

MONTHLY REPORT

September 2020



Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **6,489**

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

783 Gaza

5,625 West Bank

 **158**

Gaza patients exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez for healthcare

127

Gaza patient companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez



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

following suspension to functioning of Civil Affairs Office; 985 permits approved for patients to access Augusta Victoria Hospital.

 **3**

Gaza patients called for security interrogation

IN FOCUS

Oncology patient arrested en route to medical treatment at Erez

Part 1 Referrals

September Referrals by the Ministry of Health


In September, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 6,489 referrals to non-MoH facilities. A greater proportion of referrals were for patients from the West Bank despite the easing of obstacles to the coordination of permits with the implementation of a temporary coordination mechanism through WHO from 6 September. West Bank referrals comprised 87% (5,625) of all MoH referrals (the West Bank population comprises approximately 60% of the population in the oPt), including 1,082 for patients from Jerusalem, with Gaza referrals accounting for 12% (783). Meanwhile, one referral was for a Palestinian patient in Jordan and the origin of 80 referrals was not reported.

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 September, there were 5,625 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 reduced further to 783 referrals in September. The number of referrals from the Gaza Strip in September (783) represents a 69% reduction in referrals compared to the monthly average for the first quarter of 2020 (2,492).

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 49% in September. Referrals within the Gaza Strip decreased from 7% to 5%. Referrals to East Jerusalem hospitals have increased from 41% to 42%; to Israeli hospitals from 5% to 4%; and to Egypt from 6% to 1%. Referrals to Jordan comprised 0.3% of the total in September.

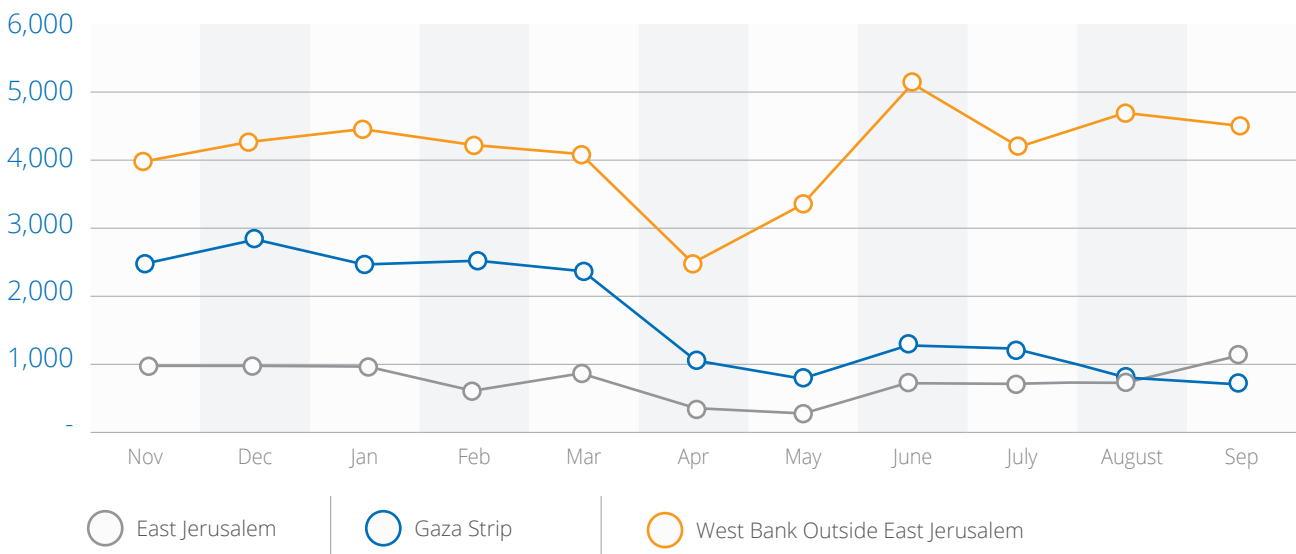
The top needed specialties for referrals were oncology (25%); ophthalmology (7%); cardiac catheterization (6%); cardiology (6%); urology (5%); medical imaging (5%); and radiotherapy (4%). Referrals for patients under 18 years of age comprised 21% (1,341) of the total, while 28% (1,831) were for those aged 60 years or older. Referrals for female patients comprised 47% of the total.

 **783**
Gaza Strip

 **5,625**
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, November 2019 to September 2020



Part 2 Access

The Gaza Strip

From May 2020, the Health Liaison Office of the Palestinian MoH ceased coordination of permit applications and the movement of patients, companions, and ambulances across Erez/Beit Hanoun checkpoint.

On 6 September, WHO implemented a temporary coordination mechanism to facilitate access for patients and their companions. Additional information on the mechanism can be found in a flowchart for the mechanism [here](#) and a questions and answers document [here](#). Prior to 6 September, several organizations had been coordinating permits. The activities of these organizations continued for part or all of September, reducing as the capacity of the temporary coordination mechanism became established.

