



MONTHLY REPORT

January 2020

Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **7,909**

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

2,437 Gaza

5,472 West Bank

 **70%**

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

51%

of Gaza companion permit applications approved

 **86%**

of West Bank patient permit applications approved

81%

of companion permit applications approved

 **2**

Gaza patients called for security interview

2
denied


IN FOCUS

Three-year-old Jana from Gaza gets permit to travel for cancer treatment, after five months delay.

Part 1 Referrals

January Referrals by the Ministry of Health

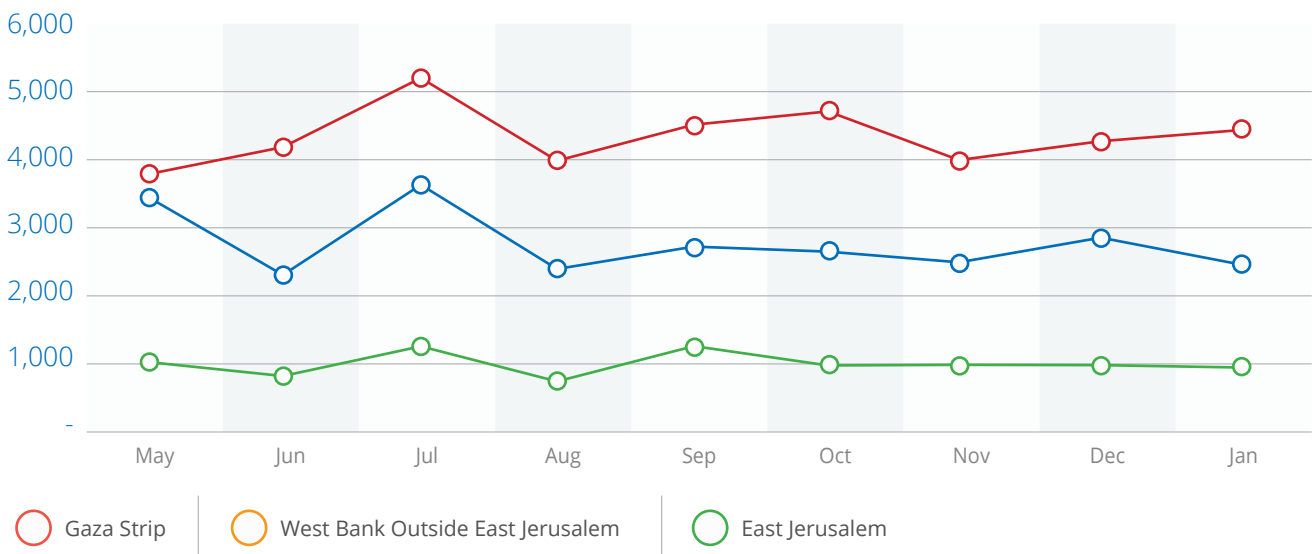
In January, the Palestinian Ministry of Health approved 7,909 referrals. 71% (5,472) of referrals were for West Bank patients, including 1,006 referrals for patients from East Jerusalem, while 29% (2,437) of referrals were for Gaza patients. Female patient referrals comprised 47% of the total. There was a 29% increase in referrals to Israeli hospitals from the West Bank compared to the second half of 2019, from a monthly average of 355 referrals to 457 for January. Meanwhile, there was a 54% reduction in referrals from the Gaza Strip to Israeli hospitals, from an average of 94 referrals in the second half of 2019 to 61 referrals in January. Referrals from the West Bank and Gaza Strip to Israeli hospitals continue to be significantly lower than the average monthly referrals for 2018, which were 1,185 and 389 respectively. Referrals from Gaza to Egypt, requiring access through Rafah, comprised 16% (384) of the total; an increase from the monthly average of 245 in the first half of 2019. Two-thirds (66%) of Gaza referrals required Israeli-issued permits. In the West Bank, 53% of referrals were to facilities in East Jerusalem or Israel, the majority of which require Israeli-issued permits to access health care. Chart 1 shows the number of referral documents issued to patients by the Palestinian MoH from May 2019 to January 2020.

