



Patients waiting for permits at Erez crossing. Only 44% of patients who requested permits to access health care were approved in October © WHO

## Health Access for Referral Patients from the Gaza Strip

Ref: 10 (November 30, 2016)

### Summary: October 2016

#### Erez crossing

- **October permit approval rates drop to lowest in 7 years:** Of 2,019 patient permit applications to exit Gaza through Erez checkpoint for hospital appointments in October, 44.08% were approved, **the lowest approval rate since April 2009**. 125 patients (6.19%) were denied permits, including 5 children and 6 elderly persons over 60 years, while 1,004 patients (49.73%) received no response, including 265 children and 116 elderly people over 60 (Palestinian District Liaison office in Gaza).
- **84% of Gaza patients' permit requests were to access treatment within the occupied Palestinian territory**, in East Jerusalem or elsewhere in the West Bank.
- **Almost two-thirds of patients' companions denied/delayed:** The approval rate for permit applications of patient companions was 38%; 7% of the companions were denied permits and the remaining 55% were still pending as of the patients' hospital dates.
- **Security interrogations:** 14 patients, among them 6 females, were requested by the General Security Services for interviews at Erez during October. One was approved.
- **Humanitarian health workers through Erez:** Of 4 WHO requests, none were approved: 3 denied and 1 pending.

#### Rafah exit

- **Access to Egypt:** According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the Rafah border terminal was open in both directions for 7 days in October allowing 102 patients to travel for health reasons to Egypt. 10 pallets of drugs donated by the Egyptian Red Crescent entered Gaza. No medical delegates entered Gaza through Egypt during the month.

#### Ministry of Health referrals in October

- The Ministry of Health issued 2,098 referrals (for 1,989 patients) in October for outside care with an estimated cost of **NIS 8,380,300**. The top 5 needed specialties for Gaza patients were in oncology, paediatrics, ophthalmology, orthopaedics, and haematology.

## MoH Referrals in October

The Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 2,098 referrals for patients (representing 1,989 individuals) in October, according to the Medical Referral Directorate data in Ramallah (**Table 1**), 5.4% higher than the monthly average in 2015. Most referrals were to East Jerusalem hospitals (43%); the remaining were to West Bank hospitals (19.6%), Israeli hospitals (18%), and to medical centers within Gaza (11%). Referrals to Egypt (8.3%) increased slightly reflecting the recent open days at the Rafah border. Of total referrals in October, 1,687 (80.4%) required Israeli permits for access through Erez checkpoint and 173 (8.3%) required approval from Egypt to exit through Rafah (and the Rafah border to be accessible).

**Table 1: Monthly referrals of Gaza patients 2016 (number and %)**

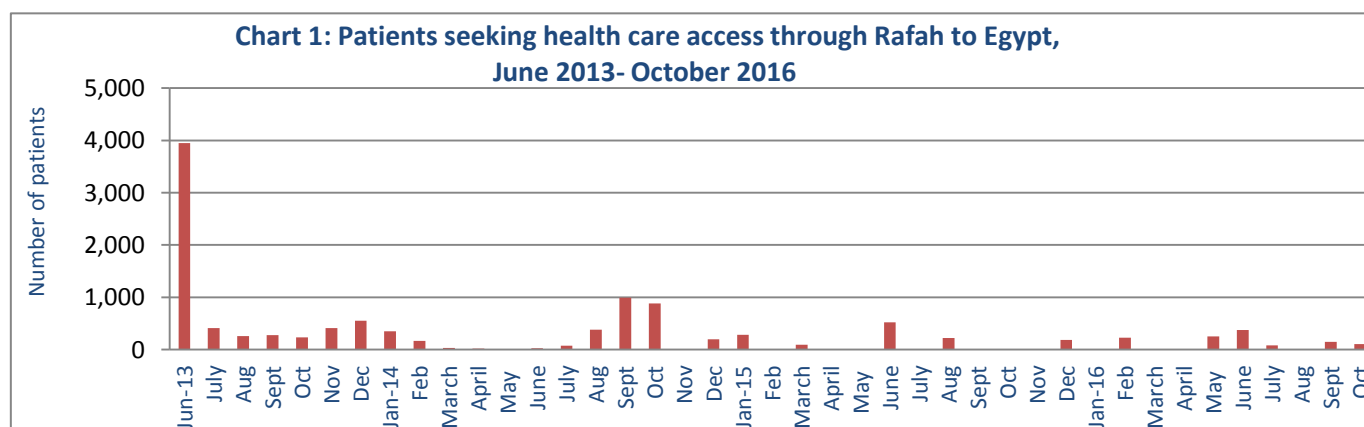
Referral destination		Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	October	Total
Gaza (non-MoH)	N	323	363	402	313	255	139	153	154	122	238	2,462
	%	15.7	16	17.01	16.43	11.63	7.38	8.13	7.83	7.13	11.34	12.1
WB (MoH / non-MoH)	N	430	460	503	407	473	403	379	397	336	406	4,194
	%	20.90	20.27	21.29	21.36	21.58	21.4	20.15	20.18	19.64	19.35	20.63
East Jerusalem	N	865	998	1,000	756	988	840	871	955	828	901	9,002
	%	42.05	43.98	42.32	39.69	45.07	44.61	46.31	48.55	48.39	42.95	44.29
Jordan	N	3	2	0	2	2	1	2	3	4	1	20
	%	0.15	0.09	0.00	0.10	0.09	0.05	0.11	0.15	0.23	0.05	0.10
Israel	N	357	359	365	343	392	391	365	328	338	379	3,617
	%	17.36	15.82	15.45	18.01	17.88	20.76	19.4	16.68	19.75	18.06	17.79
Egypt	N	79	84	93	84	82	109	111	130	83	173	1,031
	%	3.84	3.83	3.94	4.41	3.73	5.79	5.9	6.61	4.85	8.25	5.07
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,057</b>	<b>2,269</b>	<b>2,363</b>	<b>1,905</b>	<b>2,192</b>	<b>1,883</b>	<b>1,881</b>	<b>1,967</b>	<b>1,711</b>	<b>2,098</b>	<b>20,326</b>

