



# MONTHLY REPORT

## August 2019

## Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **7,071**

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

**2,384** Gaza


**4,625** West Bank

 **67%**

of Gaza patient permit applications to Israeli authorities and

**51%**

of companions permit applications to exit via Erez approved

 **84%**

of West Bank patient permit applications and

**78%**

of companions permit applications approved

 **4**

Gaza patient called for security interview,

**4**

delayed

### IN FOCUS


*A young person with thyroid cancer in Gaza who faced barriers to accessing healthcare*

# Part 1 Referrals

## August Referrals by the Ministry of Health

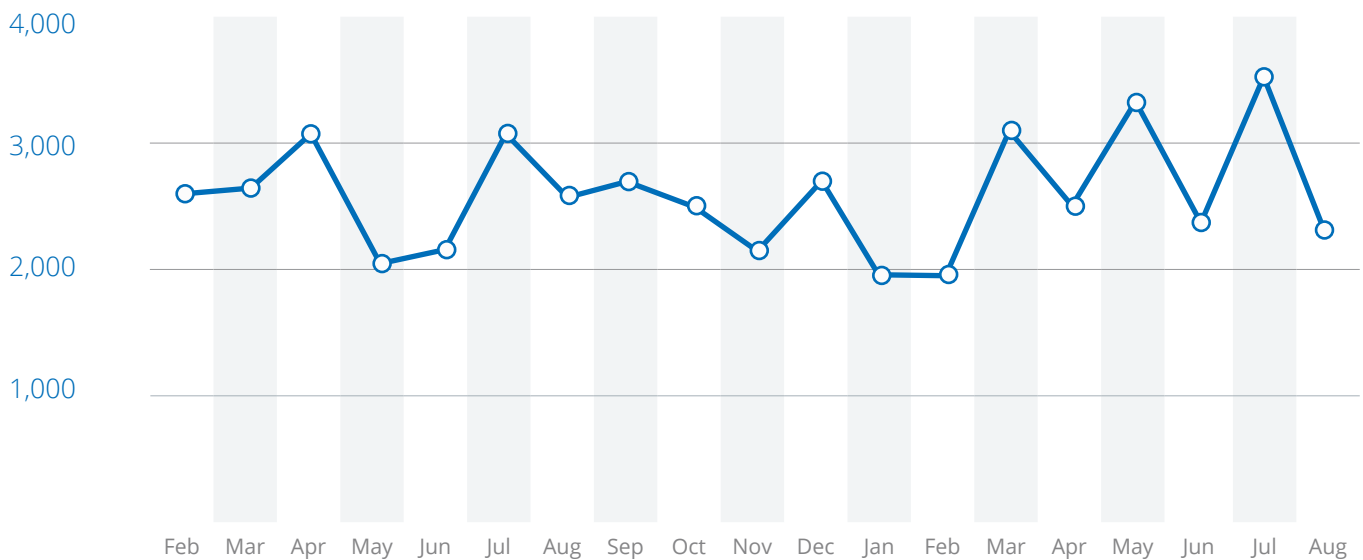
In August, the Palestinian Ministry of Health approved 7,071 referrals. 65% (4,625) of referrals were for West Bank patients, including 709 referrals for patients from Jerusalem, while 34% (2,384) of referrals were for Gaza patients. The origins for 61 referrals (1%) were not reported, while one patient was referred from Jordan. Female patient referrals comprised 45% of the total. There was further reduction in referrals to Israeli hospitals, with 80 referrals to Israeli hospitals from Gaza (21% of the 2018 monthly average of 389), and 317 referrals for West Bank patients (27% of the 2018 monthly average of 1,185). Over two-thirds (69%) of Gaza referrals required Israeli-issued permits, while 14% required access through Rafah terminal to access healthcare in Egypt. In the West Bank, 47% 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 August 2019.

