



Passenger corridor to Erez terminal, Gaza-Israel border © WHO

Health Access for Referral Patients from the Gaza Strip

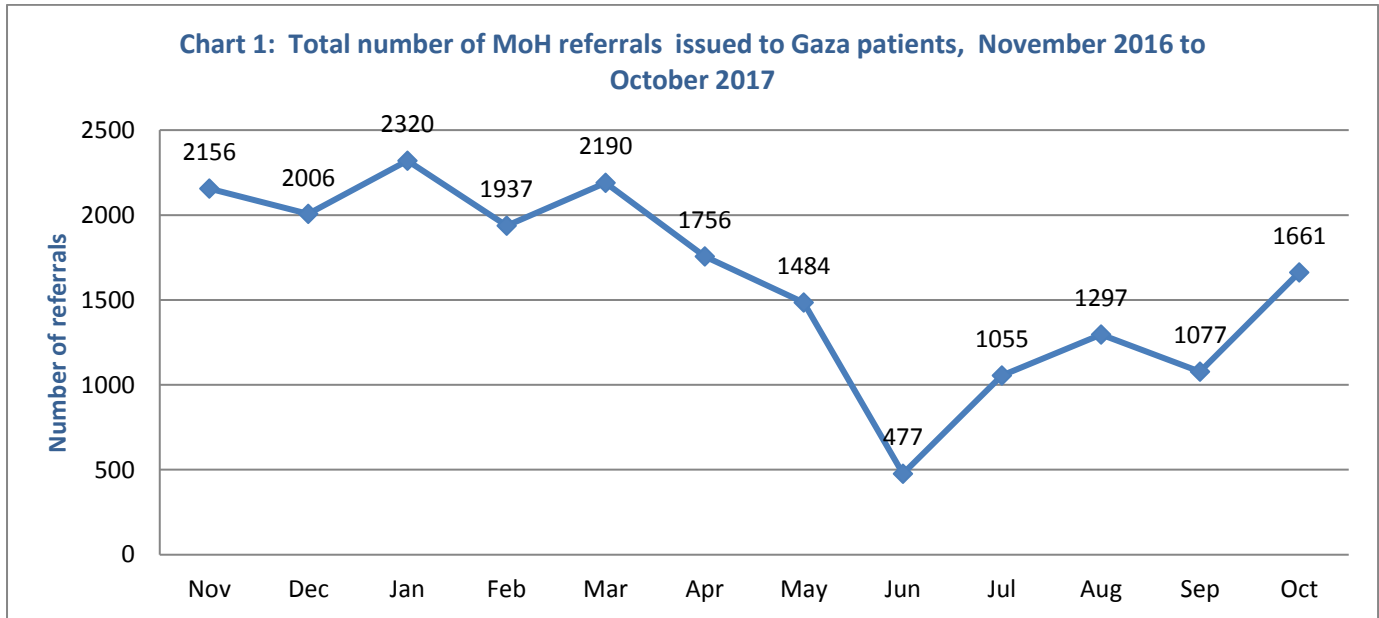
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Summary: October 2017

- **More than 45% of patients unsuccessful in obtaining security permits from Israeli authorities:** Of 2,017 patient applications for a permit to exit Gaza through Erez checkpoint for hospital appointments in October 2017, **55%** were approved; **2%** were denied including three children and two elderly patients; and **43%** were pending and lost their hospital appointments including 164 children and 82 elderly.
- **More than half of patient companions unsuccessful in obtaining permits to travel out of Gaza:** Of 2,306 permit applications for patient companions to Israeli authorities in October 2017, **43%** were approved, **3%** were denied and **54%** were delayed, with their application still pending by the time of the patient's hospital appointment date.
- **Security interrogation of patients:** 29 patients (16 males; 13 females) were requested for interrogation by the General Security Services at Erez during October. Two were approved permits to travel for health care.
- **Significant increase in the number of referral documents for Gaza patients seeking financial coverage for health referrals:** 1,661 requests for financial coverage for Gaza patients were approved by the Services Purchasing Unit of the Palestinian Ministry of Health in October but there remain a backlog of more than 1,400 requests for patient referrals.
- **No access to Egypt:** Rafah terminal was closed in both directions. No medical aid and no medical delegates entered Gaza.
- **Patient arrested and detained while crossing Erez to access health care**

Ministry of Health referrals

In October, there was an increase in the number of financial coverage documents issued to patients by the Services Purchasing Unit (SPU), though this number did not reach levels observed prior to April 2017. 1,661 referral documents were issued for Gaza patients. This is 77% of the monthly average in the first quarter of 2017 (2,149) and 79% compared to the corresponding month in 2016 (2,098). **Chart 1** shows the number of referral documents issued for Gaza patients from November 2016 to October 2017.



