



Hamza Mgat, 10 years old, was born with a congenital heart condition, ventricular septal defect. He and his grandmother wait in an ambulance on the Palestinian side of the Rafah terminal to cross the border for health care. His family had applied for a permit 3 times to exit Gaza for an appointment in Makassed hospital in East Jerusalem, but did not receive an answer, only that the request was “under study.” When his health deteriorated, he had surgery at Shifa hospital, after which his physicians recommended follow up at an advanced cardiac center, with Egypt the only possible destination. © WHO.

Health Access for Referral Patients from the Gaza Strip

Ref: 12
(published February 1, 2017)

Summary: December 2016

Lack of access through Erez crossing

- **High volume of permit requests:** In the last two months permit applications increased 20% over the previous month due largely to a high number of repeat applications from patients who were denied or had no response in previous months.
- **58.3% of patients are denied/delayed permits:** Of 2,596 patient applications for a permit to exit Gaza through Erez checkpoint for hospital appointments in December, only 41.7% were approved, marking the lowest approval rate recorded by WHO since April 2009. 91 patients (3.5%) were denied permits, among them 8 elderly persons over 60 years, while 1,422 patients (54.8%) received no response, including 323 children and 103 elderly people over 60 (Palestinian District Liaison office in Gaza).
- **65% of patients' companions are denied/ delayed permits:** The approval rate for permit applications of patient companions was 35%; about 9.7% of the companions were denied permits and the remaining 55.3% were still pending at the time of the patients' hospital dates.
- **Security interrogations:** 29 patients (17 males; 12 females), among them a female child, were requested by the General Security Services for interviews at Erez during December. 8 were approved.
- **Humanitarian health workers through Erez:** Of 11 WHO requests, only 3 (27%) were approved. 2 were denied and 6 were pending.

Limited Rafah exit in December

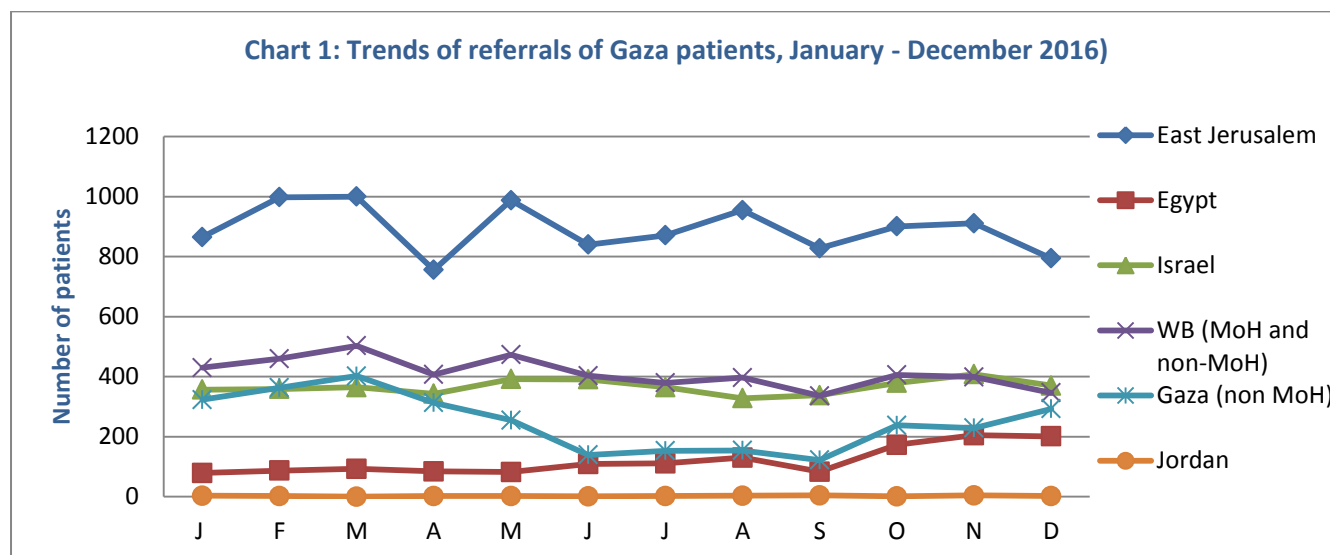
- **Access to Egypt improved:** According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the Rafah border terminal was open in both directions for 6 days in December allowing 424 patients to travel for health reasons to Egypt. Two ambulance cars donated by Indonesia entered Gaza.