 **2,384**  
Gaza

 **4,625**  
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 - August 2019





# Part 2 Access

## The Gaza Strip

There were 1,734 patient applications to cross Erez for healthcare in August. Almost a third (31%) were for children under 18 and 18% were for patients aged 60 years or older. 46% of applications were for female patients and 92% were for medical care funded by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

More than two-thirds (69%) of applications to cross Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, more than a fifth (21%) for West Bank hospitals and 10% for Israeli hospitals. Augusta Victoria Hospital (33%) and Makassed Hospital (29%), both in East Jerusalem, received two-thirds of permit applications (62%). The top five specialties accounted for 68% of permit applications: oncology (34%); haematology (10%); paediatrics (9%); cardiology (8%); and orthopaedics (7%). The remaining 32% were for 25 other specialties.

**Approved permit applications:** 1,159 (602 male; 557 female), or 69% of the 1,734 applications to cross Erez in August 2019, were approved – similar to the average approval rate so far in 2019. Chart 2 shows the trend for Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications over the past 12 months. More than a third (34%) of permits approved were for children under 18 and a fifth (20%) were for patients aged 60 years or older.

**1,734**  
patients applications  
to Israeli authorities to cross  
Erez to access healthcare

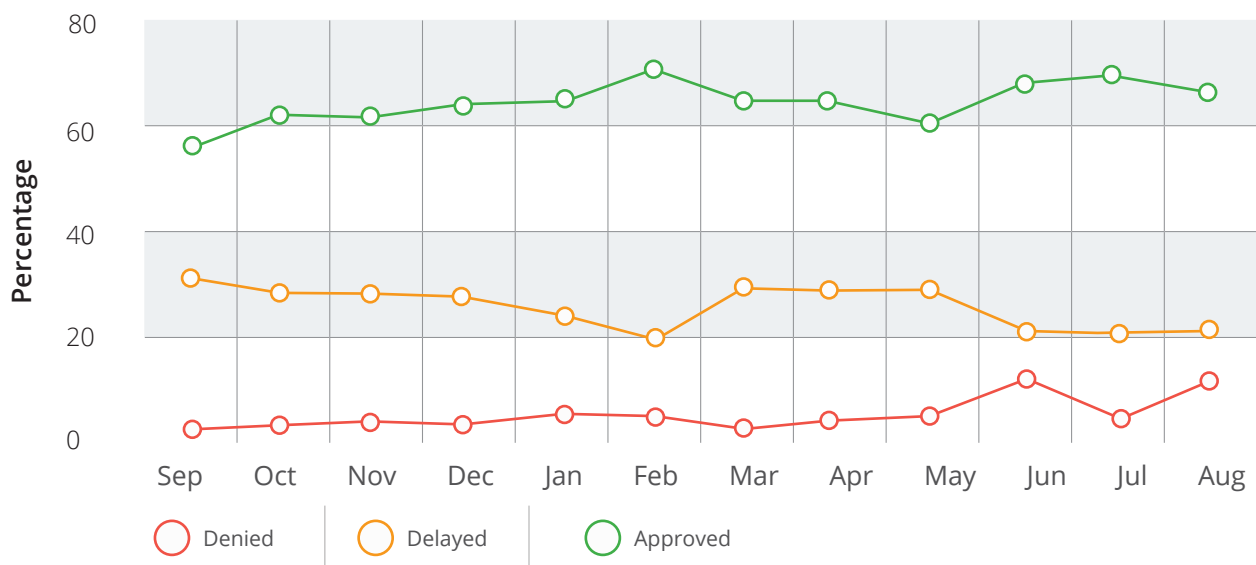
**67%**  
approved

**13%**  
denied

**21%**  
delayed

Chart 2

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, September 2018 - August 2019



**Denied care:** 219 patient applications (133 male; 86 female), or 13% of the total, were denied permits to cross Erez for healthcare in August. Those denied included 40 children under 18 and 35 patients aged 60 years or older. A quarter (24%) of denied applications were for appointments in oncology, 19% for orthopaedics, 7% for ophthalmology, 6% for haematology, 6% for cardiology, and 5% for general surgery. 90% of denied permit applications were for appointments at hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

**Delayed care:** 356 patient applications (195 male; 161 female), or 21% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. Of these, 100 applications were for children under the age of 18 and 48 applications were for patients aged 60 years or older. A third (31%) of those delayed had appointments for oncology, 10% for haematology, 8% for cardiology, 8% for paediatrics, 7% for ophthalmology, 6% for orthopaedics, and 6% for internal medicine. The remaining 24% were for 18 other specialties. The majority of delayed applications (259 or 73%) were ‘under study’ at the time of appointment.

