



The Rafah border terminal was open in both directions for 4 days in September allowing 150 patients to travel for health reasons to Egypt, Rafah terminal © WHO

Health Access for Referral Patients from the Gaza Strip

Ref: 9 (October 23, 2016)

Summary: September 2016

Erez crossing

- **High demand for patient permits – low approval rate:** Of 2,026 patient permit applications to exit Gaza through Erez checkpoint for hospital appointments in September, 63.77% were approved, **the lowest approval rate since June 2009**. 177 patients (8.74%) were denied permits, including 9 children and 7 elderly persons over 60 years. 557 patients (27.49%) received no response, including 175 children and 54 elderly people over 60 (Palestinian District Liaison office in Gaza).
- **A 60-year-old man accompanied his brother to hospital – detained at Erez and released after 2 days.**
- **Almost 1 in 2 patient companions denied/delayed:** The approval rate for permit applications of patient companions was 54%; 9% of the companions were denied permits and the remaining 37% were pending.
- **Security interrogations:** 15 patients, among them 2 females, were requested by the General Security Services for interviews at Erez during September. None were approved in the month.
- **Humanitarian health workers through Erez:** Of 8 requests, 6 were approved, 1 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 4 days in September allowing 150 patients to travel for health reasons to Egypt. Seven ambulances were donated and entered Gaza. No medical delegates entered Gaza through Egypt during the month.

Ministry of Health referrals in September

- The Ministry of Health issued 1,711 referrals (for 1,550 patients) in September for outside care with an estimated cost of **NIS 7,228,993**. The top 5 needed specialties for Gaza patients were in oncology, paediatrics, hematology, ophthalmology and nuclear medicine.

MoH Referrals in September

The Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 1,711 referrals for patients (representing 1,550 individuals) in September, according to the Medical Referral Directorate data in Ramallah (**Table 1**), 14% lower than the monthly average in 2015. Most referrals were to East Jerusalem hospitals (48.4%); the remaining were to Israeli hospitals (19.8%), West Bank hospitals (19.6%), and to medical centers within Gaza (7%). Referrals to Egypt (4.9%) remained low due to the continued closure of the Rafah border. Of total referrals in September, 1,506 (88%) required Israeli permits for access through Erez checkpoint and 83 (4.9%) required approval from Egypt to exit through Rafah (and the Rafah border to be accessible).

Table 1: Monthly referrals of Gaza patients 2016 compared to average 2015 (no. and %)

