

# MONTHLY REPORT

## April 2019



## Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **8,066**

referrals issued to Gaza and West Bank patients to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

**2,489** Gaza patients

**5,577** West Bank patients

 **58%**

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

**65%** Gaza patients

**52%** Gaza patient companions

 **81%**

of West Bank patient and companion permit applications to Israeli authorities approved over the first quarter of 2019

 **1**

Gaza patients called for security interview, delayed


### IN FOCUS

*Families face barriers to accompanying children to access healthcare*

# Part 1 Referrals

## March Referrals by the Ministry of Health

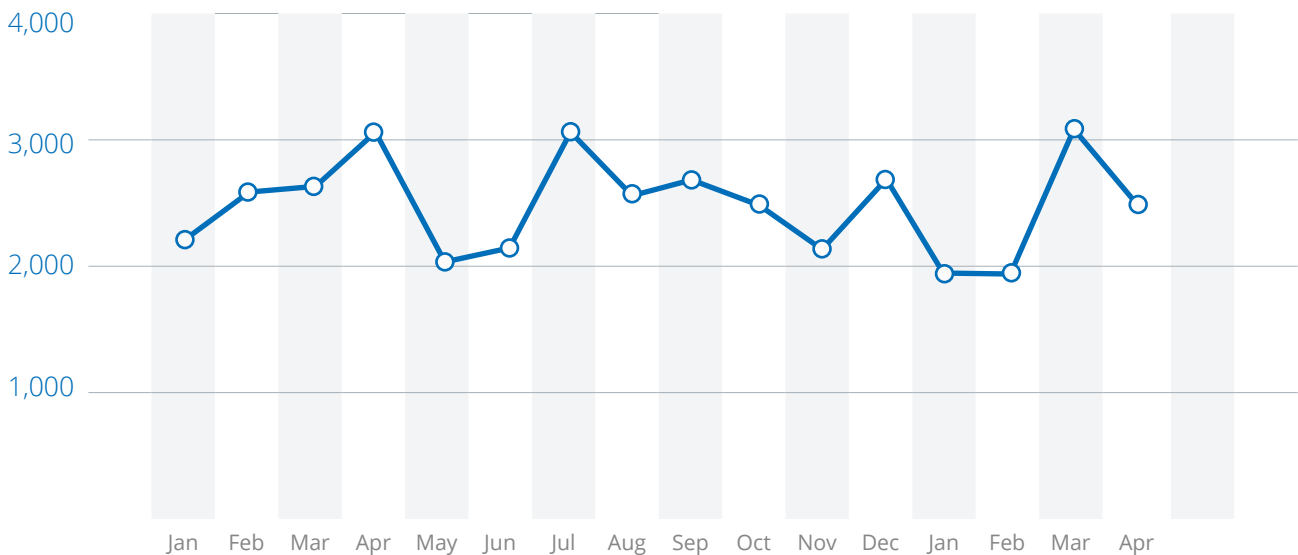
In April, the Palestinian Ministry of Health approved 2,489 referrals for Gaza patients and 5,577 referrals for West Bank patients to non-Ministry of Health facilities. There were only 4 referrals for Gaza patients and 71 referrals for West Bank patients to Israeli hospitals, reflecting the Palestinian MoH's decision in March to stop referrals to Israeli hospitals, apart from exceptional cases. For comparison, in 2017 there was an average of 346 referrals for Gaza patients and 1,010 referrals for West Bank patients to Israeli hospitals each month. In April, 72% of Gaza referrals required Israeli-issued permits to reach hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, while 7% required access through Rafah terminal to access healthcare in Egypt. In the West Bank, 38% of 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 January 2018 to April 2019.

 **2,489**  
Gaza

 **5,577**  
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, January 2018 - April 2019



# Part 2 Access

## The Gaza Strip

2,161 patient applications to cross Erez for healthcare were submitted in April, close to the average number of patient permit applications in 2018 (2,150). 29% were for children under age of 18 and 16% were for patients aged 60 years or older. 46% of applications were for female patients and 92% of applications were for medical care funded by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

Almost two-thirds (64%) of applications to cross Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, one fifth (20%) for West Bank hospitals and 16% were for hospitals in Israel. Makassed Hospital (32%) and Augusta Victoria Hospital (26%), both in East Jerusalem, received nearly three-fifths of permit applications (58%). The top five specialties accounted for more than 62% of permit applications: oncology (31%); paediatrics (8%); orthopaedics (8%); haematology (8%); and cardiology (7%). The remaining 38% were for 25 other specialties.