## Access for those injured during demonstrations:

As of 31 August 2019, according to Gaza's Coordination and Liaison Office, there had been 585 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 17% (102) approved, 27% (160) denied and 55% (323) delayed.

## Security interrogation

In August, four patients were called for security interrogation as a prerequisite to processing of their permit applications. The applications, for a 66-year-old man, 45-year-old man, 37-year-old man and 28-year-old woman, were all for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals. All were delayed, not receiving a definitive response to their applications by the date of their hospital appointments.

## Patient companions:

In August, there were 1,897 companion 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 allowed to accompany each Gaza patient. In August, 975 patient companion applications (51% of the total) were approved, 317 applications (17%) were denied and the remaining 605 (32%) 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

patient called for security interrogation



None approved



4 delayed



1,897

patient companion applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to accompany patients



51% approved



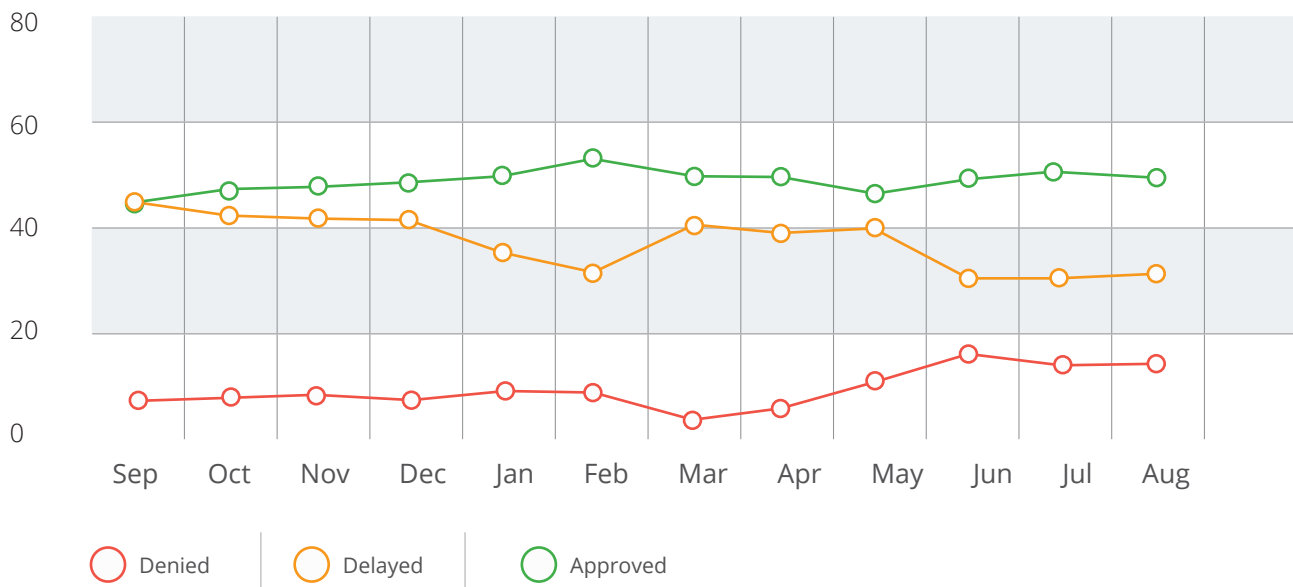
17% denied



32% pending

### Chart 3

Israeli responses to Gaza patient companion applications, September 2018 - August 2019



## Patients and companions crossing Erez:

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,594 Gaza patients and 1,289 companions crossed Erez in August to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of these, 62 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 59 companions. During the month, Erez crossing was open for 26 days for daytime working hours and closed on 5 days (5 Saturdays).