During the period from mid-May until the end of October, there has been a backlog of more than 1,400 Gaza patient referral requests pending in the central SPU in Ramallah.

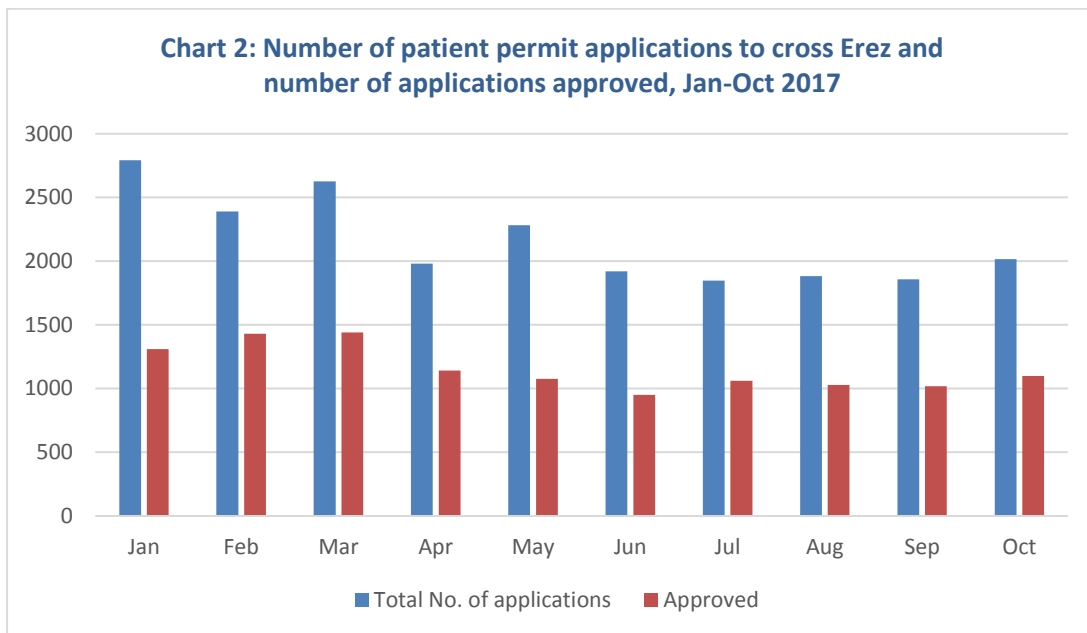
Processing time: In October 2017, a third of applications were approved within one week, with two-thirds of applications taking longer than seven days to process, see **Table 1**. Overall there has been an increase in the length of time to process referrals: from January to May 2017, 99% of referrals were processed within one week.

Processing time (days)	Applications (%)
1-7	33%
8-14	13%
15-21	12%
22-31	11%
>31	31%

Israeli security permits and interrogations

Number of applications: There has been an overall decline in the number of applications to cross Erez for health care since the beginning of the year with the lowest number in July. 2,017 patient applications were submitted in October, 23% lower than the monthly average for the first quarter (2,603) but an increase on the average number submitted each month from July to September (1,863). see **Chart 2**.

Approved permit applications: During the same time, since the beginning of the year, the rate of approvals for patients applying for security permits to exit Gaza has been consistently low, with an average acceptance rate of 54% from January to October 2017. Of the 2,017 applications to cross Erez in October 2017, a total of 1,100 or just over half (55%) of applications received security approval.



Denied care: 42 patient applications (27 male; 15 female), or 2% of the total, were denied permits to access health care through Erez in October, including three children under the age of 18 years and two patients aged 60 years or older.

Delayed care: 875 patient applications (454 males; 421 females), or 43% of the total, were delayed in October, among them 164 applications for children under the age of 18 and 82 applications for patients aged 60 years or older. Patients who are delayed receive no formal acceptance or rejection to travel by the time of their hospital appointment. This results in delayed access to care, as patients must reapply for new hospital appointments. Many patients are receiving care for conditions that risk deterioration with successive delays. In October, just over a quarter (26%) of those delayed were seeking care for oncology and one in ten (10%) were seeking care for cardiology.

Of the 2,017 patients applications, 28% were for children under age 18, and 19% were for patients over 60 years old. 48.7% of applications were for female patients. 94% of applications were for medical care funded by the Ministry of Health. The top five specialties accounted for two-thirds (67%) of applications: oncology (32%), cardiology (9.5%), paediatrics (8.9%), haematology (8.8%), and orthopaedics (7.7%).

