



*235 patients were denied
access to health care during
August 2015 © WHO*

Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip

Ref: RAD 8 (Sept. 28, 2015)

Summary: August 2015

High number of Erez permit applications, highest rate of denials in 5 years

- **Erez crossing:** 2,121 referral patients applied for permits to exit Gaza through Erez checkpoint for hospital appointments in August. According to the Palestinian District Liaison office in Gaza, only 72.56% of patients were approved, 19.36% received no response to their applications (347 patients, including 90 children) and 11.08% were denied permits (235 patients, including 6 children and 21 elderly patient over 60 years old). The cause of August decline in access is not clear. 11 patients (9 males; 2 females) were requested to attend Israeli security interviews after applying for a permit, 5 were later approved. 93% of permit applications were from MoH referral patients and 7% were financed by NGOs and other donors.

Rafah terminal opened 4 days

- **Rafah border:** Rafah terminal was open on 4 days during August, allowing 21 patients to cross into Egypt. 61 pallets (equivalent to cubic meters) of medical aid were allowed entry into Gaza. No medical delegations entered Gaza through Rafah during the month. The border was open on only 19 days so far this year, allowing only 148 patients to cross into Egypt for health care. Before the July 2013 closure, more than 4,000 Gaza residents crossed Rafah monthly for health-related access.

MoH referrals in August

- **Ministry of Health referred 2,077 Gaza patients in August for outside care.** The August totals were 18% more than the monthly average of the first half of 2015: According to the Ministry of Health Referral Abroad Department (RAD) in Gaza, the main referral specialties needed in August were oncology, orthopaedic surgery, nuclear medicine, hematology and ophthalmology.
- **Gender gap:** The gender gap in Gaza referrals remained very wide: 55.71% male patients versus 44.29% female patients. 25.76% of all referrals were for children aged 0-17 years and 17.19% were for patients aged over 60 years.
- **Estimated cost of referrals for August:** NIS 10,460,087.

REFERRALS

Referrals of Gaza patients

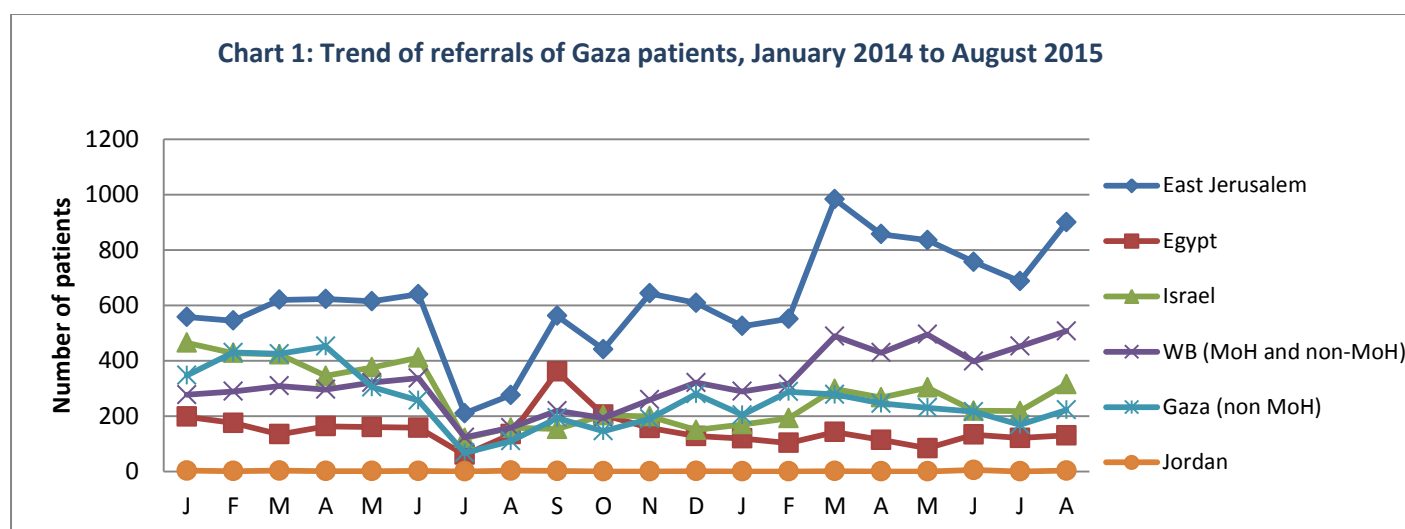
The Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 2,077 referrals for Gaza patients in August, according to the Referral Abroad Department (RAD) data in Gaza¹ (Table 1). August was the second after March as the highest month for referrals historically and 18% higher than the monthly average this year.

