

# MONTHLY REPORT

## March 2019



## Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **3,092**

referrals issued to Gaza patients to access health facilities outside the Palestinian

 **65%**

of Gaza patient permit applications to Israeli authorities for exit via Erez approved

**53%** Gaza patient companions

 **85%**

of West Bank patient permit applications to Israeli authorities approved

**80%** West Bank patient companions

 **1**

Gaza patients called for security interview, delayed

### IN FOCUS

*Attacks on health care in the occupied Palestinian territory*

# Part 1 Referrals

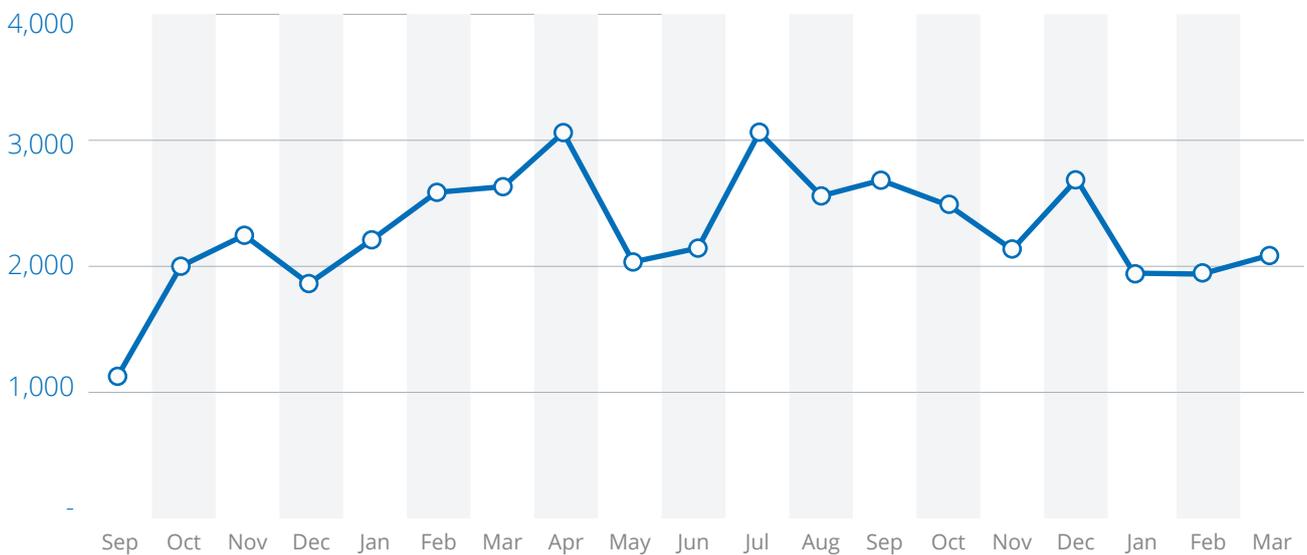
## March Referrals by the Ministry of Health

In March, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) approved 3,092 referrals for Gaza patients to non-Ministry of Health facilities, with an estimated cost of 11.5 million NIS. This is higher than the average monthly number of referrals for Gaza patients in 2018, which was 2,579 referrals per month. 65% of referrals required access through Erez crossing to reach hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, while 8% required access through Rafah terminal to access health care in Egypt. Towards the end of March, the MoH stopped referrals to Israeli hospitals. Some medical interventions, such as bone marrow transplant is not available even in specialized centres in either East Jerusalem or the West Bank. Chart 1 shows the number of referral documents issued to patients in Gaza from September 2017 to March 2019.

 **3,092**  
referrals

approved for financial coverage for Gaza patients outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health

**Chart 1:** Total number of referrals approved for Gaza patients, September 2017 - March 2019



# Part 2 Access

## The Gaza Strip

2,004 patient applications to cross Erez for health care were submitted in March. 32% were for children under age of 18 and 17% were for patients aged 60 years or older. 47% of applications were for female patients and 92% of applications were for medical care funded by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

Three fifths (58%) of applications to cross Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, one fifth (22%) were for hospitals in Israel, and one fifth for West Bank hospitals (20%). Augusta Victoria Hospital (27%) and Makassed Hospital (25%), both in East Jerusalem, received more than half of referrals (52%). Permit applications for the top five specialties accounted for more than 63% of referrals: oncology (31%); haematology (9%); orthopaedics (8%); paediatrics (8%) and cardiology (7%). The remaining 37% referrals were for 26 other specialties.