 **2,437**
Gaza

 **5,472**
West Bank

referrals approved financial coverage for healthcare outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health

Chart 1 Number of referrals issued by the Palestinian MoH by place of origin, May 2019 to January 2020



Part 2 Access

The Gaza Strip

There were 1,794 patient applications submitted to Israeli authorities to cross Erez for healthcare in January. About a third (30%) were for children under 18 and about a fifth (19%) were for patients aged 60 years or older. 47% of applications were for female patients and 90% were for medical care funded by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

Two-thirds (66%) of applications to cross Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, 23% for West Bank hospitals and 11% for Israeli hospitals. Almost three-fifths of applications (57%) were for appointments at Augusta Victoria Hospital (31%), and Makassed Hospital (26%), both in East Jerusalem.

The top five specialties accounted for 71% of permit applications: oncology (35%); haematology (11%); cardiology (9%); ophthalmology (8%); and paediatrics (8%). The remaining 29% were for 25 other specialties

Approved permit applications: 1,248 (634 male; 614 female) or 70% of the 1,794 applications to cross Erez in January 2020 were approved, an increase compared to the approval rate for 2019 (65%). Chart 2 shows the trend for Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications over the past 12 months. Close to a third (32%) of permits approved were for children under 18 and nearly a quarter (23%) for patients aged 60 years or older.

1,794
patients applications
to Israeli authorities to cross Erez/
Beit Hanoun to access healthcare

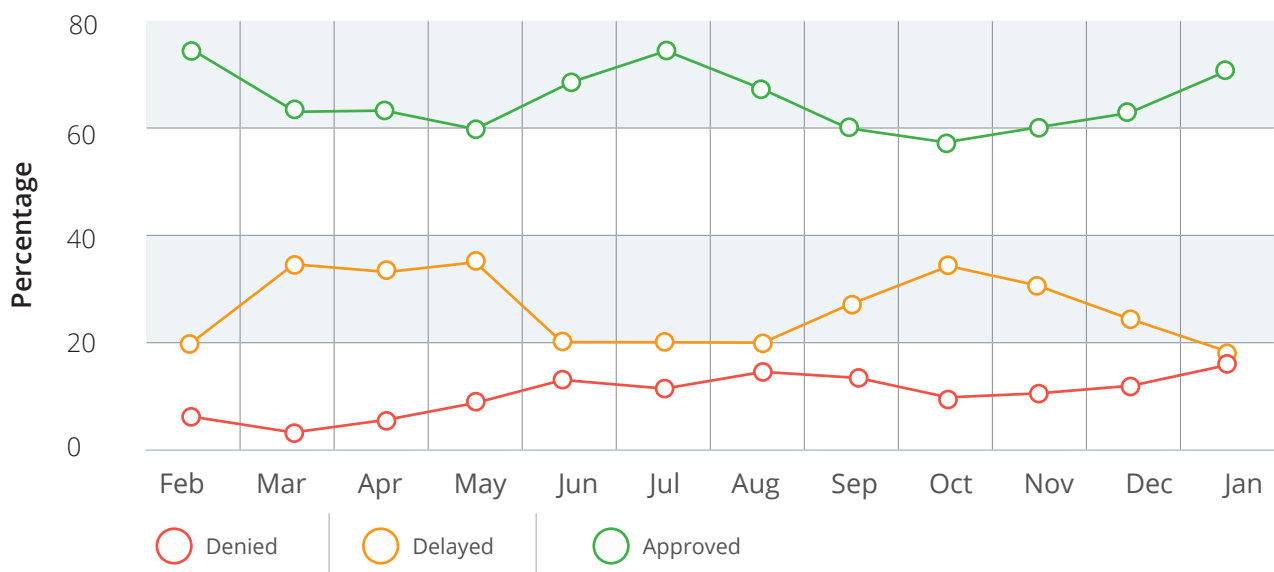
70%
approved

14%
denied

17%
delayed

Chart 2

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, February 2019 to January 2020



