

MONTHLY REPORT

November 2020



Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **6,980**

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

1,321 Gaza

5,659 West Bank

 **72%**

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

42%

of Gaza companion permit applications approved



No comprehensive data available for West Bank patient and companion permit applications

1,070 permits approved for patients to Augusta Victoria Hospital
1,057 permits approved for patients to St. John Hospital

 **10**

Gaza patients called for security interrogation.

IN FOCUS

Gaza leukaemia patient denied and delayed access nine times

Part 1 Referrals

November Referrals by the Ministry of Health


In November, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 6,980 referrals to health care services delivered by non-MoH providers. West Bank referrals comprised 80% (5,569) of all MoH referrals (the West Bank population comprises approximately 60% of the population in the oPt), including 924 referrals for patients from East Jerusalem. Gaza referrals accounting for 19% (1,321), though Gaza's population comprises approximately 40% of the oPt. Meanwhile, the origin of 89 referrals was not reported and one patient was referred from Jordan.

After an almost 40% reduction in West Bank referrals from March to April 2020, by June 2020 West Bank referrals had recovered to the pre-COVID-19 level. In November, there were 5,569 referrals compared to a monthly average of 5,133 referrals for the first quarter of 2020. By contrast, in the Gaza Strip the substantial 58% reduction in the monthly number of referrals from March to April 2020 has still not recovered. In November, there was a slight increase to 1,321 referrals from 1,165 in October compared to a monthly average of 2,492 in the first quarter of the year.

The proportion of all Palestinian MoH referrals destined for hospitals in the West Bank, outside East Jerusalem, increased from 40% in the first quarter of 2020 – prior to the COVID-19 outbreak in the oPt – to 45% in November. Referrals within the Gaza Strip decreased from 7% to 4%. Referrals to East Jerusalem hospitals increased slightly from 41% to 43%; to Israeli hospitals they were similar (5%); and to Egypt decreased from 6% to 3%. Referrals to Jordan comprised 0.3% of the total in November.

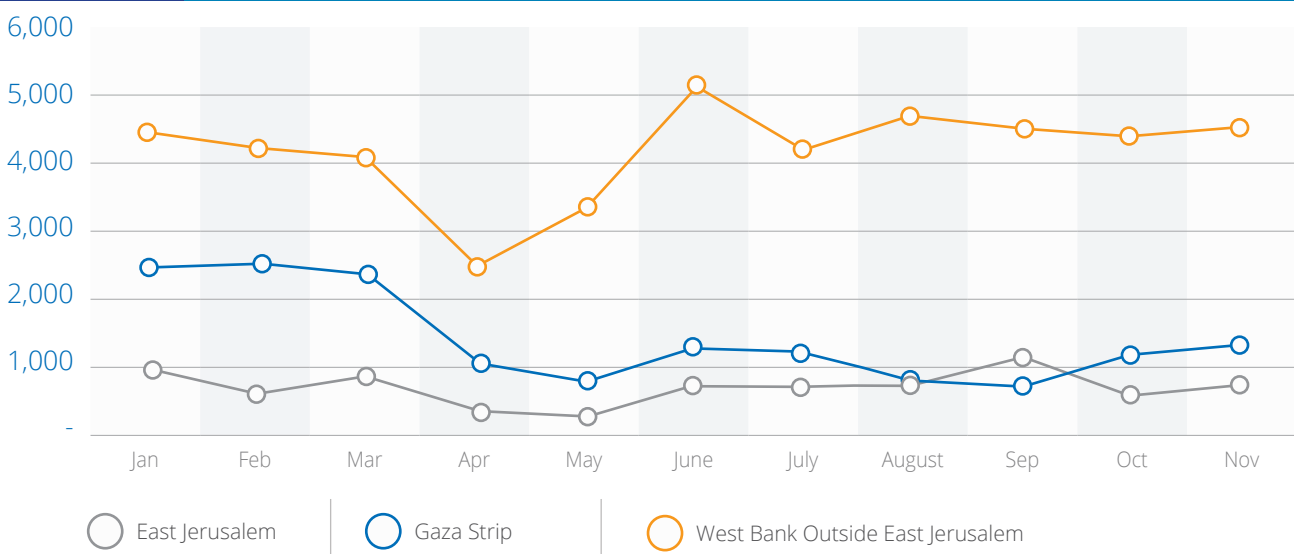
The top needed specialties for referrals were oncology (30%); ophthalmology (8%); cardiac catheterization (6%); urology (6%); cardiology (5%); medical imaging (5%); and radiotherapy (4%). Referrals for patients under 18 years of age comprised 21% (1,440) of the total, while 29% (1,991) were for those aged 60 years or older. Referrals for female patients comprised 46% of the total.