Source: MoH Medical Referral Directorate, Ramallah, November 6, 2016

Of Gaza patients referred, 46.4% were females and 53.6% were males. 31.5% of referrals were children under the age of 18; 20% were elderly patients over 60 years old. Gaza referral patients required treatment in the following specialties: oncology – 22%, pediatrics – 7.7%, ophthalmology – 6.9%, orthopedics – 6.8%, hematology – 6%, heart catheterization – 5.8%, nuclear medicine – 5.1%, cardiology – 4.2%, general surgery – 3.7%, neurosurgery – 3.6%. The remaining 28.3% were for 21 other specialties. The Special Purchasing Unit in Ramallah reported an estimated cost of NIS 8,380,300 for the 1,989 referrals for Gaza patients in October.

## ACCESS

**Slight improvement in access to Egypt during October:** According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the Rafah border terminal was open on 7 days during October, the highest number of days open in one month since June 2015 (10 days open), allowing 4,479 travellers to exit to Egypt. Of these, 102 reported they were travelling for health reasons with 40 companions. 28 out of the 102 patients, with 20 companions, were transferred by ambulance. The Egyptian authorities allowed the entry of 10 pallets of drugs donated by the Egyptian Red Crescent. The donated drugs were received by the MoH. No medical delegates entered Gaza during the month. From January to October 2016, the Rafah crossing was open only 27 days for humanitarian cases, allowing only 1,189 patients (207 by ambulance) to travel into Egypt for health care. Before the July 2013 closure, more than 4,000 Gaza residents crossed Rafah terminal to Egypt monthly for health-related reasons, **Chart 1**.



Source: Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal.

**Erez crossing permit approval rates lowest in 7 years:** In October, there were 2,019 applications from patients (54% males and 46% females) for permits to cross Erez for health care, 9% higher than the monthly average in 2015 (1,845). Of the total permit applications, 84% were for medical care in the occupied Palestinian territory: 1,152 (57%) were for treatment in East Jerusalem hospitals, 543 (27%) in the West Bank, 319 (15.8%) in Israel, and 5 (0.25%) in Jordan. The top receiving hospitals in October were Makassed, 595 (29.47%) and Augusta Victoria, 433 (21.5%) in East Jerusalem; Najah University in Nablus, 168 (8.3%); Hadassah, 98 (4.9%) and Tel-Hashomir, 97 (4.8%) in Israel; Msalam center, 96 (4.8%) in Ramallah; St. John hospital, 83 (4.2%) in East Jerusalem; Al-Ahli hospital in Hebron, 75 (3.7%). The remaining 374 (18.5%) were to 30 other hospitals and medical centers.