Security interrogation: 29 patients (16 men and 13 women), two over 60 years old, were called for security interrogation by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS) in October. Seven of these oncology patients had been referred for cancer treatment and testing. After interrogation, two patients were approved and 27 were pending.

Patient companions: 2,306 applications to Israeli authorities for permits to cross Erez were for relatives accompanying patients, including parents or other companions for children. Only one first-degree relative is permitted to accompany a Gaza patient and permits are conditional on security clearance. In October, 43% of those applications were approved, 3% were denied and 54% were pending by the date of the patient's medical appointment.

Rafah crossing – Egypt

The Rafah border terminal was closed in both directions for the whole month of October allowing no travelers to exit or enter Gaza including patients. No medical aid or medical delegates entered Gaza via Rafah during the month. Since the beginning of 2017, the terminal was open for exit only 16 days during the year, of which two days were for the exit of pilgrims only. Long periods of closure make Rafah terminal unreliable for patients seeking healthcare outside Gaza. So far in 2017, only 1,222 patients have exited via Rafah for medical treatment. Before the July 2013 closure, more than 4,000 Gaza residents crossed Rafah terminal to Egypt each month for health-related reasons.

Patients and companions cross Erez: The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 888 Gaza patients and 779 companions crossed Erez in October to access Palestinian or Israeli hospitals. 59 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance, with 56 companions. During the month, Erez crossing was open for 25 days for daytime working hours and closed on six days (four Saturdays and two Jewish Holidays).

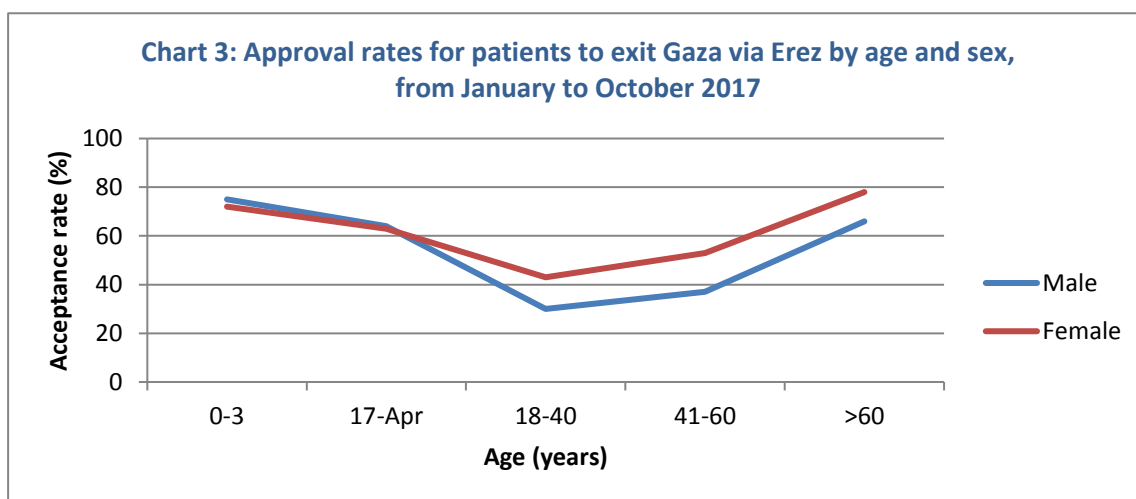
Patient arrested at Erez

Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights in Gaza reported that one patient was arrested by Israeli security services at Erez on 24th October 2017. Abdelrahman Abu-Lehia, 31 years old from Khan Yunis, had been referred to Jordan for a neurological problem. He was accompanied by his father, who reported that Abdelrahman was arrested at Erez and transferred for detention to Ashkelon prison. On 9th November 2017, after 17 days in detention, Abdelrahman was released without charge.

Age and gender barriers to access for patients and patient companions

All male patients and patient companions aged 16 to 55 years old and female patients and patient companions aged 16 to 45 years old must undergo supplementary security clearance process when applying for security permits from Israeli security services to exit via Erez. This can mean additional delays in processing applications.

For January to October 2017, male patients had lower rates of approval compared to female patients, at 50% compared to 57% respectively. For both men and women, the lowest approval rates were in those aged 18 to 40 and 41 to 60, see Chart 3. Men aged 18 to 40 had the lowest approval rate overall: less than one in three men is successful in gaining a security permit to exit Gaza via Erez for health care.



For patient companions, men had a substantially lower approval rate compared to women overall: 34% versus 61% respectively. The lowest rates of approval were again in men aged 18 to 40 years of age, with only a fifth (21%) of applications approved – see Chart 4.