 **1,321**
Gaza Strip

 **5,569**
West Bank

referrals approved financial coverage for healthcare outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health

Chart 1 Number of referrals issued by the Palestinian MoH by place of origin, January 2020 to November 2020



Part 2 Access

The Gaza Strip

On 24 November, the Palestinian Authority re-established functioning its Health Liaison Office (HLO) in the Gaza Strip to coordinate permit applications on behalf of patients and companions. Up to this date, WHO continued its temporary coordination mechanism during November.

From the 1 to 23 November, WHO submitted 543 permit applications for patients and 663 companions. From the 24 to 30 November, the Palestinian Health Liaison Office (HLO) submitted 177 patient applications and 195 companions. Additionally, St John Hospital submitted 36 patient applications and Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI) submitted 18 patient and 4 companion applications. In total, there were 774 patient permit applications and 862 companion permit applications during the month. Table 1 provides an overview of patient permit applications and approvals through different organizations during November.


Organization applied	# of applications	# Approved
WHO (23-1 November)	543	387
Palestinian Health Liaison Office (30-24 November)	177	122
St. John Hospital	36	32
Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI)	18	14
Total	774	555

Of the 720 (Male: 353; Female: 367) patient applications through WHO and the HLO, a fifth (20%) were for children under 18 and a fifth (20%) were for patients aged 60 years or older. 51% were for female patients, while 94% were funded by the Palestinian MoH. More than two-thirds (71%) of applications to cross Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, close to a quarter (23%) for West Bank hospitals outside East Jerusalem, 6% for Israeli hospitals and 3 applications (0.4%) were for appointments in Jordan. Two-thirds (66%) of applications were for appointments at Augusta Victoria Hospital (45%) or Makassed Hospital (21%), both in East Jerusalem. The top five specialties accounted for 73% of permit applications: oncology (52%); haematology (8%); ophthalmology (5%); cardiology (4%); and internal medicine (4%). The remaining 27% of applications were for 18 other specialties.

Approved permit applications: 555 or 72% of the 774 patient applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez in November 2020 were approved, a slight increase compared to the approval rate of 67% for the period from January to May 2020. For available disaggregated data, 53% (271 of 509) of approved applications were female; a fifth (21%) were for children under 18; and nearly a quarter (23%) for patients aged 60 years or older.

Denied care: 12 patient applications, or 1.6% of the total, were denied permits to cross Erez to reach healthcare in November. For available disaggregated data, 40% (4 out of 10) of those denied were female; one patient was a child under 18; two patients were aged 60 years or older. Four had appointments for cancer care (oncology), two for general surgery and one each for ophthalmology, orthopaedics, cardiology, and internal medicine. Eight of the denied permit applications were for appointments at hospitals in East Jerusalem, while two were for hospitals in the West Bank outside East Jerusalem.

Delayed care: 203 patient applications, or 26% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. For available disaggregated data, 46% (92 out of 201) of those delayed were female patients; 17% (34 applications) were children under

 **774** patients applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez/Beit Hanoun to access healthcare

 **72%** approved

 **1%** denied

 **27%** delayed

the age of 18; and 13% (27 applications) were patients aged 60 years or older. More than half (53%) of those delayed had appointments for cancer care (oncology), 7% for cardiology, 7% for haematology, 4% for nuclear medicine, and 3% each for orthopaedics, neurosurgery, and general surgery. The remaining 20% were for ten other specialties. Most delayed applications (157 or 78%) were 'under study' at the time of appointment. Four applications of the 36 submitted by St John Hospital were unsuccessful, either delayed or denied.

Security interrogation


In November, 10 patients between the age of 18-60 were requested for security interrogation by Israeli services as a prerequisite to processing their permit applications. Disaggregation was available for ten of the patient: three of these ten patients were female; six had appointments for oncology; two for haematology; and one each for internal medicine and neurosurgery. In addition, a female doctor who applied through PHRI to join a training session at Wolfson Hospital in Israel was requested for security interrogation.

Patient companions

WHO, the HLO and PHRI submitted 868 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities to accompany patients in November. These applications include parents or other companions applying to accompany children. Patients are eligible to apply to Israeli authorities for one companion to accompany them for health care outside the Gaza Strip. In November, 367 companion permit applications (42% of the total) were approved, 122 applications (14%) were denied and the remaining 379 (44%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's appointment. The approval rate in November decreased to 42% compared to 49% in the first five months of the year.