In October, the Palestinian District Coordination office reported that 44.1% of applications for permits for patients were approved, considerably lower than the monthly average in 2015 of 76.66% and the lowest rate since April 2009, **Table 2**. 125 applicants (6.2%) were denied access and 1,004 (49.7%) did not receive an answer to their applications in time for their hospital appointments, delaying their medical care. 14 patients were requested for security interviews with the Israeli security. Of patients applying for permits to cross Erez, 96.3% received referrals from the Ministry of Health, 2.4% were self-funded, 0.64% were supported by Noor Ala al-alam charity, and 0.7% were supported by other organizations. 10% were children aged 0-3 years, 20% children aged 4-17, 26% adults aged 18-40 years, 27% adults aged 41-60 years and 17% aged over 60 years.

**Table 2: Israeli responses to permit requests to cross Erez, by age, sex and GSS interviews, October 2016**

Age group	Total		Approved		Denied		Delayed		Called by GSS*	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
0 - 3	74	124	44	79	0	0	30	45	0	0
4 - 17	162	238	83	122	1	4	78	112	0	1
18- 40	260	264	79	59	32	40	149	165	3	4
41 - 60	275	275	115	84	21	21	139	170	3	3
Over 60	155	192	105	120	0	6	50	66	0	0
<i>Sub-total</i>	<b>926</b>	<b>1093</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>464</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>446</b>	<b>558</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,019</b>		<b>890 (44.08%)</b>		<b>125 (6.19%)</b>		<b>1,004 (49.73%)</b>		<b>14 (0.69%)</b>	

\* GSS = Israeli General Security Services

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, Ministry of Health, Gaza.

The total number of patients' permit applications from January to October 2016 was 15.6% higher than the corresponding period in 2015 and the approval rate was 12.3% lower, **Table 3**. In 2016, the denial rate was 1.4% higher and the delayed rate was 11% higher than in 2015. The approval rate for females dropped by 12.6% and for males by 11.6% in the first 10 months of 2016 compared to the corresponding period in 2015, while patients requested for security interviews increased 3.4 times.

**Table 3: Israeli responses to permit requests to cross Erez, by sex of applicant, 2016 compared to 2015**

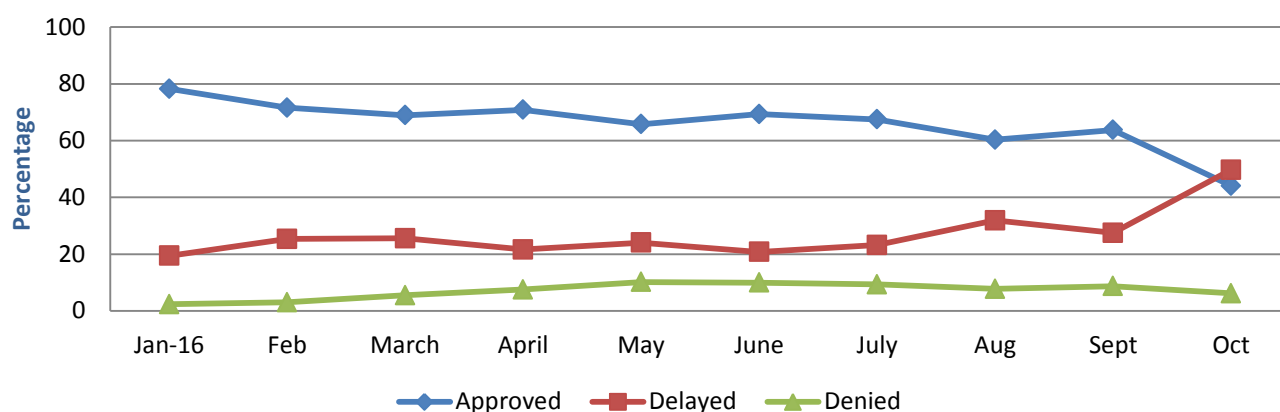
Period	January-October 2015		January-October 2016	
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,077</b>		<b>20,906</b>	
	(F:8,425; M:9,652)		(F:9,605; M:11,301)	
Approved	14,143	78.24%	13,788	65.95%
	(F:6,983; M:7,160)		(F:6,752 ;M:7,036)	
Denied	1,035	5.73%	1,481	7.09%
	(F:323; M:712)		(F:454;M:1027)	
Delayed	2,899	16.03%	5,637	26.96%
	(F:1,119; M:1,780)		(F:2,399 ;M:3,238)	
GSS	146 (F:34; M:112)	0.81%	569 (F:188;M:381)	2.72%

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

Israeli approvals of permits have declined steadily in 2016 from a high in January of 78.2% to a low of 44.1% in October, **Chart 2**. The likely cause of the rise in delays is an increase in Israeli security procedures for both patients and companions. **A delayed permit means delayed medical care.**

Patients sometimes reapply after being denied a permit, or if urgent treatment is needed and no response has been received. October data showed that out of the 2,019 applications submitted through the Palestinian coordination office, 210 (10.4%) were repeat applications for patients: 4 attempts for 1 patient, 3 attempts for 8 patients, 2 attempts for 191 patients. The remaining 1,609 (89.6%) applications represented single attempts by patients that month.