Table 1: Palestinian MoH referrals by destination, January to August 2015

Referral Destination	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	TOTAL
Gaza (non-MoH facilities)	204	288	278	246	230	216	169	222	1,853
WB (MoH and non-MoH)	289	315	489	429	495	398	452	507	3,374
East Jerusalem	525	551	983	857	836	757	687	900	6,096
Jordan	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	4
Israel	170	192	298	267	303	219	218	315	1,982
Egypt	119	103	142	114	84	133	121	130	946
Total	1,307	1,449	2,191	1,913	1,948	1,723	1,647	2,077	14,255

Source: MoH Referral Abroad Department, Gaza

In comparison with the monthly trend for 2015, this month referrals to Israel, to the West Bank, including to East Jerusalem, and to Egypt were 12% to 30% higher and referrals to non-MoH facilities within Gaza were 10% lower (Chart 1). The 222 referrals to non-MoH facilities within Gaza were mainly for MRI (104), heart catheterization (68), rehabilitation (14) and the remaining (36) were for 14 different specialties.



Of the 2,077 patients issued Ministry of Health referrals in August, 89% depended on access approvals from Israel or Egypt: 83% (1,725 patients) required Israeli permits to exit through Erez crossing and 6.26% (130 patients) required approval from Egypt to exit through Rafah (and required the Rafah border to be accessible). 25.76% of all patients referred by the MoH were children aged 0-17 years and 17.19% were patients over 60 years. Female referral patients were 44.29% of the total, compared to 55.71% male patients. 88.49% of referrals in August were for hospital admissions and 11.51% for outpatient clinics.

The Ministry of Health has shown significant progress in efficiency in processing patients' applications for referrals, at the level of the local office in Gaza and by the central Service Purchasing Department (SPD) in Ramallah. More than three-fourths of all applications are now processed within 7 days, compared to less than 10% in January. WHO

¹ The MoH Referral Abroad Department (RAD) in Gaza data reflects the number of patient applications approved for financial coverage by the central RAD office in Ramallah.

supported the Ministry by providing a web-based approval tracking system to shorten communication time between the Gaza and Ramallah offices. Scheduling of appointments in private and NGO hospitals continues to slow the processing, however. WHO is working toward adding hospital appointments to the online system.

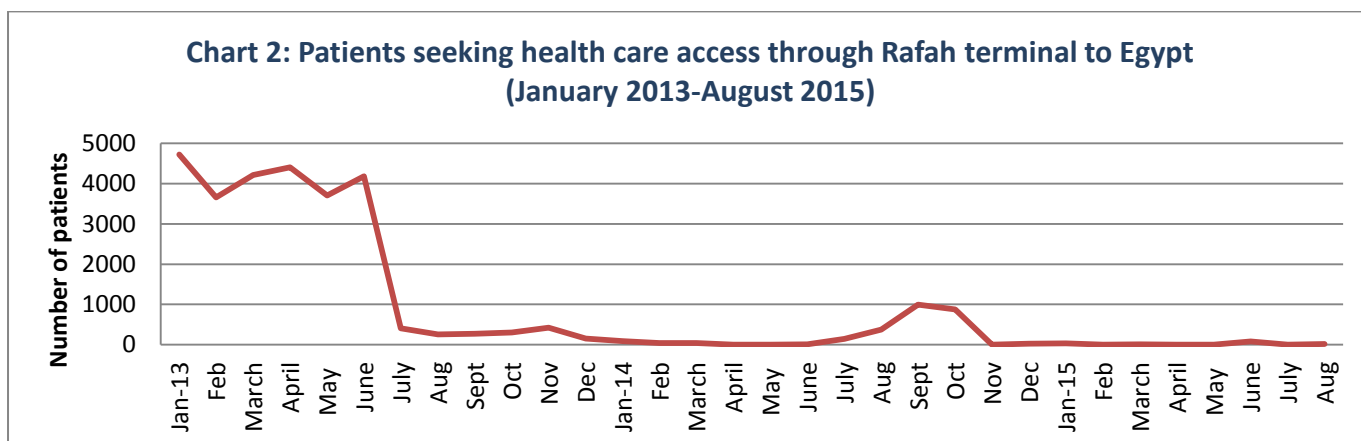
The three top destinations for the 2,077 referrals were Makassed Hospital (22.15%) and Augusta Victoria Hospital (14.4%) in East Jerusalem, and AnNajah National University Hospital (10%) in Nablus. The remaining appointments (53.45%) were in 48 other hospitals. Among 13 referring hospitals in the Gaza Strip, Shifa referred 1,006 patients in August (48.44% of the total), 390 (18.78%) were from the European Gaza Hospital (EGH), 133 (6.4%) from Rantisi pediatric hospital and 117 (5.63%) were from Nasser hospital.

