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MONTHLY REPORT

April 2021

Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **7,275**

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

1,643 Gaza

5,542 West Bank

 **74%**

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

48%

of Gaza companion permit applications approved

 **87%**

of West Bank patient permit applications approved

80%

of West Bank companion permit applications approved

 **0**

Gaza patients called for security interrogation.

Part 1 Referrals

April Referrals by the Ministry of Health


In April, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 7,275 referrals to health care services delivered by non-MoH providers. Referrals from the West Bank comprised 76% (5,542) of the total, including 794 referrals for patients from East Jerusalem, while the West Bank population comprises approximately 60% of the population in the oPt. Referrals from the Gaza Strip, which makes up around 40% of the population in the oPt, accounted for 23% (1,643) of the total. The origin of 88 (1%) of referrals was not reported, and 2 were to 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 April, there were 5,542 referrals compared to a monthly average of 5,056 referrals for 2020. By contrast, in the Gaza Strip the reduction by more than half (58%) in the monthly number of referrals from March to April persisted for most of 2020, though there has been a sustained increase in referrals since a low of 783 in September 2020. In April, there were 1,643 referrals, representing a more than doubling since September 2020 but a 34% reduction from the first quarter of 2020 (2,492).

Palestinian MoH referrals to hospitals in the West Bank, outside East Jerusalem, comprised less than half (47%) of all referrals in April; to East Jerusalem hospitals close to two-fifths (39%) of the total; within the Gaza Strip 5% (a decrease from 8% in 2020); to Israeli hospitals 5%; to Egypt 3%; and to Jordan 0.4% (29).

The top needed specialties for referrals were oncology (31%); urology & nephrology (9%); cardiac catheterization (6%); ophthalmology (6%); cardiology (6%); haematology (4%); and paediatrics, medical imaging, and radiotherapy (3% each). The remaining 29% were for 24 other medical specialties.

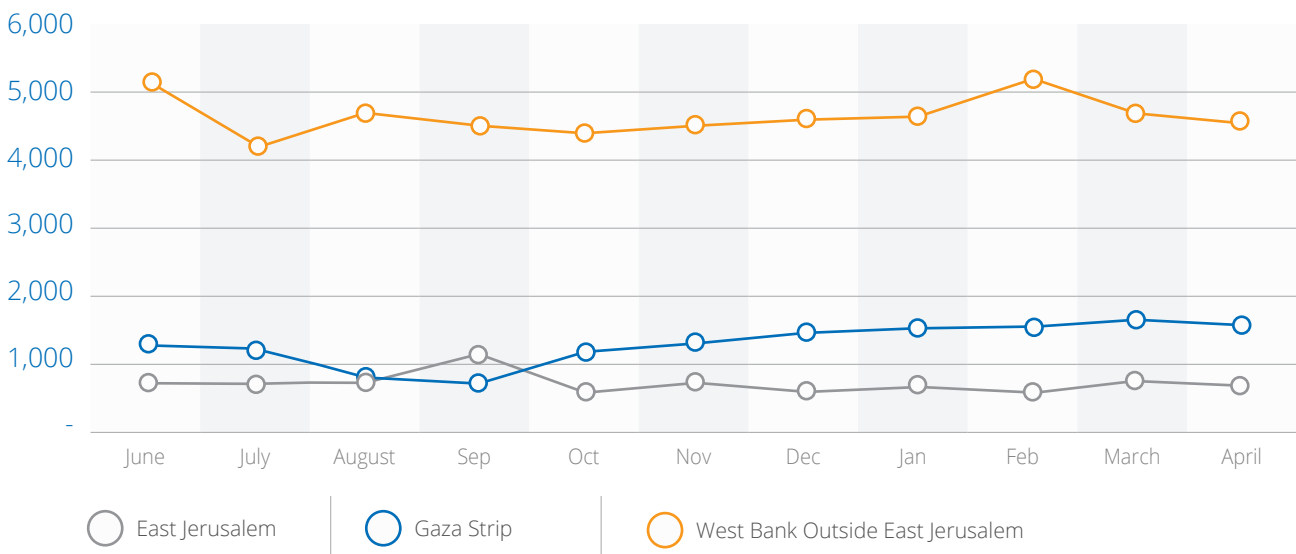
Referrals for patients under 18 years of age comprised 20% (1,488) of the total, while 28% (2,049) were for those aged 60 years or older. Referrals for female patients comprised 46% of the total.