Denied care: 243 patient applications (141 male; 102 female), or 14% of the total, were denied permits to cross Erez to reach healthcare in January. Those denied included 42 children under 18 and 27 patients aged 60 years or older. Close to a quarter (23%) of denied applications were for appointments for cancer care (oncology), 14% for ophthalmology, 10% for cardiology, 9% for internal medicine, 7% for orthopaedics, 7% for haematology and 5% for neurosurgery. 92% of denied permit applications were for appointments at hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and 8% were for Israeli hospitals.

Delayed care: 303 patient applications (173 male; 130 female), or 17% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. Of these, 98 applications were for children under the age of 18 and 26 applications were for patients aged 60 years or older. More than a quarter (26%) of those delayed had appointments for cancer care (oncology), 14% for haematology, 9% for ophthalmology, 9% for cardiology, 8% for internal medicine, and 7% for paediatrics. The remaining 37% were for 17 other specialties. The majority of delayed applications (269 or 89%) were 'under study' at the time of appointment.

Access for those injured during the Great March of Return

As of 31 January 2020, according to Gaza's Coordination and Liaison Office, there had been 606 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% (105) approved, 28% (167) denied and 55% (334) delayed.

Security interrogation

In January, two patients were called for security interrogation as a prerequisite to processing of their permit applications. Both patients were denied permits

Patient companions

In January, there were 2,023 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 January, 1,037 companion permit applications (51% of the total) were approved, 414 applications (20%) were denied and the remaining 572 (28%) 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.



2

patients called for security interrogation

2 denied



2,023

patient companion applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to accompany patients