The RAD in Ramallah reported 2,310 referrals for Gaza patients in August, 233 referrals² more than what registered in Gaza peripheral office with an estimated cost of **NIS 10,460,087**.

Medical reasons for referrals: The top ten specialties for Gaza patient referrals in August were: oncology—370 referrals (17.81%), orthopaedic surgery—192 (9.24%), nuclear medicine—165 (7.94%), hematology—160 (7.7%), ophthalmology—126 (6.07%), neurosurgery—117 (5.63%), pediatrics—116 (5.58%), MRI—115 (5.54%), heart catheterization—112 (5.39%), heart surgery—79 (3.8%); the remaining 525 (25.28%) referrals were to 20 other specialties.

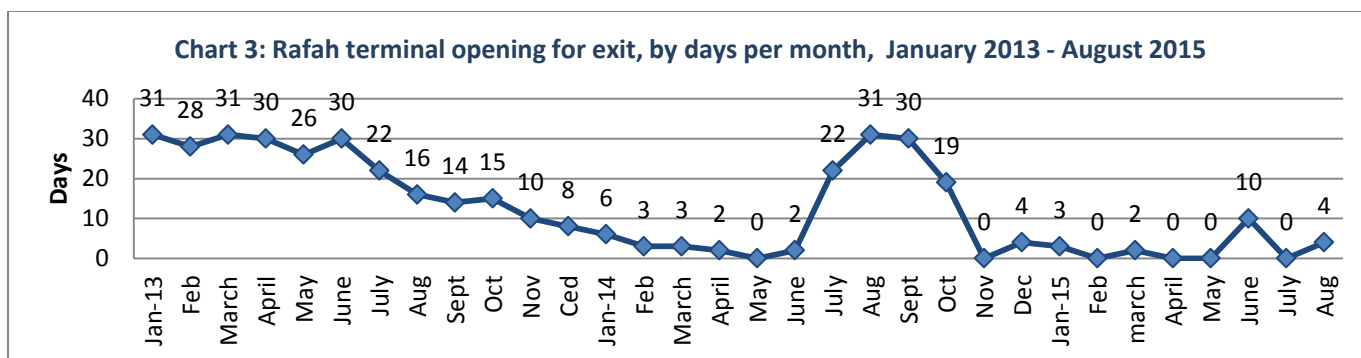
Access through Rafah terminal

Access to Egypt in August: According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the terminal was opened on 4 days in August allowing 2,618 travellers to cross to Egypt, among them 21 patients and 23 companions transferred by ambulances. Only humanitarian cases are permitted travel, including patients, university students studying abroad and individuals holding legal residency in other countries. No medical medical delegations entered Gaza through Rafah but medical aid was allowed to Gaza which included 61 pallets (approx. to cubic meters), 55 from the Egyptian Red Crescent and 5 from a private donor from Jordan. Rafah terminal has been closed by the Egyptian authorities since July 2013 except for the exit of a very limited number of humanitarian cases (**Chart 2**).