Ministry of Health referrals in December

- **Financial coverage:** The Ministry of Health issued 2,006 referral decisions (benefiting 1,800 patients) in December for outside care with an estimated cost of NIS 8,647,424. The top 5 needed specialties for Gaza patients were in oncology, haematology, orthopaedics, heart catheterization and paediatrics.

MoH Referrals in December

The Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 2,006 referrals for Gaza patients (representing 1,800 individuals) in December, according to the Medical Referral Directorate data in Ramallah (**Table 1**), 1% higher than the monthly average in 2015. 46.3% were female patients and 53.7% were male patients; 27.2% were children aged 0 to 17 years and 21% were elderly patients over 60 years old. Referrals were mainly for: oncology - 489 patients (24.4%), hematology - 151 (7.5%), orthopedics - 136 (6.8%), heart catheterization - 129 (6.4%), pediatrics - 116 (5.8%), ophthalmology - 114 (5.7%), MRI – 109 (5.4%), nuclear medicine - 97 (4.8%), neurosurgery - 82 (4.1%), general surgery - 70 (3.5%) and the remaining 513 referrals (25.6%) were for 20 other specialties.



Most referrals were to East Jerusalem hospitals (39.6%), with the remaining distributed to Israeli hospitals (18.4%), medical facilities in the West Bank (17.3%), or within Gaza (14.6%). Referrals to Egypt (10%) were the highest of the year, reflecting the recent open days at the Rafah border, **Chart 1 and Table 1**.

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

Referral destination		Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Gaza (non-MoH)	N	323	363	402	313	255	139	153	154	122	238	229	293	2,984
	%	15.7	16	17.01	16.43	11.63	7.38	8.13	7.83	7.13	11.34	10.62	14.61	12.19
WB (MoH / non-MoH)	N	430	460	503	407	473	403	379	397	336	406	399	346	4,939
	%	20.90	20.27	21.29	21.36	21.58	21.4	20.15	20.18	19.64	19.35	18.51	17.25	20.17
East Jerusalem	N	865	998	1,000	756	988	840	871	955	828	901	911	794	10,707
	%	42.05	43.98	42.32	39.69	45.07	44.61	46.31	48.55	48.39	42.95	42.25	39.58	44.72
Jordan	N	3	2	0	2	2	1	2	3	4	1	4	2	26
	%	0.15	0.09	0.00	0.10	0.09	0.05	0.11	0.15	0.23	0.05	0.19	0.10	0.11
Israel	N	357	359	365	343	392	391	365	328	338	379	408	370	4,395
	%	17.36	15.82	15.45	18.01	17.88	20.76	19.4	16.68	19.75	18.06	18.92	18.44	18.1
Egypt	N	79	84	93	84	82	109	111	130	83	173	205	201	1,437
	%	3.84	3.83	3.94	4.41	3.73	5.79	5.9	6.61	4.85	8.25	9.51	10.02	5.87
Total		2,057	2,269	2,363	1,905	2,192	1,883	1,881	1,967	1,711	2,098	2,156	2,006	24,488