**Approved permit applications:** 1,396 (705 male; 691 female), or 65% of the 2,161 applications to cross Erez in April 2019 were approved. Chart 2 shows a 12-month trend for Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications. A third (34%) of permits approved were for children under age of 18 and a fifth (20%) were for people aged 60 years or older.



**2,161**

patients applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to access health care



**65%**

approved



**6%**

denied

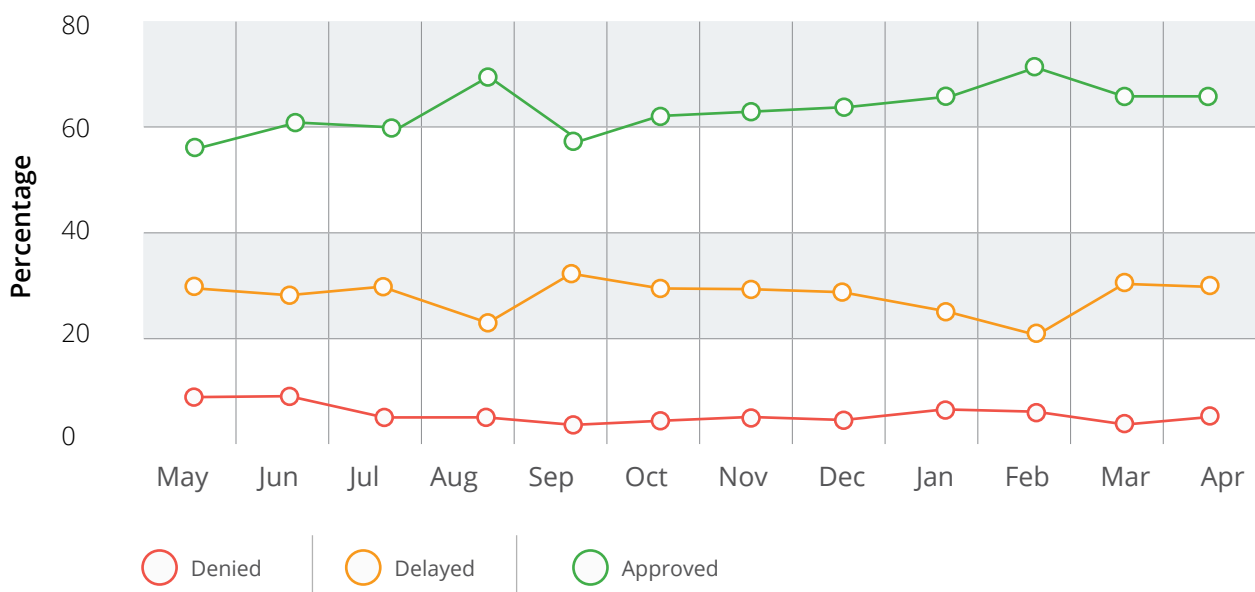


**30%**

delayed

**Chart 2**

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



**Denied care:** 120 patient applications (80 male; 40 female), or 6% of the total, were denied permits to cross Erez for healthcare in April. Those denied included 8 children under the age of 18 years and 19 patients aged 60 years or older. 28% of denied applications were for appointments in neurosurgery, 20% for orthopaedics, 13% for oncology, and 8% for ophthalmology. 92% of denied permit applications were for appointments at hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

**Delayed care:** 645 patient applications (383 male; 262 female), or 30% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. Of these, 137 applications were for children under the age of 18 and 56 applications were for patients aged 60 years or older. 20% of those delayed had appointments for oncology, 12% for orthopaedics and 8% for cardiology. The remaining 60% were for 24 other specialties. 539 (83%) of the delayed applications were 'under study' at the time of appointment. 3 applications were delayed because patients allegedly had relatives staying in the West Bank.

## Access for those injured during demonstrations:

19 permit applications in April were for those injured during demonstrations: 5 applications were approved, 3 denied and 11 delayed. As of 30 April, according to Gaza's Coordination and Liaison Office, there had been 550 applications to Israeli authorities by those injured in demonstrations to exit Gaza via Erez crossing for healthcare. The approval rate of this group is significantly lower than the overall approval rate for patient applications to exit Gaza, with only 18% (96 applications) approved. 26% (145 applications) were denied and 56% (309) were delayed.<sup>1</sup>

## Security interrogation

In April, a female patient in the age group 41-60 was called for security interrogation as a prerequisite to traveling for healthcare. She was delayed, receiving no definitive response by the date of her hospital appointment.

## Patient companions:

In April, there were 2,343 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 April, 1,221 (52%) patient companion applications were approved, 194 applications (8%) were denied and the remaining 928 (40%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's application. Chart 3 shows the trend over the last 12 months for Israeli responses to patient companion applications.