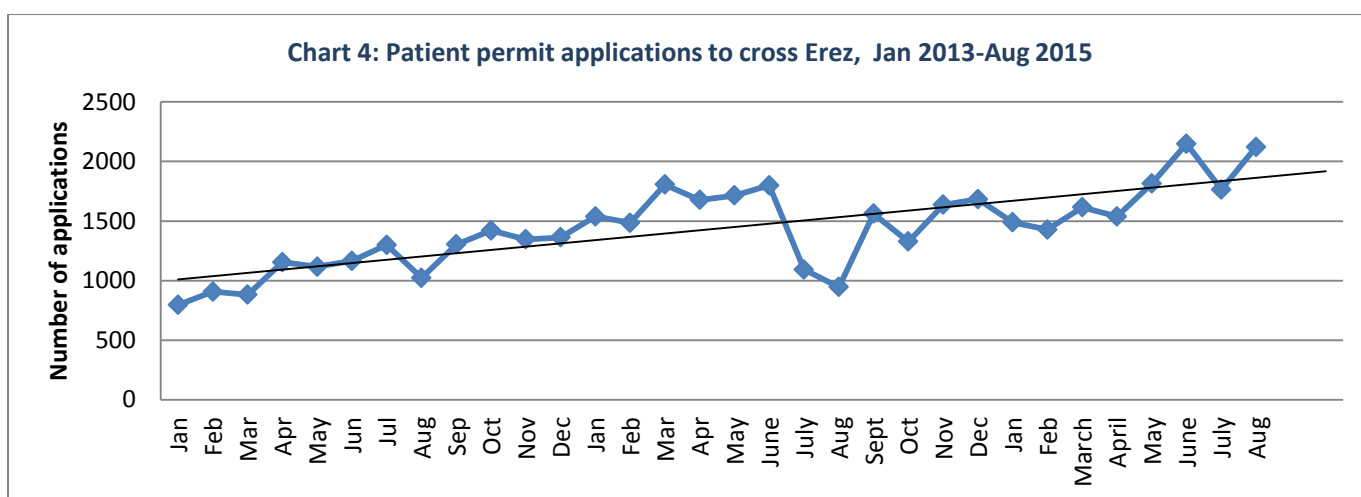
Before the July 2013 closure, more than 4000 Gaza residents crossed Rafah monthly for health-related access. The border has been opened a total of only 19 days so far this year, allowing only 148 Gaza patients to cross into Egypt for health care out of 946 referrals issued by the MoH (**Chart 3**).

² This figure includes renewals of referrals to Egypt for patients still waiting for access whose original referrals expired.



Access through Erez

In August, the total number of patients' applications for Israeli permits to cross Erez was 2,121, the second highest month after June showing a continuous high demand on referrals. The demand on referrals has been increasing gradually in the last 3 years (**Chart 4**). Referrals reflect shortages and the lack of specialized services available in the health sector in Gaza and blocked access to private medical care in Egypt. Out of the 2,121 permit applications, 1,014 (47.81%) were for patients destined to hospitals in East Jerusalem, 689 (32.49%) to the West Bank, 396 (18.67%) to Israel, and 22 (1.04%) to Jordan.



In August, the Palestinian District Coordination office reported that 1,539 (72.56%) patients' permits applications only were approved, the lowest approval rate since October 2009 (with the exception of July 2014 during the war) (**Table 2; Chart 5**). 253 applicants (11.08%) were denied access, the highest denial rate since July 2010 and 347 (16.36%) did not receive an answer to their applications in time for their hospital appointments and therefore suffered delay in health care.

Patients should submit their applications to the district liaison office 7-10 days prior to the appointment date but in August 753 applications (35.5%) out of the total 2,121 were submitted in less than 7 days, most frequently because of timing of the appointment given by the referral hospital.