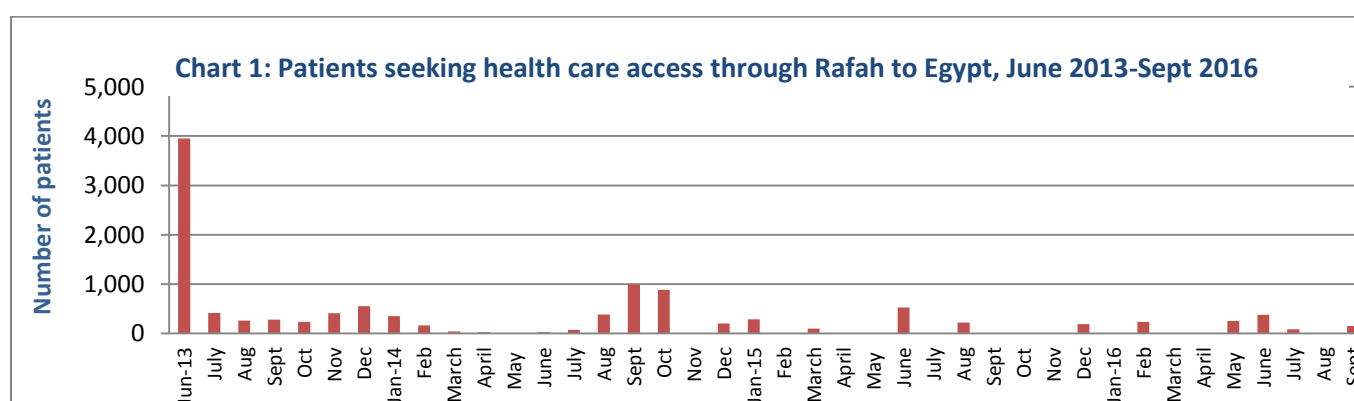
Referral destination	2015 monthly average		Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Total / % 2016
	#	%										
Gaza (non-MoH)	#	251	323	363	402	313	255	139	153	154	122	2,224
	%	12.61%	15.7%	16%	17.01%	16.43%	11.63%	7.38%	8.13%	7.83%	7.13%	12.2%
WB (MoH / non-MoH)	#	477	430	460	503	407	473	403	379	397	336	3,788
	%	23.96%	20.90%	20.27%	21.29%	21.36%	21.58%	21.4%	20.15%	20.18%	19.64%	20.78%
East Jerusalem	#	809	865	998	1,000	756	988	840	871	955	828	8,101
	%	40.6%	42.05	43.98	42.32	39.69	45.07	44.61	46.31%	48.55%	48.39%	44.5%
Jordan	#	3	3	2	0	2	2	1	2	3	4	19
	%	0.15%	0.15%	0.09%	0.00%	0.10%	0.09%	0.05%	0.11%	0.15%	0.23%	0.10%
Israel	#	312	357	359	365	343	392	391	365	328	338	3,238
	%	15.67%	17.36%	15.82%	15.45%	18.01%	17.88%	20.76%	19.4%	16.68%	19.75%	17.76%
Egypt	#	139	79	84	93	84	82	109	111	130	83	858
	%	6.98%	3.84%	3.83%	3.94%	4.41%	3.73%	5.79%	5.9%	6.61%	4.85%	4.7%
Total		1,991	2,057	2,269	2,363	1,905	2,192	1,883	1,881	1,967	1,711	18,228

Source: MoH Medical Referral Directorate, Ramallah, October 17, 2016.

Of Gaza patients referred, 46.8% were females and 53.2% were males. 31.5% of referrals were children under the age of 18; 21% were elderly patients over 60 years old. Gaza referral patients required treatment in the following specialties: oncology – 28.2%, pediatrics – 8.2%, hematology – 8.2%, ophthalmology – 6.7%, nuclear medicine - 5%, orthopedics – 4.7%, cardiology – 3.9%, heart catheterization – 3.4%, general surgery – 3%, MRI – 3%. The remaining 26% were for 21 other specialties. The Referral Directorate in Ramallah reported an estimated cost of NIS 7,228,993 for the 1,711 referrals for Gaza patients in September.

ACCESS

Limited access to Egypt during September: According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the Rafah border terminal was open on 4 days during September allowing 3,585 travellers to exit to Egypt, among them 150 reported they were travelling for health reasons. 41 were transferred by ambulances with 20 companions. The Egyptian authorities allowed the entry of 7 ambulance cars to Gaza which were donated by the Sudanese Red Crescent to the Palestinian Red Crescent. No medical delegates entered Gaza during the month. From January to September 2016, the Rafah crossing was open only 20 days for humanitarian cases, allowing only 1,087 patients (179 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.

Access through Erez crossing: In September, there were 2,026 applications from patients (53% males and 47% females) for permits to cross Erez for health care, 15.5% lower than the previous month and 10% higher than the monthly average in 2015 (1,845). Of the total permit applications, 1,026 (50.6%) were for patients seeking treatment in hospitals in East Jerusalem, 524 (25.7%) in Israel, 473 (23.4%) in the West Bank, and 3 (0.15%) in Jordan. The top receiving hospitals in September were Makassed, 536 (26.5%) and Augusta Victoria, 351 (17.3%) in East Jerusalem; Najah University in Nablus, 189 (9.3%); Tel-Hashomir, 170 (8.4%) and Hadassah, 120 (5.9%) in Israel; St. John hospital, 96 (4.7%) in East Jerusalem; Msalam center, 77 (3.8%) in Ramallah; Al-Ahli hospital in Hebron, 68 (3.4%); Asuta hospital, 61 (3%) and Ichilov hospital, 51 (2.5%) in Israel. The remaining 307 (15%) were to 31 other hospitals and medical centers.