1

patient called for security interrogation



Delayed



2,343

patient companion applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to accompany patients



52% approved



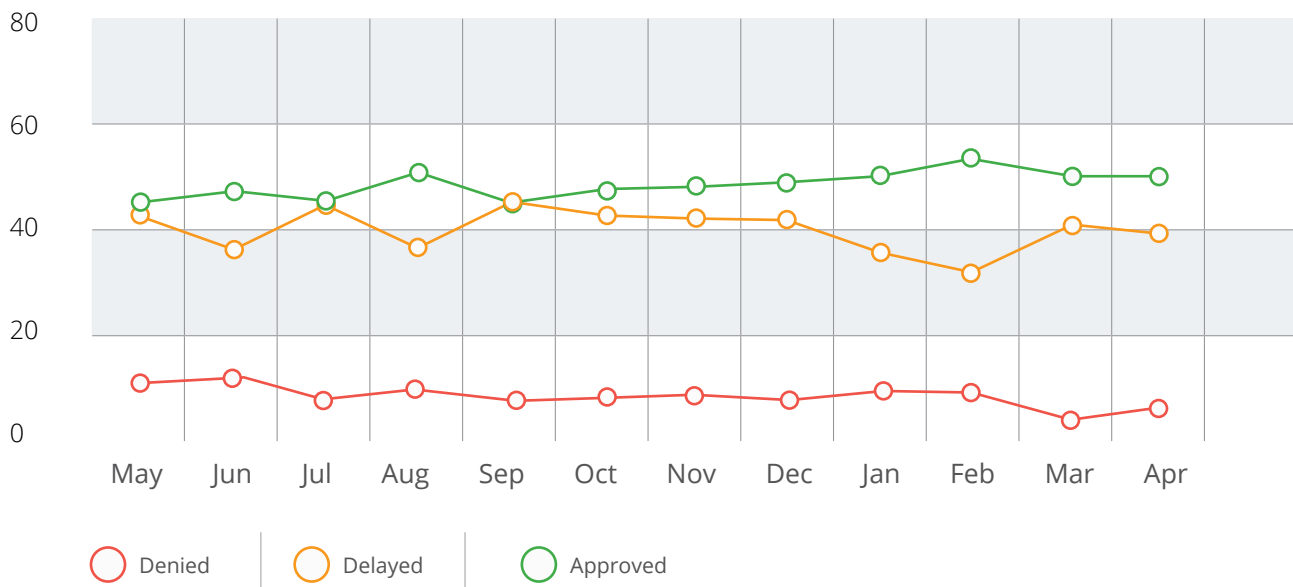
8% denied



40% pending

### Chart 3

Israeli responses to Gaza patient companion applications, May 2018- April 2019



## Patients and companions crossing Erez:

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,695 Gaza patients and 1,445 companions crossed Erez in April to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of these, 70 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 71 companions. During the month, Erez crossing was open for 25 days for daytime working hours and closed on 5 days (4 Saturdays and 1 day for the Israeli elections).



1,695

patients crossed Erez for health care



1,445

patient companions crossed Erez

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

## Patient companion arrested at Erez

Israeli forces arrested a patient companion at Erez crossing on 23 April 2019, on his return to Gaza. Karam Tantawi from Khan-Yunis accompanied his wife Safaa', a 47-year-old cancer patient, during her 23-day treatment at Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem. Karam was released without charge on 20 May.



1

patient companion



Arrested

## Rafah crossing – Egypt

Rafah crossing was open in both directions for 19 days (9 days were for pilgrims only). The crossing was closed for 11 days (4 Fridays, 4 Saturdays, 2 Egyptian official holidays and 1 day reportedly due to technical problems). There were 6,472 crossings to exit Gaza towards Egypt during April, among them 719 for health reasons.



## The West Bank

During the first quarter of 2019, there were 51,181 applications by West Bank patients and patient companions 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. There were 51,181 applications from January to March (17,060 applications per month). Of these, 41,687 (81%) were approved, 8,313 (16%) were denied and 42 (2%) were pending any reply at the time of monthly reporting. An average of the first quarter was calculated due to delays in obtaining April West Bank data due to administrative delays.