Table 2: Israeli responses to permit requests to cross Erez, by age, sex and GSS interviews, August 2015

Age group	Total		Approved		Denied		Delayed		Called by GSS*	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
0 - 3	81	107	70	96	1	0	10	11	0	0
4 - 17	187	230	157	186	2	3	28	41	0	0
18 - 40	304	321	191	135	57	81	56	105	2	5
41 - 60	297	291	255	196	17	53	25	42	0	2
Over 60	156	147	142	111	10	11	4	25	0	2
Sub-total	1025	1096	815	724	87	148	123	224	2	9
Total	2121		1539 (72.56%)		235 (11.08%)		347 (16.36%)		11 (0.59%)	

* GSS = Israeli General Security Services

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH –Gaza

The total applications in August 2015 were 2.24 times the corresponding month last year with an approval rate of 10% lower and denial 5.25 times higher. For the period from January to August 2015, the number of applications was 15% higher than the corresponding period last. The approval rate was 1.6% lower and the denial was 1.8% higher (Table 3).

Table 3: Israeli District Liaison Office decisions on permit requests to cross Erez, by response and sex of applicant (2015 compared to 2014)

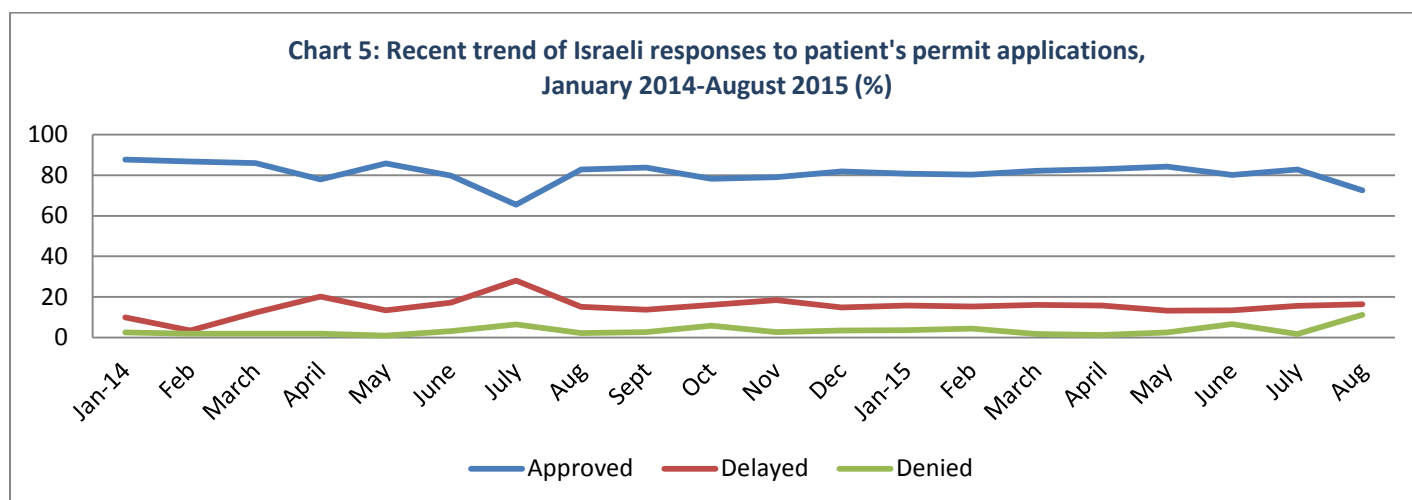
Period	August 2014		August 2015		Jan-Aug 2014		January – August 2015	
Total	946 (F:381; M:565)		2,121 (F:1025; M:1096)		12,058 (F:5,523; M:6,535)		13,919 (F:6,495;M:7,424)	
Approved	783 (F:329; M:454)	82.77%	1,539 (F:815; M:724)	72.56%	9,905 (F:4,766; M:5,139)	82.14%	11,206 (F:5,520;M:5,686)	80.51%
Denied	20 (F:7; M:13)	2.11%	235 (F:87; M:148)	11.08%	311 (F:104; M:207)	2.58%	608 (F:168;M:440)	4.37%
Delayed	143 (F:45; M:98)	15.12%	347 (F:123; M:224)	16.36%	1,842 (F:653; M:1,189)	15.28%	2,105 (F:807;M:1,298)	15.12%
<i>-- of which called for GSS interrogation (of total applicants)</i>	13 (F:3;M:10)	1.37%	11 (F:2; M:9)	0.59%	112 (F:16; M:96)	0.93%	132 (F:32;M:100)	0.95%

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

Patient companions: In August, 2,187 applications for relatives accompanying patients (including parents of children) were submitted to the Israeli authorities. Only 66% were approved, 24% were pending and 10% were denied. Only one first-degree relative is permitted and permits are subject to security clearance.