In September, the Palestinian District Coordination office reported that 63.77% of applications for permits for patients were approved (**Table 2**), considerably lower (13%) than the monthly average in 2015 (76.66%) and the lowest rate since June 2009 (67.8%). 177 applicants (8.74%) were denied access and 557 (27.5%) did not receive an answer to their applications in time for their hospital appointments, delaying their medical care. 15 patients were requested for security interviews with the Israeli security. Of patients applying for permits to cross Erez, 92% received referrals from the Ministry of Health, 4.3% were self-funded, 2.3% were supported by Noor Ala-Alam, and 1.6% were supported by other organizations. 10.4% were children aged 0-3 years, 23.3% were children aged 4-17, 25% were adults aged 18-40 years, 27.3% were 41-60 years and 13.8% were aged over 60 years.

Age group	Total		Approved		Denied		Delayed		Called by GSS*	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
0 - 3	80	131	65	107	0	1	15	23	0	0
4 - 17	221	250	154	172	2	6	65	72	0	0
18 - 40	245	265	139	116	22	68	84	81	0	5
41 - 60	260	294	168	152	16	55	76	87	1	8
Over 60	139	141	110	109	4	3	25	29	1	0
Sub-total	945	1081	636	656	44	133	265	292	2	13
Total	2,024		1,292 (63.77%)		177 (8.74%)		557 (27.49%)		15 (0.74%)	

* GSS = Israeli General Security Services

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH –Gaza

Table 3 shows that total number of permit applications from patients from January to September 2016 was 19.5% higher than the corresponding period in 2015 and the approval rate was 11% lower. The denial rate was 2.3% and the delayed rate was 9% higher in 2016.

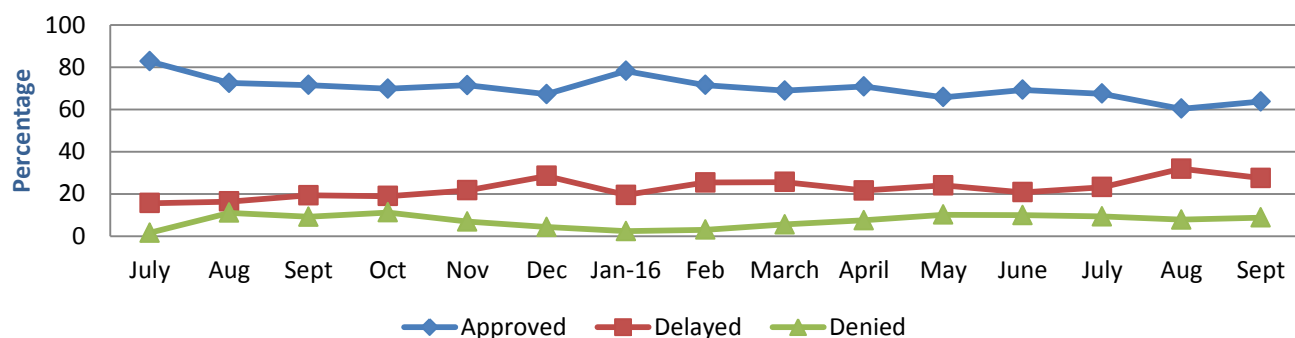
Period	January-September 2015		January-September 2016	
Total	15,802 (F:7,364; M:8,438)		18,887 (F:8,679;M:10,208)	
Approved	12,554 (F:6,192; M;6,362)	79.44%	12,898 (F:6,326 ;M:6,572)	68.29%
Denied	780 (F:222; M:558)	4.94%	1,356 (F:400;M:956)	7.18%
Delayed	2,468 (F:950; M:1,518)	15.62%	4,633 (F:1,953 ;M:2,680)	24.53%
GSS	136 (F:32; M:104)	0.86%	555 (F:182;M:373)	2.94%

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

Israeli approvals declined after July 2015 for patient permit applications and delays increased possibly due to an increase in GSS requests for security interviews, seen in **Chart 2**. In 2016, the approval rate dropped 18% from a high in January of 78.2% to a low of 60.3% in August.

