

MONTHLY REPORT

October 2019

Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **8,496**

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

2,656 Gaza

5,723 West Bank

 **58%**

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

45%

of companion permit applications approved

 **85%**

of West Bank patient permit applications approved

81%

of companion permit applications approved

 **4**

Gaza patients called for security interview

4

pending

IN FOCUS


Patient with tumour makes 12 unsuccessful permit applications to access healthcare


Part 1 Referrals

October Referrals by the Ministry of Health

In October, the Palestinian Ministry of Health approved 8,496 referrals. Sixty-seven percent (5,723) of referrals were for West Bank patients, including 996 referrals for patients from Jerusalem, while 31% (2656) of referrals were for Gaza patients. The origins for 114 referrals (1%) were not reported, while 3 patients were referred from Jordan. Female patient referrals comprised 45% of the total.

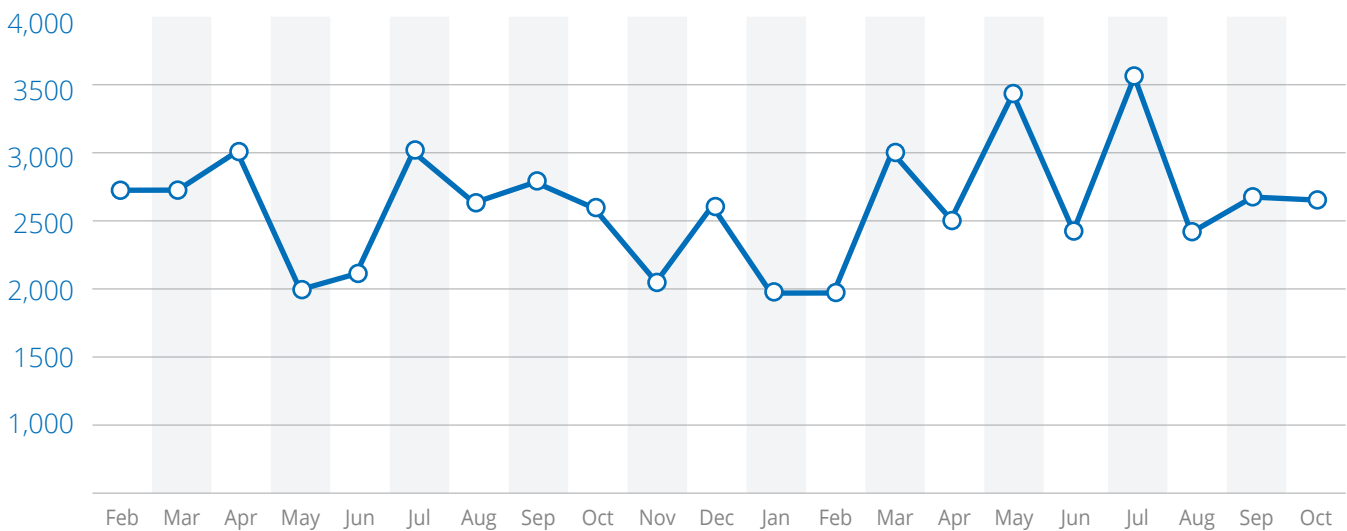
There was further reduction in referrals to Israeli hospitals from Gaza, with 66 referrals to Israeli hospitals (17% of the 2018 monthly average of 389), while 352 referrals were made for West Bank patients (30% of the 2018 monthly average of 1,185 and similar to September). There were 438 referrals from Gaza to Egypt, or 16% of Gaza referrals, that required access through Rafah. Meanwhile 64% of Gaza referrals required Israeli-issued permits and 45% of West Bank referrals were to facilities in East Jerusalem or Israel, the majority of which require Israeli-issued permits to access care. Chart 1 shows the number of referral documents issued to patients in Gaza from February 2018 to October 2019.

 **2,656**
Gaza

 **5,723**
West Bank

referrals approved for financial coverage for healthcare outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health

Chart 1: Total number of referrals approved for Gaza patients, February 2018 to October 2019



Part 2 Access

The Gaza Strip

There were 1,764 patient applications to cross Erez for healthcare in October. Almost a third (31%) were for children under 18 and 19% were for patients aged 60 years or older. Forty-seven percent of applications were for female patients and 91% were for medical care funded by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

Two-thirds (66%) of applications to cross Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, more than a fifth (22%) for West Bank hospitals and 12% for Israeli hospitals. One application was for an appointment at a Jordanian hospital. Augusta Victoria Hospital (35%) and Makassed Hospital (25%), both in East Jerusalem, received three-fifths of permit applications (60%). The top five specialties accounted for 72% of permit applications: oncology (38%); haematology (10%); paediatrics (10%); cardiology (8%); and orthopaedics (6%). The remaining 28% were for 23 other specialties.