**Approved permit applications:** 1,293 (661 male; 632 female), or 65% of the 2,004 applications to cross Erez in March 2019 were approved, 7% lower than the previous month. Chart 2 shows a 12-month trend for Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications. Almost two-fifths (38%) of permits approved were for children under age of 18 and a fifth (20%) were for people aged 60 years or older.



**2,004**

patients applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to access health care



**65%**

approved



**4%**

denied

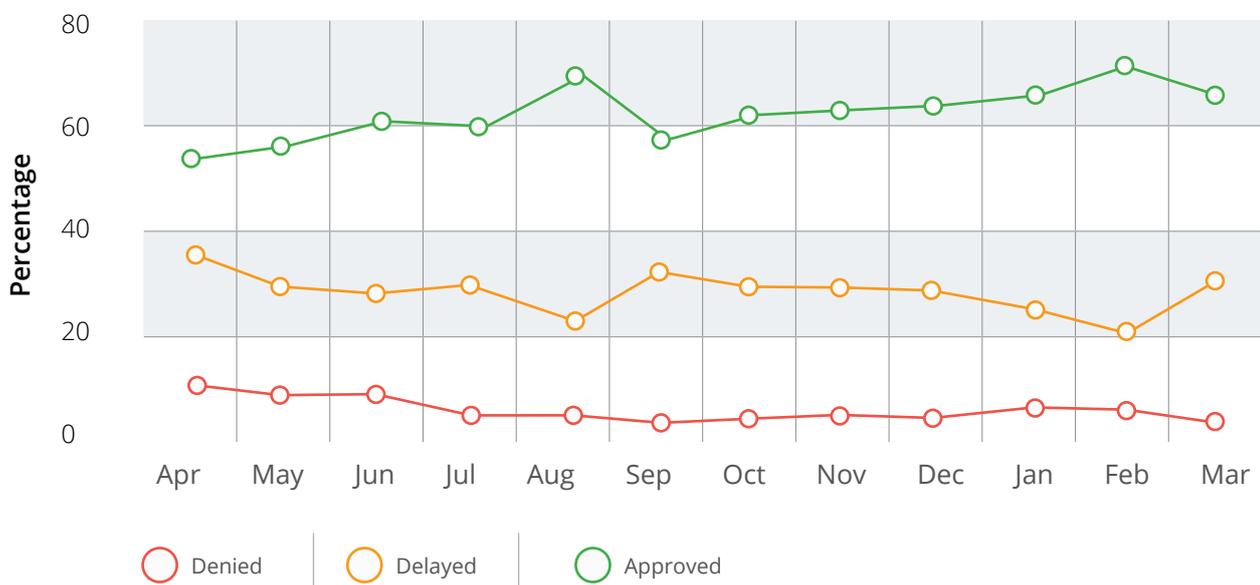


**32%**

delayed

**Chart 2**

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, April 2018- March 2019



**Denied care:** 74 patient applications (57 male; 17 female), or 4% of the total, were denied permission to cross Erez for health care in March. Those denied included four children under the age of 18 years and eight patients aged 60 years or older. 27% of denied applications were for appointments in orthopaedics, 23% for neurosurgery, 8% for oncology, 8% for ophthalmology. 95% of denied permit applications were for appointments at hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

**Delayed care:** 637 patient applications (350 male; 287 female), or 32% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. Of these, 144 applications were for children under the age of 18 and 77 applications were for patients aged 60 years or older. 19% of those delayed had appointments for oncology, 14% orthopaedics and 9% for ophthalmology. The remaining (58%) were for 21 other specialties. 585 (92%) of the delayed applications were 'under study' at the time of appointment. Four patient applications were unsuccessful because patients allegedly had relatives staying in the West Bank.