 **1,643**
Gaza Strip

 **5,542**
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, June 2020 to April 2021




Part 2 Access

The Gaza Strip

There were 1,202 (M: 632; F: 570) patient permit applications for patients from the Gaza Strip to the Israeli authorities in April 2021. A quarter (25%) were for children under 18 and a fifth (20%) were for patients aged 60 years or older. 47% were for female patients, while 88% were for referrals funded by the Palestinian MoH. Three-fifths (61%) of applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, more than a quarter (26%) for West Bank hospitals outside East Jerusalem, 13% for Israeli hospitals, and 2 applications for hospitals in Jordan. More than half (54%) of applications were for appointments at either Augusta Victoria Hospital (38%) or Makassed Hospital (16%), both in East Jerusalem. The top five specialties accounted for 78% of permit applications: oncology (44%); haematology (10%); ophthalmology (9%); cardiology (9%); and paediatrics (6%). The remaining 22% of applications were for 20 other specialties. 18 (1.5%) applications were cancelled by hospitals and are excluded from the analysis of the proportions approved/denied/delayed.

Approved permit applications: 880 (M: 435; F: 445) or 74% of the 1,184 patient applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez in April 2021 were approved, 6% higher than the average approval rate for 2020 (68%). Half (51%) of the approved applications were female patients; slightly less than a quarter (23%) were for children under 18; and a fifth (20%) for patients aged 60 years or older.

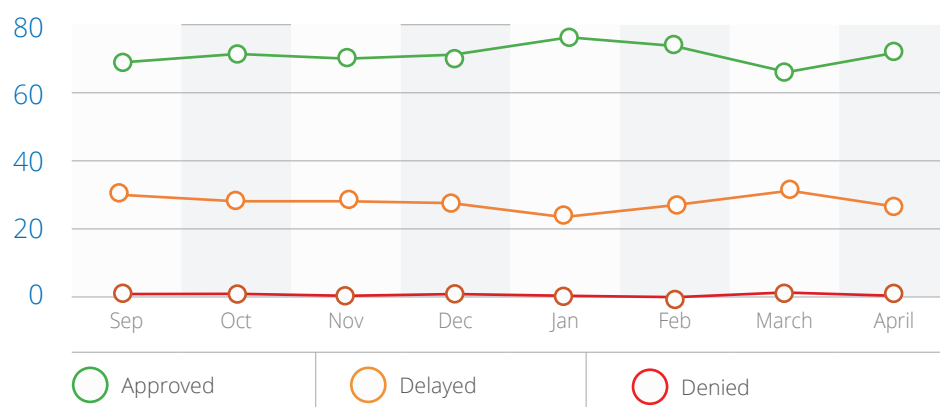
 **1,202**
patients applications
to Israeli authorities to cross Erez/
Beit Hanoun to access healthcare

 **74%**
approved

 **0%**
denied

 **26%**
delayed

Chart 2 Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, September 2020 to April 2021 (%)



Denied care: No patient permit applications were denied in April.

Delayed care: 304(M: 185; F: 119) patient permit 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. 31% (100 applications) were for children under the age of 18; 60% for patients aged 18-60 years and 7% for patients over 60 years of old. Around a fifth (19%) of those delayed had appointments for cancer care (oncology); 18% for ophthalmology; 14% for cardiology; 9% for orthopaedics; 8% each for paediatrics and haematology; 4% each for general surgery and urology; and 3% each for internal medicine, neurosurgery, and ENT. The remaining 7% were for 9 other specialties.

Of delayed applications, 47% were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, 37% for the West Bank, 16% for Israeli hospitals and 1% for hospitals in Jordan. Most delayed applications (296 or 97%) were 'under study' at the time of appointment, with three requested to re-apply on a new appointment, two to change companion, two delayed because of an alleged relative staying in the West Bank and one delayed because of allegation of availability of treatment in Gaza.

Security interrogation

In April, no patients or patient companions were recorded to have been requested for security interrogation as a prerequisite to processing their permit application.

Patient companions

The Health Liaison Office submitted 1,400 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities to accompany patients in April. 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 April, 677 companion permit applications (48% of the total) were approved, five applications (1%) were denied and the remaining 718 (51%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's appointment.

A patient companion arrested at Erez checkpoint

Al Mezan Center For Human Rights reported that a 39-year-old companion of a patient from Khan Younis was arrested at the Israeli checkpoint at Beit Hanoun (Erez) on 2 March 2021. Karam was accompanying his mother Aziza (61-year-old), a cancer patient who had an appointment at Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem. Aziza had been approved for travel the night before her appointment, with Karam requested to attend for security interrogation on the same day. Karam arrived to the Israeli checkpoint with his mother in the morning of 2 March, hoping to accompany her to hospital after security interrogation. Aziza waited for her son at the checkpoint until around 3 pm, when she was told by the military personnel there that her son had been arrested. She was allowed to then cross and travel to hospital in East Jerusalem. Karam's family in Khan Younis received a phone call the next day telling them he had been detained. Karam was released on the 25 March without indictment or a trial, 23 days after he was arrested.