Financial coverage: 93.49% of all patients applying for Israeli permits in August were referred by the Palestinian MoH, 3.35% were self-funded, 1.04% by Peres Center for Peace, 0.80% by Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, 0.61% were funded by Nour Al-Alam foundation, 0.47% by the Military Medical Services, 0.09% by a private insurance companies, 0.05% by Hadassa fund, 0.05% by UNRWA and 0.05% by other organizations.

Charts 5 and 6 show that August 2015 represents a sharp decline in the Israeli approval rate for patients' permit applications and highest rate of denials since 2009 (with the exception of July 2014 during the war). The cause of this recent decline in access is not clear.



Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

Denied care: 235 patients (87 males; 148 females) were denied permits to access through Erez, including 6 children and 21 patients over 60 years old. Of the denied patients, 211 patients had appointments in East Jerusalem and West Bank hospitals, 23 in Israel and 1 in Jordan. 214 were financially covered by the Palestinian MoH, and 11 were self-funded, 4 by Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, 3 by MMS, 1 by Peres Center for Peace, 1 by UNRWA and 1 by insurance company. 27.23% (64 patients) of those denied had submitted their applications less than 8 days from the hospital appointment. 43.83% (103) had waited for a response for 8-14 days, 28.09% (66) waited 15-30 days, 2 patients waited more than 30 days before receiving a denial. Of those denied, 52 patients had appointments for orthopedics, 39 for neurosurgery, 28 for ophthalmology, 20 for general surgery, 18 for ENT,

17 for urology, 11 for internal medicine, 9 for neurology, 9 vascular surgery, 5 ob/gyn, 4 oncology, 4 nuclear medicine, 4 dermatology, 4 nephrology, 2 hematology, 2 endocrinology, 2 chest disease, plastic surgery, 1 cardiology, 1 infertility, and 1 maxillofacial.

Delayed care: 347 patient applicants (123 males; 224 females), including 90 children and 29 patients over the age of 60, received no response to their applications and consequently lost their hospital appointments. Of the 347 patients delayed, 79.25% had scheduled appointments in East Jerusalem or West Bank hospitals, 19.6% in Israel, and 1.15% in Jordan. The delayed patients had scheduled appointments in ophthalmology (68), oncology (44), neurosurgery (43), cardiology (32), pediatrics (30), orthopedics (25), hematology (13), general surgery (12) urology (11), neurology (10), nephrology (9), internal medicine (7), nuclear medicine (7), vascular surgery (6), ob/gyn (5), heart surgery (5), ENT (5), maxillofacial surgery (2), heart catheterization (2), plastic surgery (20), ICU (2), technical aids (1), chest surgery (1), dermatology (1), infertility (1), rehabilitation (1), chest disease (1) and pediatric surgery (1).

Out of 347 delayed patient applicants, 30.84% had submitted their applications 1-7 days prior to the appointment date. However, 49.57% waited 8-14 days, 15.56% waited 15-30 days and 3.75% waited more than 30 days for a response to their permit request. 1 application was not accounted for. 34 patients out of the delayed were eventually approved late, within the first 2 weeks of September.

Security Interviews: 11 (9 males; 2 females) patients, 9 aged 18-60 and 2 over 60 were called for security interviews by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS), 5 were approved after the interview.

Patients and companions crossed Erez: The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,346 patients (and 1,325 companions) crossed Erez in August to access hospitals in the West Bank including Jerusalem, Israeli hospitals, or Jordanian hospitals, including 74 transferred by ambulance (back-to-back). Erez crossing was open for 26 days with regular day-time working hours and closed for 5 days (5 Saturdays) during the month.

Chart 6: Historical trend of Israeli responses to permit applications, January 2009-August 2015 (%)