17,060

patient and companion applications

per month for permits to Israeli authorities, from January to March



81% approved



16% denied



2% pending

at the time of monthly reporting

# In Focus

## Families face barriers to accompanying children to access healthcare

Gaza patients and their companions face considerable barriers to accessing healthcare facilities outside the Gaza Strip. From 2012 to 2018, the annual approval rate for patients declined from more than nine in ten (93%) approved to just over a three-fifths (61%) approved. In the first four months of 2019, a third of patient applications (33%) for Israeli-issued permits to exit Gaza were unsuccessful – either denied or delayed, with patients receiving no definitive response from authorities by the time of their hospital appointment. Similarly, the annual acceptance rate for patient companion applications declined from more than four in five approved (83%) in 2012 to less than a half approved (48%) in 2018. In the first four months of 2019, 46% of patient companion applications were unsuccessful. Men aged 18 to 60 years and women aged 18 to 40 face substantially lower rates of approval than companion applications for other age groups, see Chart 4. In recent years, this has meant a shift towards older, female applications to accompany patients. Anticipation by relatives and Palestinian authorities about the likelihood of acceptance for different relatives influences applications, particularly for urgent cases. Adult men under 50 years of age and women under 45 years are required to go through additional lengthy security checks that can risk delaying patient permit applications.

**Chart 4**

**Approval rates for Gaza patient companion permit applications by age and sex, 2018**

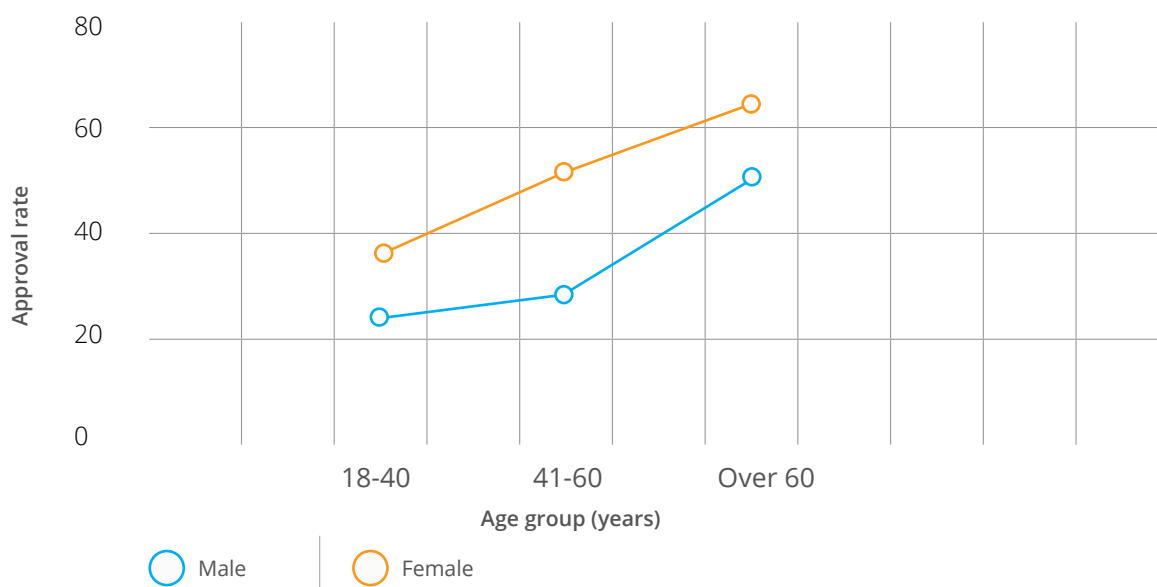




Photo credit: Aisha's family

Aisha al-Lulu, a 5-year-old girl from Gaza, was diagnosed with a brain stem tumour on 12 April. She needed specialist surgery not available in Gaza and was referred to Makassed Hospital in East Jerusalem. Aisha was granted a permit, but none of her family obtained an Israeli-issued permit in time to travel with her for her urgent surgery. Instead, she was accompanied by a non-family member who had been able to obtain a companion permit to exit Gaza. Aisha spent three weeks in Jerusalem without her family. She underwent a major operation during this time, following which her health deteriorated significantly and she was distressed. Her uncle stated:

“Aisha was fine in the first few days but then deteriorated. She couldn't talk and she started to vomit. She cried a lot and was asking for her mother. Halima [the non-family companion] got tired after ten days. We applied to change Aisha's companion but our request was rejected by the Israeli authorities.”

Aisha died shortly after her return to Gaza, on 15 May.

The benefit of family support to children is not only critical for emotional support of paediatric patients, but close involvement in a child's healthcare improves family understanding of the child's illness and needs for longer-term care.\* Non-approval of permits for patient companions represents a major barrier to ensuring effective care for children and others who are strongly dependent on families for longer-term care and recovery. WHO calls for the safeguarding of family accompaniment of children traveling for healthcare.

\* Shields, L. et al., 2011. Family-centred care for hospitalised children aged 0-12 Years: A systematic review of quasi-experimental studies. JBI Database of Systematic Reviews and Implementation Reports. doi: 10.11124/jbisrir-2011-341.