Patients sometimes reapply after being denied a permit, or if urgent treatment is needed and no response has been received. September data showed that out of the 2,026 applications submitted in the Palestinian coordination office, 383 (19%) were repeated applications for patients: 4 attempts for 1 patient, 3 attempts for 13 patients, 2 attempts for 340 patients. The remaining 1,643 (81%) applications represented single attempts by patients.

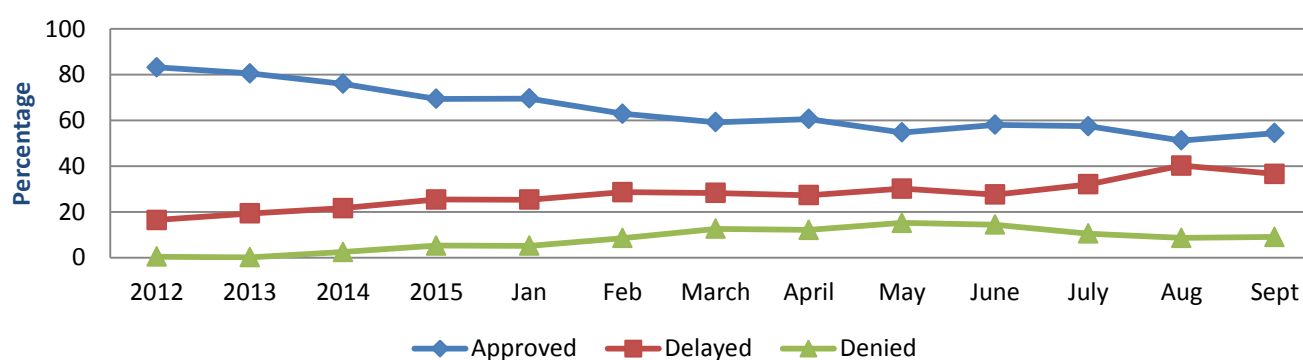
Chart 2: 15 months trend of Israeli responses to patients' permit applications, July 2015 - September 2016 (%)



Denied care: 177 patients (133 males; 44 females) were denied permits to access through Erez, including 9 children and 7 patients over 60 years old. 86.4% of the denied patients had appointments in East Jerusalem and West Bank hospitals and 13.6% in Israel. The following specialties were needed by patients who were denied permits: orthopedics (39); neurosurgery (20); oncology (17); general surgery (15); ophthalmology (10); ENT (10); and the remaining 66 referrals were for 19 other specialties.