Approved permit applications: 1,020 (523 male; 497 female), or 58% of the 1,764 applications to cross Erez in October 2019, were approved, representing the lowest approval rate since April 2018. Chart 2 shows the trend for Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications over the past 12 months. A third (34%) of permits approved were for children under 18 and a fifth (22%) were for patients aged 60 years or older.

1,764
patients applications
to Israeli authorities to cross Erez/
Beit Hanoun to access healthcare

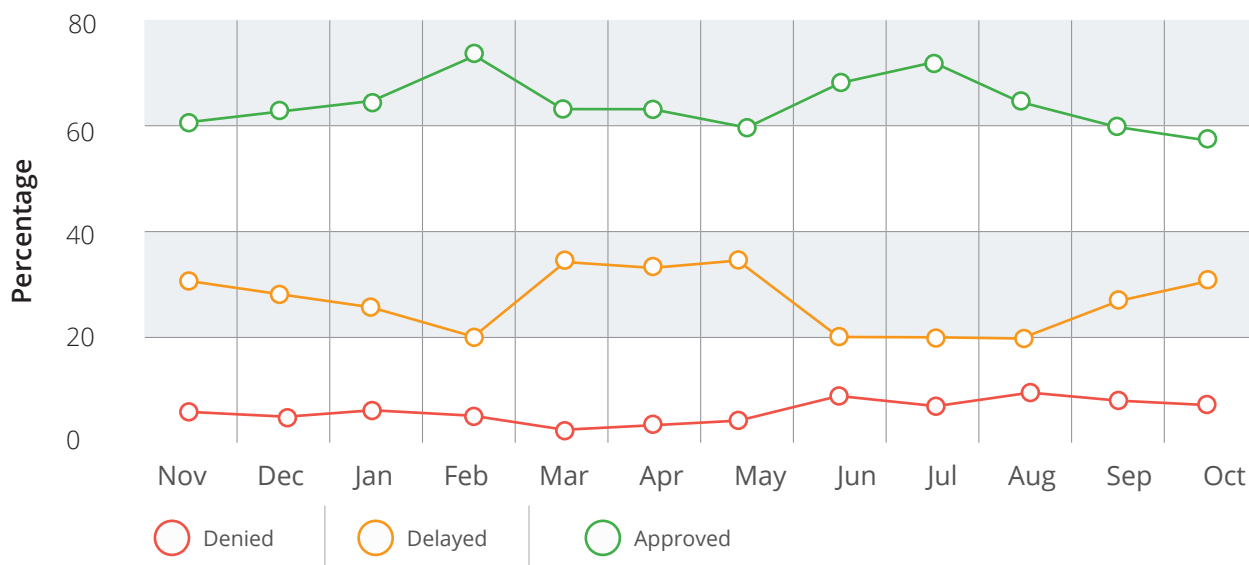
58%
approved

9%
denied

33%
delayed

Chart 2

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, November 2018 to October 2019



Denied care: 159 patient applications (87 male; 72 female), or 9% of the total, were denied permits to cross Erez for healthcare in October. Those denied included 33 children under 18 and 21 patients aged 60 years or older. About a quarter (24%) of denied applications were for appointments in oncology, 9% for orthopaedics, 8% for cardiology, 8% for haematology, and 6% for ophthalmology.

Delayed care: 585 patient applications (320 male; 265 female), or 33% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. Of these, 173 applications were for children under the age of 18 and 90 applications were for patients aged 60 years or older. More than a third (34%) of those delayed had appointments for oncology, 11% for paediatrics, 10% for haematology, 7% for cardiology, 7% for ophthalmology, and 5% for nuclear medicine. The remaining 24% were for 21 other specialties. The majority of delayed applications (453 or 77%) were 'under study' at the time of appointment.

Access for those injured during the Great March of Return

As of 31 October 2019, according to Gaza's Coordination and Liaison Office, there had been 596 patient applications to Israeli authorities for permits to access healthcare through Erez/Beit Hanoun crossing by those injured during the Great March of Return demonstrations since 30 March 2018. The approval rate for this group is significantly lower than the overall approval rate for patient permit applications to exit Gaza, with 18% (105) approved, 27% (162) denied and 55% (329) delayed.

Security interrogation

In October, 4 (2 male; 2 female) patients were called for security interrogation as a prerequisite to processing of their permit applications. The patients called for security interrogation were a 67-year-old woman with cancer of the biliary tract, a 42-year-old woman with breast cancer, a 49-year-old male with ischaemic heart disease and an 18-year-old man with secondary hypertension. All four were delayed, not receiving a definitive response to their applications by the date of their hospital appointments.