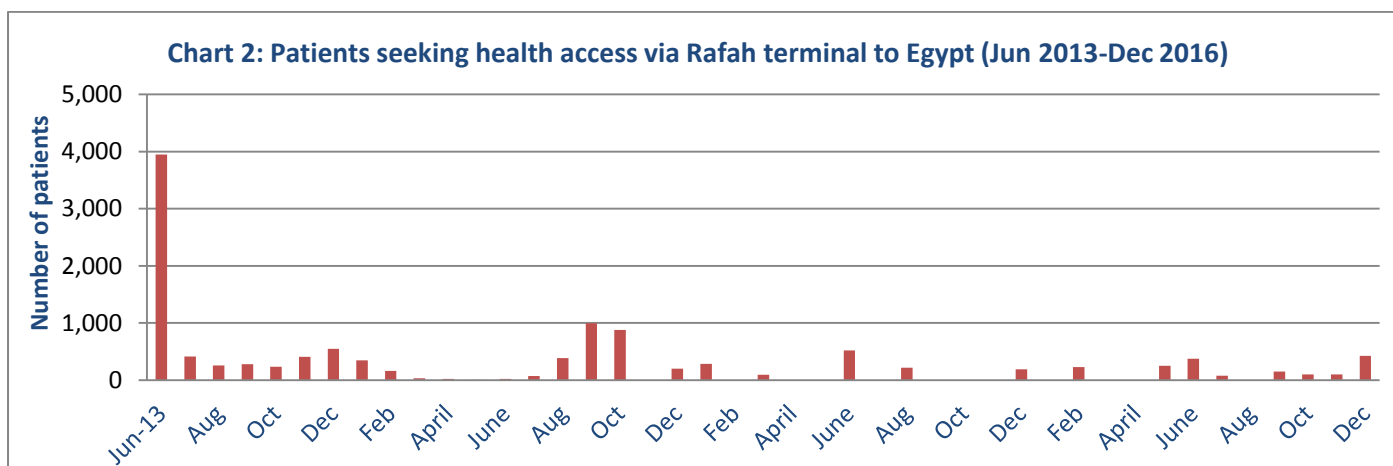
Source: MoH Medical Referral Directorate, Ramallah, January 1, 2017

The Special Purchasing Unit in Ramallah, which administers referrals, estimated the cost of December's 2,006 referrals for Gaza patients in December to be NIS 8,647,424. Of total referrals in December, 1,512 (75.4%) required Israeli permits for access through Erez checkpoint and 201 (10%) required approval from Egypt to exit through Rafah (and the Rafah border to be accessible).

ACCESS

Limited access to Egypt during December: According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the Rafah border terminal was open on 6 days during December for humanitarian cases. A total of 4,131 travellers crossed to Egypt. Of these, 424 reported they were travelling for health reasons with 202 companions, the highest number of travellers for health reasons since June 2015 (**Chart 2**). 30 of the patients, with 31 companions, were transferred

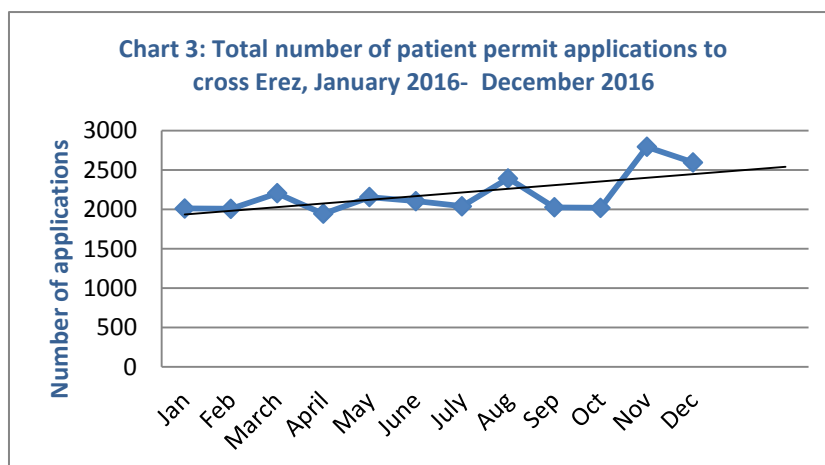
by ambulance. The Egyptian authorities allowed the entry of 2 ambulance cars donated by the Indonesian people to the Indonesian hospital in Gaza. No medical delegates entered Gaza during the month. Between January and December 2016, the Rafah crossing has been open only 38 days for humanitarian cases, allowing only 1,713 patients (247 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 2**.



Erez crossing permit approval rates = the lowest in 7 years: In December, there were 2,596 applications from patients for permits to cross Erez for health care, 41% higher than the monthly average in 2015 (1,845). The sharp increase of total applications in November and December reflects the high number of reapplications for patients who were denied or delayed in the previous months, **Chart 3**.

About 22% (566) of patient applications in December were repeat applications by patients to cross Erez: 6 attempts for 1 patient, 4 attempts for 3 patients, 3 attempts for 20 patients and 2 attempts for 488 patients. The remaining 78% (2,030) applications represented single attempts by patients during the month.