**Chart 2: Trend of monthly Israeli responses to patients' permit applications, January -October 2016 (%)**

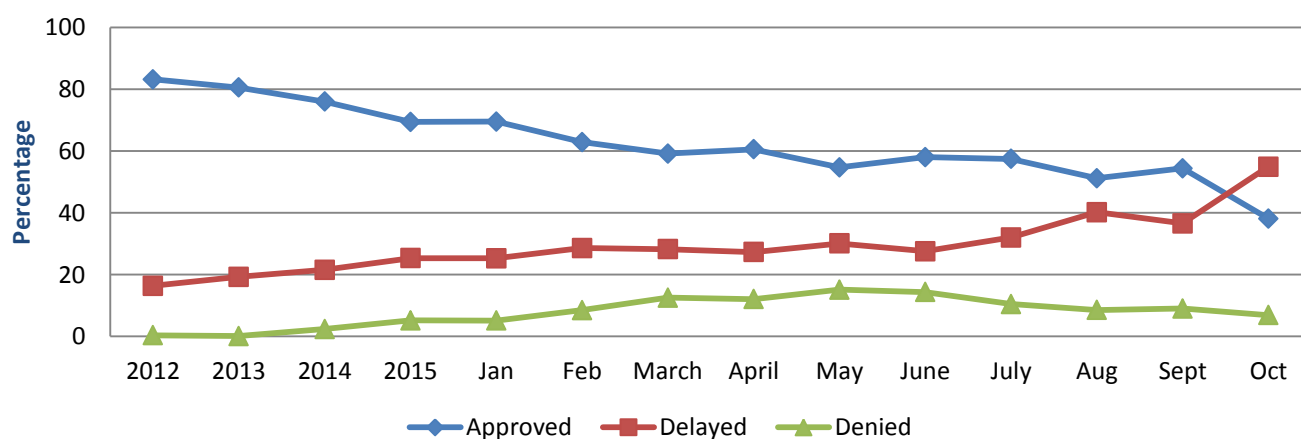


**Denied care:** 125 patients (71 males; 54 females) were denied permits to access through Erez, including 5 children and 6 patients over 60 years old. 92.8% of the denied patients had appointments in East Jerusalem and West Bank hospitals and 7.2% in Israel. The following specialties were needed by patients who were denied permits: orthopedics (40); oncology (13); neurosurgery (12); general surgery (10); ophthalmology (6); endocrinology (5); cardiology (5); hematology (4); internal medicine (4 each); and the remaining 26 referrals were for 11 other specialties.

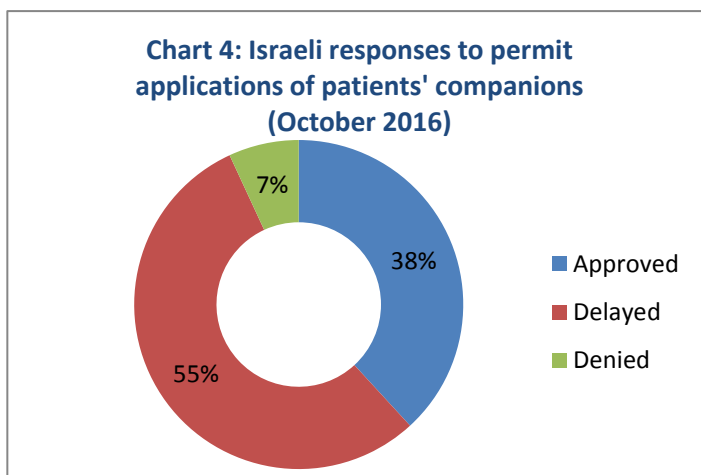
**Delayed care:** 1,004 patients (558 males; 446 females) were delayed in reaching health care in October, among them 265 children and 116 patients over the age of 60; those delayed had received no response to their applications and consequently lost their scheduled hospital appointments. The patients had scheduled appointments in: oncology (194); orthopedics (115); pediatrics (98); hematology (84); ophthalmology (81); cardiology (74); vascular surgery (41); internal medicine (41); nuclear medicine (38); neurosurgery (36); general surgery (36); obstetrics/gynecology (30); nephrology (30); neurology (21); urology (21); ENT (20) and the remaining 44 referrals were for 12 other specialties. Out of the 1,004 delayed patient applications, the status of 920 (91.6%) was pending, 30 (3%) were asked to change their companions, 23 (2.3%) were asked to reapply, 14 (1.4%) were waiting for a response to their applications after having a security interview, 12 (1.2%) were waiting for an appointment for a security interview, and 5 applications were returned as 'not suitable'. 32 patients out of those delayed in October were eventually approved late, within the first week of November 2016, requiring rescheduling of hospital appointments.