Table 1 provides data on permit applications and approvals coordinated through different organizations in September. In total, there were 303 permit applications and 260 permit approvals recorded – however, not all organizations recorded approvals and applications in the same way, nor was it possible to receive patient identifiers from all partners to check for duplications. Therefore, an overall approval rate could not be calculated.

For WHO and PHRI, where there were no duplications and data was recorded in the same way: there were 163 patient permit applications, of which 116 (71%) were approved. Disaggregation for applications made by different organizations can be found below.

Organization applied	# of applications	# Approved
WHO	139	95
Augusta Victoria Hospital	127	85
Makassed Hospital	**	37
St. John Hospital	13	8
International Committee of the Red Cross	**	14
Physicians for Human Rights - Israel	24	21
Total	303	260


** Missing data

WHO, from 6 to 30 September, submitted 139 (M: 53; F: 86) patient applications for Gaza patients to exit Erez/Beit Hanoun checkpoint. 31 (22%) were for children under 18 and 22 (16%) were for people aged 60 years and older. Two-thirds (68%) of applications were for services at East Jerusalem hospitals, predominantly Augusta Victoria Hospital (35% of the total) and Makassed Hospital (31% of the total). A quarter (27%) of applications were to the West Bank and 5% to Israeli hospitals. 98% were covered financially by the Palestinian MoH and 2% by other organizations.

32% had appointments for oncology, 17% for haematology, 12% for general surgery, 6% for neurosurgery, 6% for heart surgery, 6% for internal medicine, the remaining 21% were for 11 other specialties.

Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) submitted 127 requests for Gaza patients, of whom 85 (67%) were approved and 42 (33%) were either pending decision at the end of September, delayed (meaning no definitive response by the date of their hospital appointment) or denied.

Makassed Hospital coordinated the exit of 37 (M: 13; F: 24) patients from the Gaza Strip for appointments at the hospital in September. All were inpatients. 15 were admitted to the general surgery department, 7 to the neurosurgery, 5 to the internal medicine, 5 to orthopaedic surgery, 4 to paediatrics and 1 to cardiovascular and thoracic surgery.

 **260**
recorded approvals
for patient permits

St. John Hospital received 8 patients from the Gaza Strip. 2 for admissions and 6 for outpatient clinic.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) coordinated the exit of 14 (M: 7; F: 7) patients during the month of September. 3 children and 11 adults. All of them were referred as urgent cases. The ICRC stopped to coordinate for patients exit when the WHO started. The last coordination by the ICRC was on 10 September.

Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI) made 24 patient permit applications: 17 for adult patients and 7 for child patients. PHRI applied for permits for 9 adult companions and 7 child companions. For adult patient permit applications, 16 out of 17 (94%) were approved. For child patient permit applications, 5 of the 7 (71%) were approved and 1 (14%) denied. Of the 24 patients, 11 had appointments in East Jerusalem Hospitals, 8 in Israeli hospitals and 5 in the West Bank. 11 (46%) applications were for oncology patients. Of 24 patient applications 21 (88%) were approved, 1 was denied and 2 were cancelled by patients.

Security interrogation

In September, 3 patients were requested for security interrogation by Israeli services. Two patients were among those applying through PHRI and one was applying through the WHO temporary coordination mechanism.

Patient companions

WHO and PHRI collected data separately on companion applications. Overall, the two organizations recorded 171 companion applications, with 89 (52%) approved, 7 (4%) denied, and 74 (43%) delayed. One application was cancelled by the patient's family.

WHO submitted a total of 155 patient companion applications to the Israeli authorities during September. 77 (50%) were approved, 5 (3%) were denied and 73 (47%) were delayed.

PHRI made 16 companion permit applications during September: 9 for adult companions and 7 for child companions. All child patient applications were matched with companions, with the same outcomes: 5 of 7 (71%) were approved, 1 (14%) denied and 1 (14%) cancelled by the patient family. For adult companion applications, 7 out of the 9 were approved (78%), 1 denied (11%) and 1 (11%) delayed, receiving no definitive response by the date of the patient's appointment.

Not all partners were able to provide data on companion applications and approvals, though most patients traveled with a companion.

Patients and companions crossing Beit Hanoun/Erez

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 158 Gaza patients and 127 companions crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in September to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of these, 35 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 27 companions. During the month, Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint was open for 24 days for daytime working hours and closed on 6 days (4 Saturdays and 2 Jewish Holidays).