Of the total permit applications, 77.6% were for medical care in the occupied Palestinian territory: 1,360 (52.4%) were for patients seeking treatment in East Jerusalem hospitals, 655 (25.2%) in the West Bank hospitals, 578 (22.3%) in Israeli hospitals, and 3 (0.12%) in Jordanian hospitals.



The top receiving hospitals in December were Makassed, 616 (23.7%) and Augusta Victoria, 565 (21.8%) in East Jerusalem; Najah University in Nablus 222 (8.6%); Hadassah, 153 (5.9%) and Tel-Hashomir, 141 (5.4%) in Israel; Msalam center, 134 (5.2%) in Ramallah; St. John hospital, 122 (4.7%) in East Jerusalem; Assuta hospital, 88 (3.4%) and Ichilov hospital 79 (3.1%) in Israel. The remaining 476 (18.3%) were to 33 other hospitals and medical centers.

In December, the Palestinian District Coordination office reported that only 41.7% of applications for patients' permits were approved, the lowest approval rate in 7 years, since April 2009, considerably lower than the monthly average in 2015 of 76.7% (**Table 2 and Chart 4**). 91 applicants (3.5%) were denied access and 1,422 (54.78%) did not receive an answer to their applications in time for their hospital appointments, delaying their medical care. 29 patients were requested for security interviews with the Israeli security.

Of patients applying for permits to cross Erez, 94.3% received referrals from the Ministry of Health, 2.9% were self-funded, 1.5% were supported by Noor Ala Al-alam charity, 0.5% by PHR-Israel and the remaining 0.8% by other organizations. 8.9% of applicants were children aged 0-3 years, 19.8% children aged 4-17, 26.2% adults aged 18-40 years, 30.2% adults aged 41-60 years and 15% aged over 60 years.

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

Age group	Total		Approved		Denied		Delayed		Called by GSS*	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
0 - 3	82	148	50	96	0	0	32	52	0	0
4 - 17	211	304	114	162	0	0	97	142	1	0
18- 40	321	358	94	63	13	36	214	259	3	6
41 - 60	376	406	128	97	10	24	238	285	8	8
Over 60	186	204	141	138	0	8	45	58	0	3
Sub-total	1176	1420	527	556	23	68	626	796	12	17
Total	2,596		1,083 (41.72%)		91 (3.5%)		1,422 (54.78)		29 (1.12%)	

* GSS = Israeli General Security Services

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

The total number of patients' permit applications submitted from January to December 2016 was 25% higher than the corresponding period in 2015 while the approval rate was about 13% lower (**Table 3**). In 2016, the denial rate was 0.57% higher and the delayed rate was 12.3% higher than in 2015. The number of patients requested for security interviews increased 2.7 times.

Israeli approvals of permits have declined steadily in 2016 from a high in January of 78.2% to a low of 41.7% in December (**Chart 4**). The likely cause of the rise in delays is an increase in Israeli security procedures for both patients and companions.

Denied care: 91 patients (68 males; 23 females) were denied permits to access through Erez, including 8 patients over 60 years old. 89% of the denied patients had appointments in East Jerusalem and West Bank hospitals and 11% in Israel. The following specialties were needed by patients who were denied permits: orthopedics (37); oncology (9); ophthalmology, nuclear medicine, and neurosurgery (5) each; cardiology and internal medicine (4) each; urology, ENT, general surgery and hematology (3) each; nephrology, vascular surgery and infertility (2) each; maxillofacial surgery, plastic surgery, chest disease, and endocrinology (1) each.

Delayed care: 1,422 patients (796 males; 626 females) were delayed in reaching health care in December, the highest number of patient applications delayed ever, among them 323 children and 103 patients over the age of 60; those delayed received no response to their applications and consequently lost their scheduled hospital