## Access for those injured during demonstrations:

15 permit applications (0.7% of the total) in March were for those injured during demonstrations: 2 applications were approved; 2 denied; and 11 delayed. The approval rate for those injured in demonstrations is significantly lower than the overall approval rate. As of 31 March, according to Gaza's Coordination and Liaison Office, there have been 524 applications to Israeli authorities by those injured in demonstrations to exit Gaza via Erez crossing for health care. Of those applications, 92 (18%) were approved, 141 (27%) were denied and 291 (55%) were delayed.<sup>1</sup>

## Security interrogation

In March, a 48-year-old man with bladder cancer was requested for security interrogation as a prerequisite to travel for health care. He had been referred for an isotope scan not available in Gaza. His application was delayed, receiving no definitive response by the date of his appointment.

## Patient companions:

In March, there were 2,191 permit applications to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to accompany patients. These applications include parents or other companions applying to accompany children. Only one companion is permitted to accompany each Gaza patient and permits are conditional on security clearance. In March, 1,153 (53%) patient companion applications were approved, 120 applications (5%) were denied and the remaining 918 (42%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's appointment. Chart 3 shows the trend over the last 13 months for Israeli responses to patient companion applications.



1

patient called for security interrogation



Delayed



2,191

patient companion applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to accompany patients



53% approved



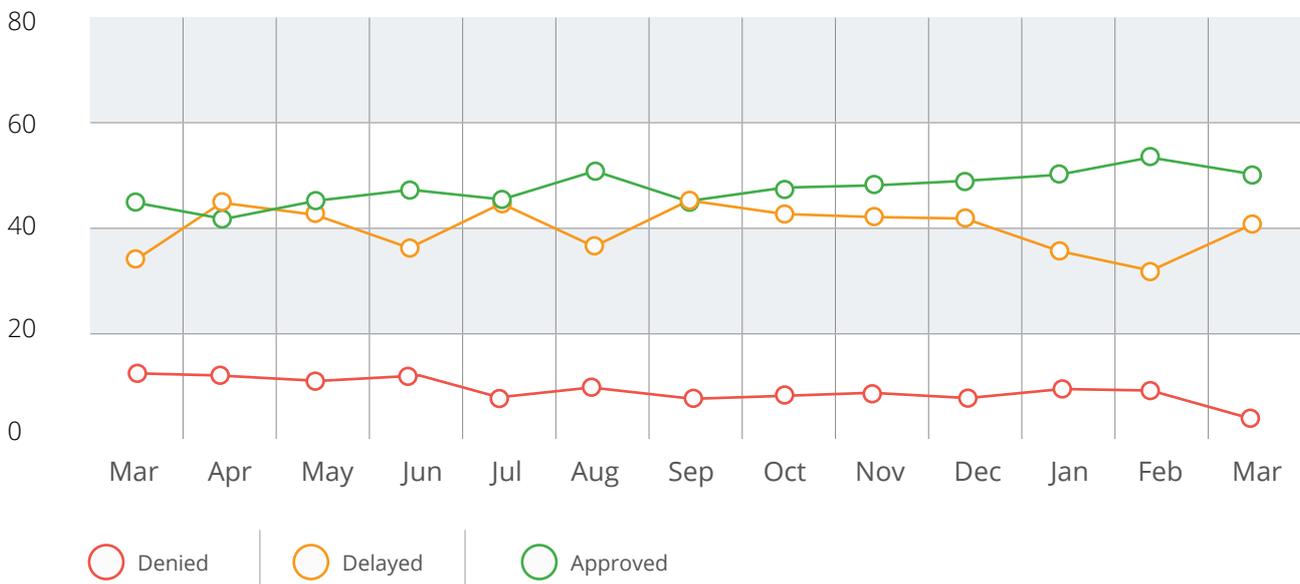
5% denied



42% pending

### Chart 3

Israeli responses to Gaza patient companion applications, March 2018- March 2019



## Patients and companions crossing Erez:

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,470 Gaza patients and 1,250 companions crossed Erez in March to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of these, 71 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 69 companions. During the month, Erez crossing was open for 26 days for daytime working hours and closed on five days (five Saturdays).