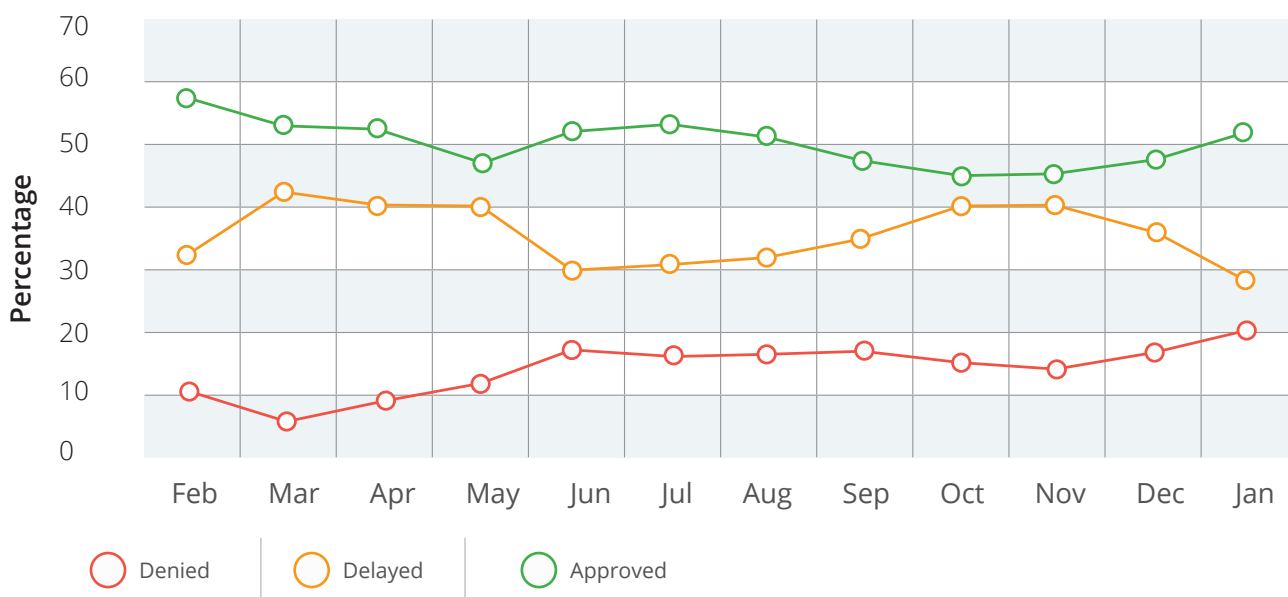
51% approved

21% denied

28% delayed

Chart 3

Israeli responses to Gaza companion applications , February 2019 to January 2020



Patients and companions crossing Erez

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,641 Gaza patients and 1,332 companions crossed Erez in January to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of these, 75 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 68 companions. During the month, Erez crossing was open for 27 days for daytime working hours and closed on 4 days (4 Saturdays).



1,641

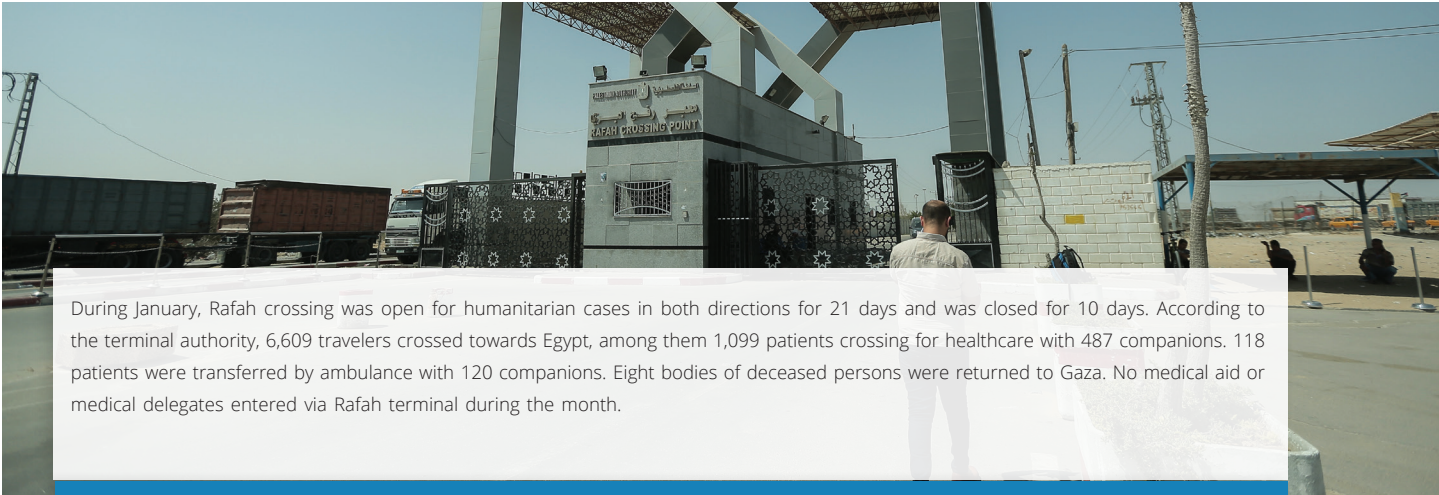
patients crossed Erez for healthcare



1,332

patient companions crossed Erez

Rafah crossing – Egypt




During January, Rafah crossing was open for humanitarian cases in both directions for 21 days and was closed for 10 days. According to the terminal authority, 6,609 travelers crossed towards Egypt, among them 1,099 patients crossing for healthcare with 487 companions. 118 patients were transferred by ambulance with 120 companions. Eight bodies of deceased persons were returned to Gaza. No medical aid or medical delegates entered via Rafah terminal during the month.