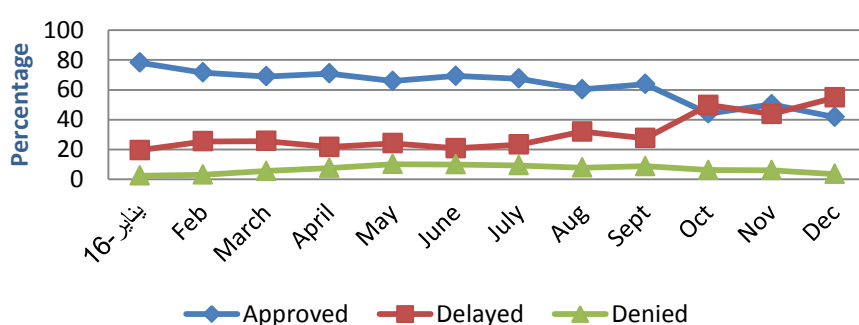
Table 3: Israeli responses to permit requests to cross Erez, by sex of applicant, 2016 compared to 2015

Period	2015		2016	
Total	22,138 (F:10,315; M:11,823)		27,688 (F:12,596;M:15,092)	
Approved	16,970 (F:8,389; M:8,581)	76.66%	17,665 (F:8,520 ;M:9,145)	63.8%
Denied	1,267 (F:403; M:864)	5.72%	1,741 (F:527;M:1,214)	6.29%
Delayed	3,901 (F:1,523; M:2,378)	17.62%	8,282 (F:3,549 ;M:4,733)	29.91%
GSS	230 (F:60; M:170)	1.04%	631 (F:214;M:417)	2.28%

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza. 2016 annual totals are based on preliminary monthly data.

A delayed permit means delayed medical care, which is particularly harmful for cancer patients whose treatment protocols must be timely.

Chart 4: Monthly Israeli responses to patients' permit applications, January -December 2016 (%)



Patient resorts to Egypt for transplant after kidney donor denied permit

Osama Quaider, a 43 year-old man from Khan Younis, began hemodialysis 6 months ago since he was diagnosed with end stage renal failure, and was waiting for a kidney transplant. On 21 September 2016, Osama travelled to Ramallah hospital in the West Bank for the transplant, scheduled for 15 October 2016, with his brother Mohammed as a donor. But Mohammed was denied a permit. Osama waited in the West Bank while his brother tried to obtain a permit but after more than one month Osama was forced to return to Gaza. Doctors in Ramallah hospital advised Osama to change his treatment destination to Egypt.



Osama (on right) and his brother Mohammed at Rafah terminal in December © WHO.

appointments. The patients had treatment appointments in: oncology (356); orthopedics (136); ophthalmology (134); cardiology (123); hematology (107); pediatrics (102); neurosurgery (72); nuclear medicine (71); general surgery (63); urology (39); nephrology (32); vascular surgery (26); ENT (23); obstetrics/gynecology (21), endocrinology and neurology (12) each; plastic surgery (11); heart surgery (9); dermatology and lab analysis (6) each; maxilla-facial surgery and infertility (4) each; chest disease (3); chest surgery (2); intensive care and pediatric surgery (1) each.

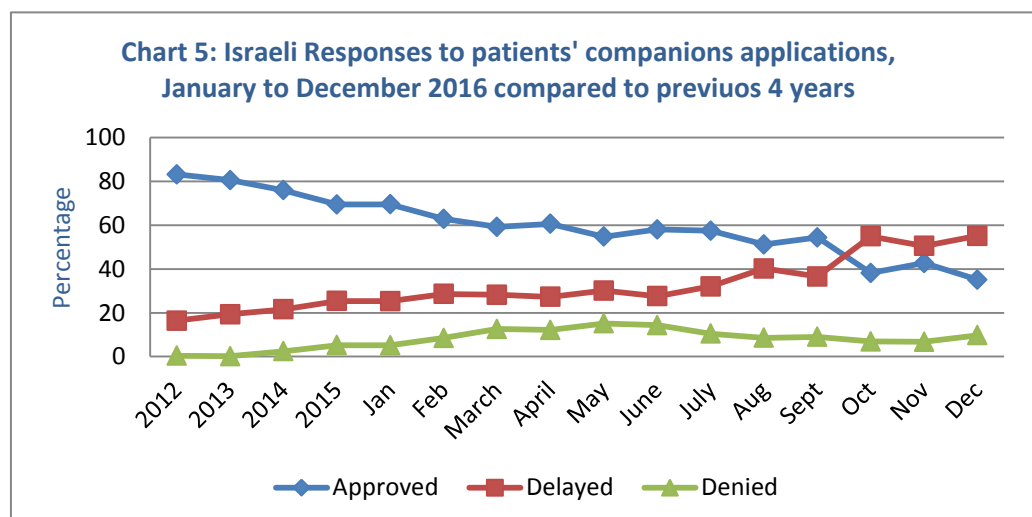
Out of the 1,422 delayed patient applications, the status of 1,330 (93.5%) was pending, 35 (2.5%) were asked to change their companions, 29 (2%) were waiting for a response to their applications after having a security interview, 13 (0.9%) were asked to reapply, 10 (0.7%) were waiting for an appointment for a security interview, 4 (0.3%) application were returned as 'not suitable', 1 (0.07%) was asked to reschedule a hospital appointment. 46 patients out of those delayed in December were eventually approved late, within the first week of January 2017, requiring rescheduling of hospital appointments.