1,470

patients crossed Erez for health care



1,250

patient companions crossed Erez

<sup>1</sup> Data provided by the Palestinian Coordination and Liaison Office, Gaza

## Rafah crossing – Egypt



Rafah terminal was open in both directions for 21 days and closed for 10 days (Fridays and Saturdays). There were 8,161 attempted crossings to exit Gaza towards Egypt during March and 5,135<sup>2</sup> entries to Gaza. No data has been made available for the number of patients crossing in March.

### The West Bank

In March, there were 9,113 applications by West Bank patients to 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 exempted from the requirement to obtain a permit to travel – provided they are not traveling on a Saturday or before 8am. Of the 9,113 applications, 7,751 (85.1%) were approved, 1,320 (14.4%) were denied and 42 (0.5%) were pending any reply at the time of monthly reporting.

Of the 9,724 patient companion applications, 7,761 (80%) were approved, 1,780 (18%) were denied and 183 (2%) were pending any reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **9,113**  
patient applications

to access health care in East Jerusalem and Israel

 **85.1% approved**

 **14.4% denied**

 **0.5% pending**  
at the time of monthly reporting

 **9,724**  
patient companion applications

to access health care in East Jerusalem and Israel

 **80% approved**

 **18% denied**

 **2% pending**  
at the time of monthly reporting

<sup>2</sup>OCHA March report on Gaza crossings

# In Focus

## Attacks on health care in the occupied Palestinian territory

Health workers and health facilities continue to be exposed to high levels of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory. In March, Sajed Mizher was the fourth Palestinian health worker in less than a year to be killed while carrying out his duty. The four paramedics and first responders who were killed were clearly marked as health workers. Sajed wore a high visibility jacket and was walking to treat a person injured when he was shot in the abdomen in the early hours of the morning on 27 March in Dheisha refugee camp in Bethlehem. He moved as part of his team of four first responder paramedics from the Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS), who all wore high visibility vests to indicate their function and their protection under International Humanitarian Law.

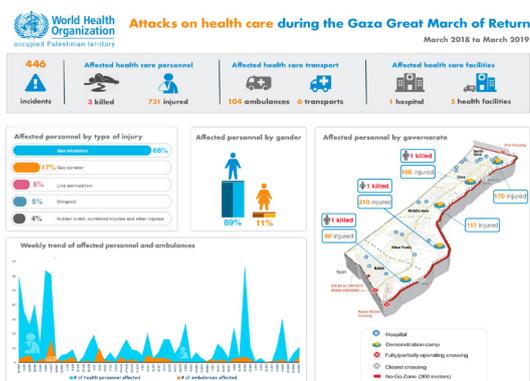
Over the past year, WHO in the occupied Palestinian territory has recorded an unprecedented 521 attacks against health care in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. 446 of these attacks happened in Gaza in the context of the Great March of Return, while 75 attacks were recorded to have taken place in the West Bank.



Sajed Mizher, 17 years, was a first responder with the Palestinian Medical Relief Society

### Health attacks in Gaza

From the start of the Great March of Return on 30 March 2018 to 31 March 2019, 446 attacks on health care have been recorded in the Gaza Strip. These attacks have resulted in 3 deaths and 731 injuries among health workers. 104 ambulances and 6 other forms of health transport have been damaged, in addition to 5 health facilities and 1 hospital. In addition to personal injury and damage to health care, health workers also face substantial risks while carrying out their work. Firing between health workers and those injured also prevents or hampers access and witnessing violence has significant implications for longer-term mental health and continued work.



Click on the picture to see WHO's infographic of attacks on healthcare during Gaza's Great March or Return

### Health attacks in the West Bank

Over the past year, WHO recorded 75 incidents of attacks on healthcare in the West Bank. Health attacks in the West Bank closely link to barriers to access from the extensive system of military checkpoints and the vulnerability of health workers and health facilities in Area C (over 60% of the West Bank) outside of Palestinian jurisdiction, as well as vulnerability in the context of clashes and incursions into Palestinian centres. Health attacks recorded in the West Bank resulted in the killing of a health, and include 56 incidents of delaying or preventing the delivery of healthcare, including to 14 Palestinians who were fatally wounded. There were also 30 incidents of physical attacks against health staff, ambulances and health facilities.

### Call for protection of healthcare

WHO reiterates its call for the protection of health workers and health facilities in the occupied Palestinian territory. Health care is not a target.