Patients need to submit their applications at least 10 days prior to the hospital appointment. In October, out of the 1,004 delayed patients 50 (5%) had submitted their applications 1-7 days prior to the appointment date and 264 (26.3%) submitted their application 8-14 days prior to the appointment date. However 642 (63.9%) were still waiting after 15-30 days, and 47 (4.7%) waited more than 30 days for a response to their permit request.

**Chart 3: Israeli responses to applications from patients' companions, January to October 2016 compared to previous 4 years**

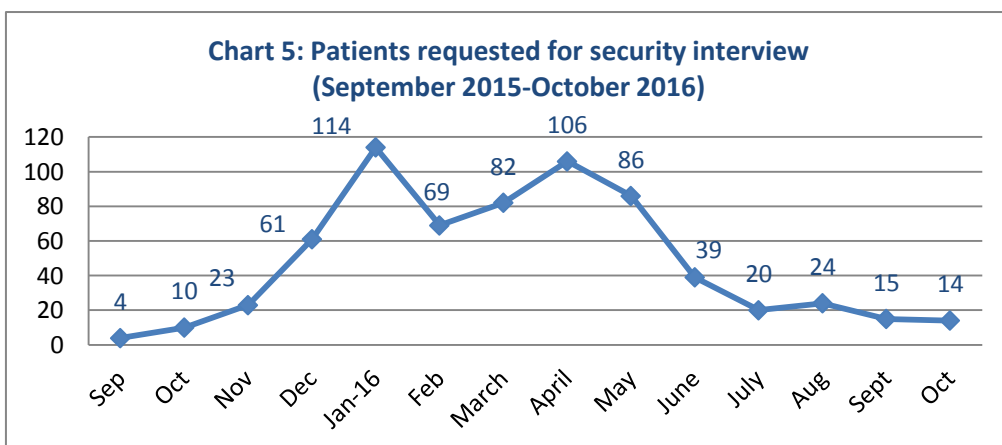


**Patients' companions:** In October, 2,159 applications for relatives accompanying patients (including parents of children) were submitted to the Israeli authorities. Only one first-degree relative is permitted to accompany a Gaza patient and permits are conditional on security clearance for all persons under the age of 55 years. Approval rates for patients' companions declined steadily from 2012 to October 2016, **Chart 3**. In October 2016, for the first time, more permits were delayed than approved: 38.2% were approved, 6.9% were denied and 54.9% were delayed and pending, **Chart 4**.



**Security Interviews:**

14 patients (8 males; 6 females), among them 1 boy, younger than 18, were called for security interviews by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS), **Chart 5**. Of the 14 patients requested by the GSS, only one was approved after the interview.



**Patients and companions cross Erez:** The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 849 Gaza patients (and 772 companions) crossed Erez in October to access Palestinian, Israeli, or Jordanian hospitals; of these, 101 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulances, with 91 companions. Erez crossing was open for 24 days during daytime working hours and closed on 7 days (5 Saturdays and 2 Israeli holidays) in October.

**Humanitarian health workers access through Erez:** The WHO submitted a total of 4 permit applications for health workers during October, with none approved. One permit application for WHO staff to exit Gaza was submitted and was denied; three permit applications to exit Gaza for Palestinian MoH workers were submitted, two were denied and one was pending.

**WHO releases latest health access report for the occupied Palestinian territory:**

On the occasion of International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, marked by the UN since 1977, WHO launched a 2-year report on health access on 29 November at an event in Gaza to highlight how the Israeli permit system and physical barriers obstruct health access for Palestinian patients, ambulances and health workers.

**Full report:**

[Right to health: Crossing barriers to access health in the occupied Palestinian territory, 2014–2015](#)

[Read the News Release in English](#)

[Read the News Release in Arabic](#)