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patients
called for security
interrogation



158

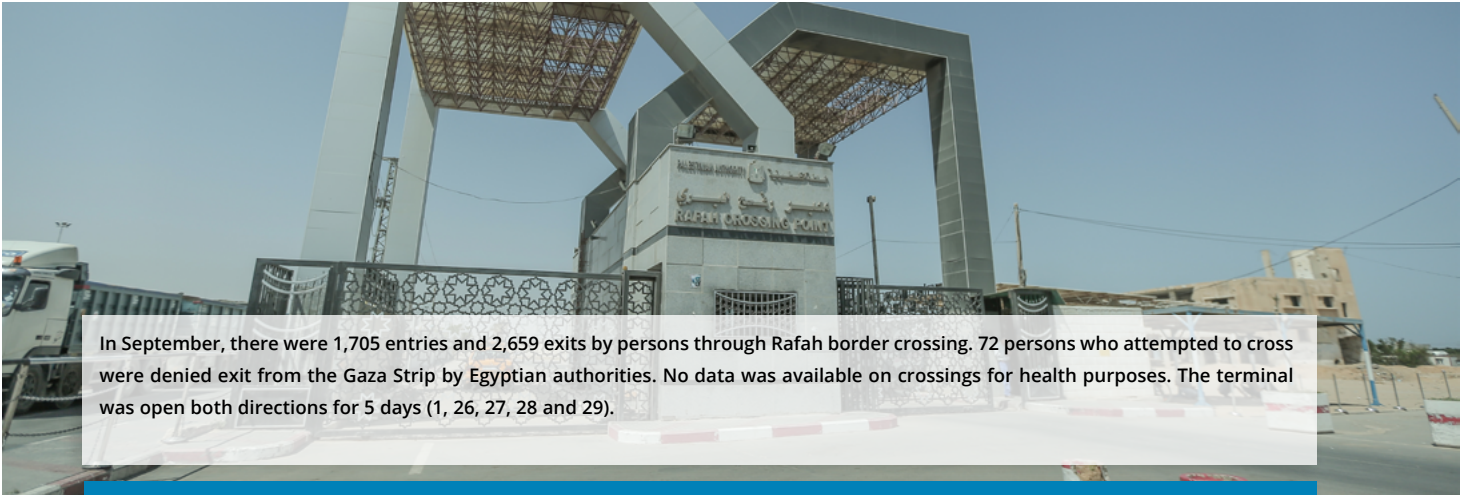
patients
crossed Beit Hanoun/
Erez for healthcare



127

patient companions
patient companions
crossed Beit Hanoun/
Erez

Rafah crossing - Egypt



In September, there were 1,705 entries and 2,659 exits by persons through Rafah border crossing. 72 persons who attempted to cross were denied exit from the Gaza Strip by Egyptian authorities. No data was available on crossings for health purposes. The terminal was open both directions for 5 days (1, 26, 27, 28 and 29).

The West Bank

In September, an unknown number of applications were submitted to Israeli authorities for permits for patients and their companions from the West Bank.

In the context of the permits system imposed by Israel, and following suspension of coordination of permit applications between Palestinian and Israeli authorities on 19 May, patients and companions from the West Bank are no longer able to apply through the Palestinian Civil Affairs Office for permits to enter East Jerusalem and Israel and instead have been applying directly to Israeli authorities present in the West Bank and through hospitals. Currently, there is no comprehensive data available for patient and companion permit applications to Israeli authorities.

Of health service providers, **August Victoria Hospital** reported the approval of 985 permit applications for patients living in the West Bank to reach its services during September.

St John Hospital gave a total of 1,553 appointments to patients residing in the West Bank in September. The hospital reported that 866 (56%) of appointments were reached, with 182 appointments for in-patients and 684 for out-patients.

Physicians for Human Rights Israel reported requesting permits for 2 patients, 1 organ donor, and 1 companion during September. A male patient with renal failure was referred for a kidney transplant in Turkey with his donor and a companion (both also male). All were approved for travel through Ben Gurion airport. Another patient had an appointment at an Israeli hospital for general surgery. Her application remained pending.



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

985 patient permits were recorded as approved for travel to Augusta Victoria Hospital. A further 886 West Bank patients were reported to have reached St. John Hospitals in East Jerusalem.

In Focus

A cancer patient arrested at Erez and deprived from reaching a health service in East

Al Mezan Center for Human Rights in the Gaza Strip reported the arrest at Erez checkpoint on 14 September of Mohammed Sawwali, a 35-year-old patient from Khan Yunis. Mohammed has been treated for colorectal cancer since he was diagnosed in March 2020. He had a hospital appointment in East Jerusalem.

Mohammed was travelling with his mother Asmahan when he was arrested on his way to receive chemotherapy and radiotherapy at Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem. Both Mohammed and his mother were stopped by Israeli forces at the Erez checkpoint, with Mohammed was taken for security interrogation at around 13:00. His mother waited until approximately 19:00 hoping to cross out of the Gaza Strip with her son and reach hospital. However, Israeli forces informed her that her son had been arrested and she would have to return to Gaza. On her return, Asmahan went into a quarantine facility, where she stayed for 14 days.

Al Mezan Center for Human Rights advocated for Mohammed to have unhindered access to healthcare while in detention. However, he remained in detention for 26 days without access to treatment and was returned to the Gaza Strip on 11 October, where the chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatments he needs remain unavailable. Mohammed now plans to change his referral destination to Egypt.