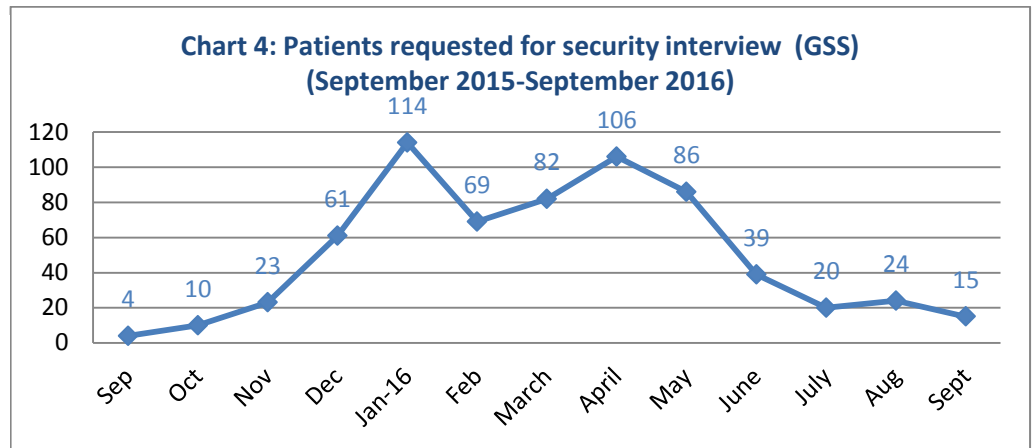
Delayed care: 557 patients (292 males; 265 females) were delayed in reaching health care in September, among them 175 children and 54 patients over the age of 60; those delayed had received no response to their applications and consequently lost their scheduled hospital appointments. The patients had scheduled appointments in: oncology (118); ophthalmology (58); cardiology (56); pediatrics (50); hematology (48); orthopedics (38); neurosurgery (22); general surgery (21); obstetrics/gynecology (21); internal medicine (19); vascular surgery (17); ENT (15); neurology and urology (12) each; nuclear medicine (10); and the remaining 40 referrals were for 12 other specialties. Out of the 557 delayed patient applications, the status of 298 (53.5%) was pending, 102 (18.3%) were asked to reapply, 77 (13.8%) were waiting for an appointment for a security interview, 52 (9.3%) were asked to change their companions, 15 were waiting for a response to their applications after having a security interview, 9 were asked to make a new hospital appointment, and 4 applications were returned as 'not suitable'. 20 patients out of those delayed in September were eventually approved late, within the first 2 weeks of October 2016, requiring rescheduling of hospital appointments.

Chart 3: Israeli Responses to patients' companions applications, January to September 2016 compared previous 4 years



Patients' companions: In September, 2,174 applications for relatives accompanying patients (including parents of children) were submitted to the Israeli authorities. Only 54.4% were approved; 9% were denied and 36.6% were delayed and pending (**Chart 3**). Only one first-degree relative is permitted to accompany patients and permits are conditional on security clearance for those aged 55 or younger. A clear decline can be noted in the approval rates for patients' companions from 2012 to May 2016. A sharp decline in the approval rate and a sharp increase of delayed in August. September is the second lowest approval rate since 2012.

Security Interviews: 15 patients (13 males; 2 females), among them 1 female over 60, were called for security interviews by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS). Of the 15 patients, 8 were cancer patients. The number of patients requested for a security interview as a condition



to process their permit applications has varied widely by month in 2016 (**Chart 4**). Of the 15 patients requested by GSS, none was approved in the month of September.

Patients and companions cross Erez: The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,197 Gaza patients (and 1,118 companions) crossed Erez in September to access Palestinian, Israeli, or Jordanian hospitals; of these, 73 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulances, with 66 companions. Erez crossing was open for 26 days during regular daytime working hours and closed for 4 days (4 Saturdays) in September.

Humanitarian health workers access through Erez: The WHO submitted a total of 8 permit applications for health workers during September. Four permit applications for WHO staff to exit Gaza were submitted and were approved; two permit applications to enter Gaza for WHO staff (Jerusalem ID holders), one was approved and one was denied. One application for a health cluster partner to exit Gaza was pending and one application for an international medical delegate to enter Gaza was approved, for a 75% approval rate.

A patient’s companion was detained at Erez and held for 2 days

Mufeed Salama Al-Hisi, a 60-year-old man from Beit-Lahia, was arrested on September, 19, 2016, at Erez checkpoint while returning to Gaza. Mufeed accompanied his brother Mohammed Salama Al-Hisi, 47 year-old for medical treatment at Makassed hospital in East Jerusalem. Mohammed suffered from a hepatic coma and had been transferred urgently by ambulance on September, 7, 2016. After he recovered from his disease he was discharged from Makassed on September 19, 2016. Mohammed and his brother Mufeed returned to Gaza by ambulance. When they arrived to Erez they were stopped by the Israeli security and Mufeed was detained. Mohamed returned to Gaza the same day and Mufeed was held for 2 days and released without charges.