1,594

patients crossed Erez for health care



1,289

patient companions crossed Erez

## Rafah crossing – Egypt



During August, Rafah crossing was open for humanitarian cases in both directions for 11 days, for pilgrims to exit for 1 day and for pilgrims to return for 5 days. The crossing was closed for 14 days (4 Fridays, 3 Saturdays, 5 Eid Al-Adha holidays, and 2 days closed by Egyptian authorities). According to the terminal authority, 5,920 travelers crossed towards Egypt, among them 515 patients crossing for health care with 256 companions. 45 patients were transferred by ambulance with 50 companions. 3 bodies of deceased persons were returned to Gaza. No medical aid or medical delegates entered via Rafah terminal through the month.


### The West Bank

In August, there were 6,631 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. 5,549 (84%) of West Bank patient applications were approved, 975 (15%) were denied and 107 (2%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.


Of the 7,642 patient companion applications, 5,971 (78%) were approved, 1,426 (19%) were denied and 245 (3%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **6,631**  
patient permit  
applications

for Israeli permits to authorities  
to access healthcare in East  
Jerusalem and Israel


 **84% approved**

 **15% denied**


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

 **7,642**  
patient companion  
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for Israeli permits to authorities  
to access healthcare in East  
Jerusalem and Israel

 **78% approved**

 **19% denied**

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

# In Focus

## A young person with thyroid cancer in Gaza who faced barriers to accessing healthcare

Hiam was 26-years-old when she died in the intensive care unit of the European Gaza Hospital in Khan Younis, in the south of the Gaza Strip. She died as a result of respiratory failure, having been diagnosed with thyroid cancer in August 2018.

In October 2018, Hiam had undergone a surgical procedure to remove her thyroid. In January 2019, she was referred outside the Gaza Strip for a specialist treatment called radioiodine ablation, in which radioactive iodine is administered to destroy any potential remaining thyroid cancer cells. After initial approval of her permit to travel out of Gaza, Hiam received a course of this treatment at Al-Ahli Hospital in Hebron in the West Bank.

Later, in June and August 2019, Hiam missed two hospital appointments for follow up treatment due to barriers in obtaining permits for her and her companions. Fatima, Hiam's mother, had previously been approved a permit to accompany her daughter in January 2019, but her applications in June and August were denied without reason by Israeli authorities. In August, the family added an additional companion application for Hiam's aunt, but both Hiam and her aunt's applications were delayed, remaining 'under study' at the time of Hiam's hospital appointment.



Thyroid cancer has overall very high rates of survival in other contexts. For example, women in Hiam's age bracket (aged 15-49) in England have a 99.3% five-year survival rate for thyroid cancer.<sup>1</sup> Radioiodine ablation is a well-recognized and effective intervention for certain forms of thyroid cancer. It is a type of nuclear medicine. In August 2019, there were 46 patients with thyroid cancer referred for nuclear medicine among 60 patients with thyroid cancer referred out of Gaza in total during the month. Al Ahli Hospital in Hebron is the main referral destination for these patients, accounting for 64% of the 544 permit applications for thyroid cancer patients from Gaza from January to August 2019.

Thyroid cancer has the sixth highest incidence (number of new cases in the population) for cancers in Gaza, and the third highest incidence among women and girls. Each year there are approximately 100 new cases with a female to male ratio of 5:1.

After delays in her appointments to access care outside Gaza, Hiam began to suffer with a cough and difficulty breathing. Without proper treatment, thyroid cancer can spread to the lungs. On 2 August 2019, Hiam was hospitalized because of her difficulty breathing. On 6 August, she was admitted to the intensive care unit at the European Gaza Hospital. Hiam died on 4 September 2019. 15 days after her death, Hiam's family received news that her mother Fatima had been approved a permit to accompany Hiam for healthcare.

Nuclear medicine, chemotherapy and radiotherapy are lifesaving treatments for cancer patients. Access to healthcare is fundamental to realization of the right to the highest attainable standard of health and should be assured for all patients, and particularly for vulnerable cancer patients, in the occupied Palestinian territory.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/thyroid-cancer/> 1 .2019 ,Cancer Research UK survival#heading-One