Patients and companions crossing Beit Hanoun/Erez

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 526 Gaza patients and 339 companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in November to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of the 526 patients, 37 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 36 companions. These numbers shows that more than a third (36%) of patients crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in November without a companion. During the month, Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint was open for 26 days for daytime working hours and closed on 4 days (4 Saturdays).

 **10**
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Erez

Rafah crossing - Egypt



In November, there were 2,166 entries and 5,867 exits through Rafah crossing, with the crossing open on 7 days and closed on 23 days. Specific data on patient crossings during the month has not been made available by the Rafah terminal authorities.

The West Bank

In November, no comprehensive data was available for patient and companion permit applications to Israeli authorities from the West Bank.

In the context of the Israeli permits system and following suspension of coordination of permit applications between Palestinian and Israeli authorities on 19 May, patients and companions from the West Bank have no longer been able to apply through the Palestinian Civil Affairs Office for permits to enter East Jerusalem and Israel. Instead, they have applied directly to Israeli authorities and through East Jerusalem hospitals. The Palestinian Civil Affairs Office has also begun reprocessing permit applications for patients and their companions from the West Bank, though data has not yet been made available.

Of health service providers, **August Victoria Hospital** reported the approval of 1,070 permit applications for patients living in the West Bank to reach its services during November.

St John Hospital reported issuing 1,870 appointments to patients residing in the West Bank in November, with 1,057 (57%) of those appointments reached. Of appointments accessed by West Bank patients at the hospital, 204 were for inpatients and 853 for outpatients.

Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI) reported submitted 3 patient permit applications (2 male; 1 female) and 1 companion permit application (male). All were approved. The patient appointments were for oncology (2) and for nephrology (1).



No comprehensive data available for West Bank patient and companion permit applications following suspension to functioning of Civil Affairs Office

 **1,070**

West Bank patient permits were approved to Augusta Victoria Hospital

 **1,057**

West Bank patient permits were approved to St. John Hospital

In Focus

Gaza leukaemia patient denied and delayed access nine times

Kafa, a 55-year-old patient from Rafah in the south of Gaza Strip, was diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL) in August 2018, more than 2 years ago.

Kafa underwent chemotherapy at the European Gaza Hospital in Khan Younis, in the Gaza Strip. After initially responding well to chemotherapy, Kafa was referred urgently to Istishari Hospital in Ramallah, in the West Bank, in January 2020 to receive a medicine called ibrutinib, a monoclonal antibody used in the treatment of CLL. Doctors had detected that she had a relapse, and that the disease was not responding to her previous treatment regimen.

“I submitted ten permit applications to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to reach treatment, but they only approved one of my applications,” said Kafa.



Month/year of hospital appointment	Permit application result
November 2019	Security interrogation, not approved
December 2019	Denied
December 2019	Delayed (under study)
January 2020	Denied
January 2020	Denied
February 2020	Security interrogation, approved
October 2020	Security interrogation, not approved
November 2020	Delayed (under study)
November 2020	Delayed (under study)
December 2020	Delayed (under study)

Kafa first applied for a hospital appointment in November 2019. She was requested for security interrogation, but she reports that she waited all day at Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint and had to return to Gaza after no one met with her. In December 2019 and January 2020, she applied for another four appointments but all were either denied or delayed (under study).

Finally, in February 2020 after a delay of approximately three months and after appealing the decisions of Israeli authorities through the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights and Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, Kafa was approved a permit to travel for treatment. She first had to undergo security interrogation at Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint. She commented, “I was requested for security interrogation about ten days before my appointment. During the interrogation, the Israeli officer noticed my poor health and told me that he would allow me to cross to receive care. I was so happy that I had been approved. After that, I reached Istishari Hospital for my medical treatment, but it was the only time I’ve been able to access the hospital.”

Between February and October 2020, Kafa did not apply to travel for treatment, due to the severity of the COVID-19 outbreak in Israel and the West Bank. She remained in the Gaza Strip, with her ability to apply for a permit to exit complicated by the Palestinian Authority’s end to coordination of permit applications during this period. In October 2020, however, after another relapse in her illness, Kafa applied again to reach treatment outside the Gaza Strip – this time through WHO’s temporary coordination mechanism for patient and companion permit applications.

Since October 2020, Kafa has made four unsuccessful permit applications to exit the Gaza Strip for treatment. She was also requested to undergo security interrogation again.

Kafa works as a cleaner in one of the Ministry of Health hospitals in the Gaza Strip. She has a family of six children and her illness has made it difficult to continue her work and her care for her children. She commented, “I am suffering from severe pain in my stomach and my left leg gets more swollen every day. I need treatment that we don’t have here [in Gaza]. Is it not my right to get that treatment? I don’t want my health to deteriorate again.”