Patients need to submit their applications at least 10 days prior to the hospital appointment. In December, out of the 1,422 delayed patients 100 (7%) had submitted their applications 1-7 days prior to the appointment date and 443 (31.2%) submitted their application 8-14 days prior to the appointment date. However, 844 (59.4%) were still waiting after 15-30 days, and 35 (2.5%) waited more than 30 days for a response to their permit request.

Patients' companions: In December, 2,875 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 have declined steadily from 2012 to December 2016. In December more permits were denied or delayed than approved: 35% were approved, 9.7% were denied and 55.3% were delayed and pending, **Chart 5**.

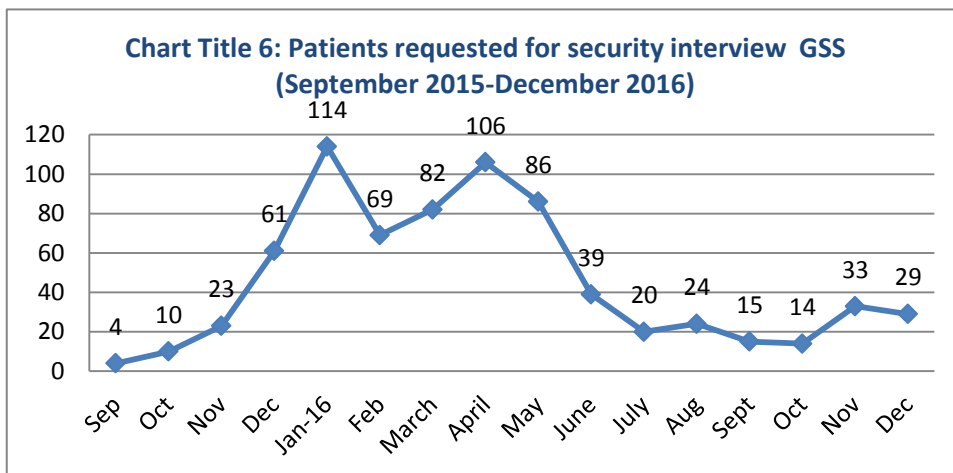
Security interviews:

29 patients (17 males; 12 females), among them a young girl child less than 18 years and 3 men over 60 years were called for security interviews by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS), **(Chart 6)**. Of the 29 patients requested by the GSS, 8 were approved after the interview.



Patients and companions

cross Erez: The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,072 Gaza patients (and 1,013 companions) crossed Erez in December to access Palestinian, Israeli, or Jordanian hospitals; of these, 81 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulances, with 77 companions. Erez crossing was open for 26 days during daytime working hours and closed on 5 days (5 Saturdays) in December.



Humanitarian health workers access through Erez: The WHO submitted a total of 11 permit applications for health workers during December; only 3 were approved. 8 requests were for WHO staff to exit Gaza, 2 were approved and 6 were pending. 3 were for medical companies' employees (Jerusalem ID holders) to enter Gaza, one was approved and 2 were denied.

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 on 29 November since 1977, WHO launched a report on health access in the oPt in 2014-2015 at an event in Gaza. The report highlights how the Israeli permit system and physical barriers obstruct health access for Palestinian patients, ambulances and health workers in the West Bank and Gaza.

Full report:

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

News release:

[English](#) | [Arabic](#)

Video of report launch in Gaza:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKaDTA1dcTo>