Patient companions:

In October, there were 1,905 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities to cross Erez/Beit Hanoun to accompany patients. These applications include parents or other companions applying to accompany children. Only one companion is allowed to accompany each Gaza patient. In October, 857 patient companion applications (45% of the total) were approved, 279 applications (15%) were denied and the remaining 769 (40%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's appointment. Chart 3 shows the trend for Israeli responses to patient companion applications over the last 12 months.



4

patients called for security interrogation



4 delayed



1,905

patient companion applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to accompany patients



45% approved



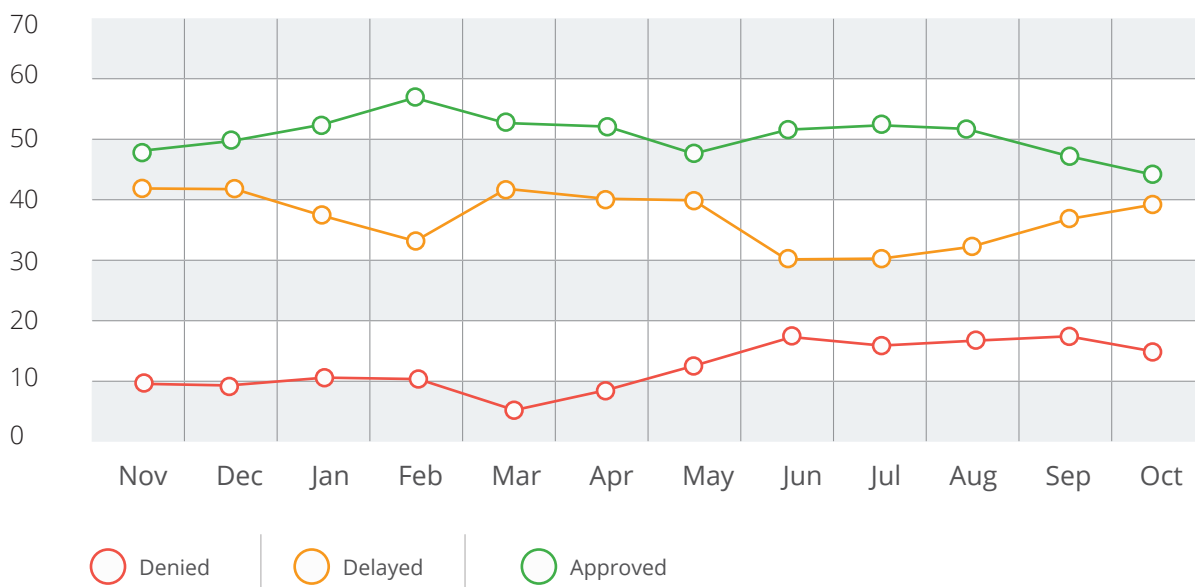
15% denied



40% pending

Chart 3

Israeli responses to patient companion applications, November 2018 to October 2019



Patients and companions crossing Erez:

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,404 Gaza patients and 1,108 companions crossed Erez in October to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of these, 45 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 44 companions. During the month, Erez crossing was open for 23 days for daytime working hours and closed on 8 days (4 Saturdays and 4 Jewish holidays).