Patients and companions crossing Beit Hanoun/Erez

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 925 Gaza patients and 719 companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in April to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of the 925 patients, 59 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 58 companions. These numbers show that more than a fifth (22%) of patients crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in April without a companion. 12 bodies of deceased patients were returned to Gaza. 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 days for a Jewish holiday).



0

Gaza patients
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interrogation



1,400

companion applications

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



48%

approved



1%

denied



51%

delayed



925

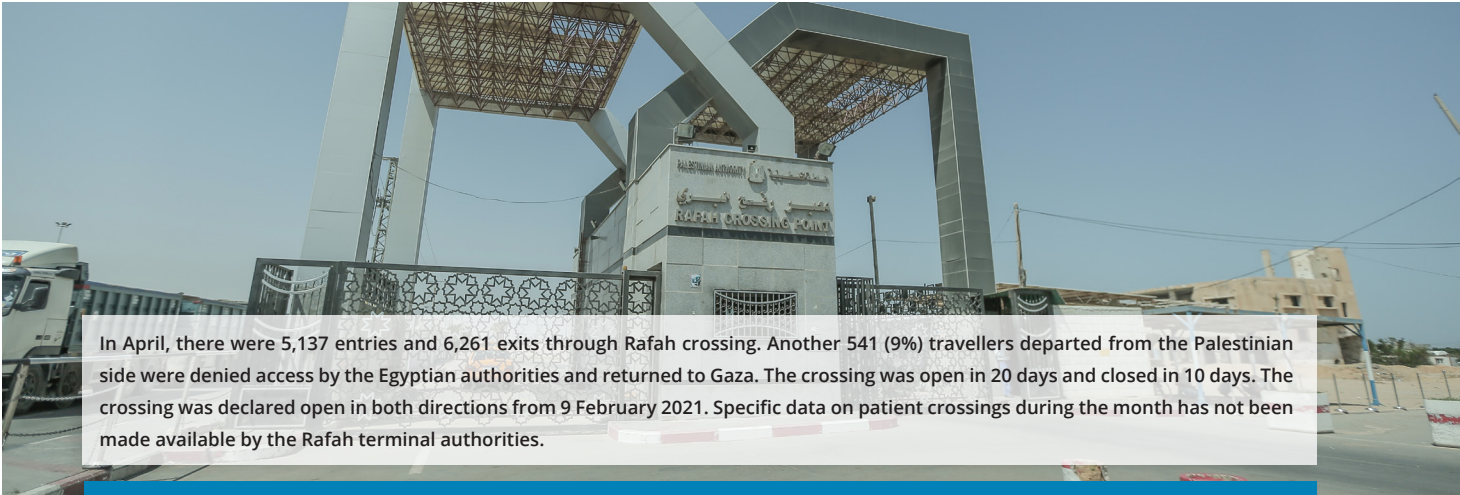
patients
exited through Beit
Hanoun/Erez



719

patient companions
exited through Beit
Hanoun/Erez

Rafah crossing - Egypt



In April, there were 5,137 entries and 6,261 exits through Rafah crossing. Another 541 (9%) travellers departed from the Palestinian side were denied access by the Egyptian authorities and returned to Gaza. The crossing was open in 20 days and closed in 10 days. The crossing was declared open in both directions from 9 February 2021. Specific data on patient crossings during the month has not been made available by the Rafah terminal authorities.

The West Bank

In April 2021, there were 3,814 applications by West Bank patients to Israeli authorities to access health care in East Jerusalem and Israel.

Restrictions on the movement of Palestinians from the West Bank to Israel and East Jerusalem are less severe for certain sections of the population. Many women older than 50 years of age and men older than 55 years of age, as well as children under 13 years traveling with an approved adult, are exempted from the requirement to obtain a permit to travel – provided they are not traveling on a Saturday, before 8am or after 7pm.

Of 3,814 West Bank patient applications, 3,333 (87%) were approved, 329 (9%) were unsuccessful (denied) and 150 (4%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

Of the 3,900 West Bank companion applications, 3,130 (80%) were approved, 593 (15%) were unsuccessful and 177 (5%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **3,814**

patient permit applications
for Israeli permits to access
healthcare in East Jerusalem and
Israel

 **87%**
approved

 **9%**
denied

 **4%**
pending at the time
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 **3,900**

patient companion applications
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