1,404

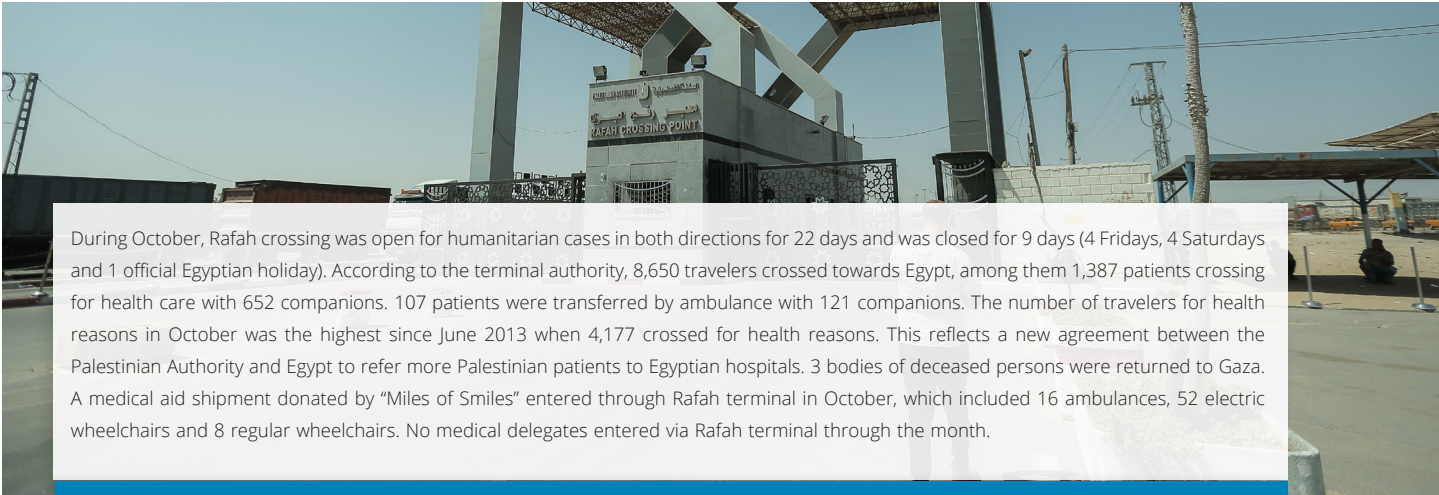
patients crossed Erez for health care



1,108

patient companions crossed Erez

Rafah crossing – Egypt



During October, Rafah crossing was open for humanitarian cases in both directions for 22 days and was closed for 9 days (4 Fridays, 4 Saturdays and 1 official Egyptian holiday). According to the terminal authority, 8,650 travelers crossed towards Egypt, among them 1,387 patients crossing for health care with 652 companions. 107 patients were transferred by ambulance with 121 companions. The number of travelers for health reasons in October was the highest since June 2013 when 4,177 crossed for health reasons. This reflects a new agreement between the Palestinian Authority and Egypt to refer more Palestinian patients to Egyptian hospitals. 3 bodies of deceased persons were returned to Gaza. A medical aid shipment donated by "Miles of Smiles" entered through Rafah terminal in October, which included 16 ambulances, 52 electric wheelchairs and 8 regular wheelchairs. No medical delegates entered via Rafah terminal through the month.

The West Bank


In October, there were 7,335 applications by West Bank patients to the 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 7,335 West Bank patient applications for permits, 6,251 (85%) were approved, 871 (12%) were denied and 213 (3%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.


Of 8,572 patient companion applications for permits, 6,916 (81%) were approved, 1,376 (16%) were denied and 280 (3%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **7,335**
patient
applications

for Israeli permits to access
healthcare in East Jerusalem
and Israel


 **85% approved**


 **12% unsuccessful**


 **3% pending**
at the time of monthly
reporting

 **8,572**
patient companion
applications

to access healthcare in East
Jerusalem and Israel

 **81% approved**

 **16% unsuccessful**

 **3% pending**
at the time of monthly
reporting

In Focus

Patient with tumour makes 12 unsuccessful permit applications to access healthcare



Sherehan discovered she had a tumour in her left adrenal gland when she went to the doctor in the Gaza Strip with abdominal pains in July 2018. Three months later, when the mother of four returned to hospital to follow up, doctors found that the tumour had grown. Sherehan needed advanced multidisciplinary care, including CT-guided biopsy with the possibility of follow up specialist surgery. Such services are not currently available in the Gaza Strip, so the 33-year-old was referred to the Palestine Medical Complex in Ramallah. For Sherehan, this meant applying for an Israeli-issued permit to exit Gaza. Since her initial referral, she has now applied 12 times to exit Gaza for healthcare, and every time she has been unsuccessful. On eight occasions she was denied a permit, while three times her application was 'under study' at the time of her appointment, so that she missed it, and on a further occasion she was informed the treatment is 'locally available'. According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, the complex multidisciplinary care Sherehan requires is not available locally. She applied to travel alone, without a companion, for nine of her permit applications, to try to increase her chances of approval. The approval rate for companion permits is lower than for patient permits.

Sherehan, from Al-Tufah area in the Gaza Strip, has become increasingly frustrated and depressed in the face of barriers to accessing the care she needs. "I've been suffering a year with sickness, but over the last three months I felt so down and depressed. The tumour is getting bigger and my symptoms are getting worse. I have no options, just painkillers. My blood pressure is low and I get bad headaches, sickness and pain in my joints and stomach."

Married with four children, Sherehan lives with her husband, children, mother-in-law and brother-in-law in a rented house. Her husband works on and off as a car mechanic and, like many families in Gaza, they struggle financially. The extra costs of accessing healthcare, including transport and medicines, are high. Many drugs are not available in public hospitals because of long-term shortages, with 46% of essential medicines with less than a month's stock remaining in the Ministry of Health Central Drugs Store in October.

Sherehan and her family are appealing the decisions by Israeli authorities to deny her access to healthcare through the Palestinian Center for Human Rights. Her next scheduled hospital appointment in Ramallah is for 12 December 2019, and she hopes she will finally be able to attend.