The West Bank


In January, there were 7,763 applications by West Bank patients to the Israeli authorities to access healthcare 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. Of West Bank patient applications, 6,690 (86%) were approved, 8,80 (11%) were unsuccessful and 193 (2%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting. Of the 8,633 patient companion applications, 7,030 (81%) were approved, 1,398 (16%) were unsuccessful and 205 (3%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **7,763**
patient
applications

for Israeli permits to access
healthcare in East Jerusalem
and Israel


 **86% approved**


 **11% unsuccessful**


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

 **8,633**
patient companion
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 **81% approved**

 **16% unsuccessful**

 **3% pending**
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reporting

In Focus

Three-year-old Jana from Gaza gets permit to travel for cancer treatment, after five months delay.

Three-year-old Jana from Jabalia in the north of the Gaza Strip has cancer, but she hasn't been able to access the treatment she needs since October last year. Jana and her mother's applications for Israeli-issued permits, required for her to access health facilities outside the Gaza Strip, have been repeatedly delayed or denied. Jana's mother, Maysa, was increasingly concerned, "Jana was in a very critical condition. Doctors in Gaza told us that if she didn't get treatment in time, she would need to undergo kidney dialysis."

On the evening of Saturday 15 February, the day before Jana's appointment, Jana and Maysa received a text message informing them they had been approved permits to travel to Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem. Maysa talked about her relief, "I jumped up from the bed to the floor and



"I jumped up from the bed to the floor and started shouting, I was so happy as if I'd won a 1000-dinar prize!"



"Jana is one of hundreds of children who depend on Israeli-issued permits to travel to health facilities outside the Gaza Strip and for accompaniment of their parents."

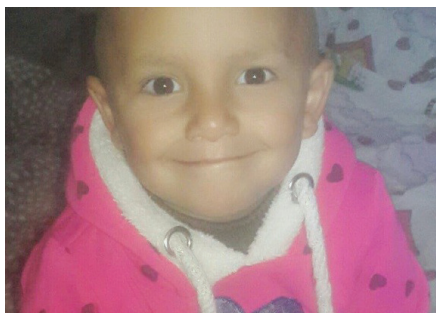
started shouting, I was so happy as if I'd won a 1000-dinar prize!" At 6am on Sunday 16 February, Jana and Maysa began the journey from their home to Erez checkpoint. Up to the last minute, Maysa was anxious and afraid they might be turned back.

Jana's family discovered she had a tumour in 2018 when she was unable to pass urine and her family took her to Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City. A CT scan showed a tumour in her bladder and she underwent surgery to have it removed in January 2019. Initially the doctors at Al-Shifa had thought the tumour was benign. However, a biopsy in May 2019 confirmed that Jana had a cancer called a rhabdomyosarcoma.

From July 2019, Jana underwent a course of chemotherapy. Due to the size of her tumour, Jana then needed radiotherapy treatment that is not available in the Gaza Strip. She was referred to Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem in October 2019, which required travel out of Gaza and an Israeli-issued permit. However, her permit application to Israeli authorities was delayed, remaining 'under study' by the time of her hospital appointment, and her mother's application was denied.

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Jana received chemotherapy in Gaza every Sunday. The treatment is tough and Jana experienced side effects that made her sick. Her blood count went down on several occasions, where she needed blood transfusions.

Since October 2019, Jana and Maysa applied three times for permits to exit Gaza so Jana could access the radiotherapy treatment she needs to have the best chance of recovery. Jana's applications were delayed, remaining 'under study' by the time of her hospital respective appointments. Maysa's applications to accompany Jana were once denied and twice delayed.

The process has been a difficult and stressful one for Jana's family, especially for Maysa: "I am Jana's mother. I should have priority to accompany my daughter for such significant treatment. In any case, my daughter is a small child and she would have been distressed to be away from me for this amount of time." Jana has four other siblings at home, two sisters and two brothers. Her oldest sister is a first-year student at university and youngest sister is in fourth grade.

Jana's mother is waiting to find out the full treatment plan for her daughter at Augusta Victoria Hospital, which will depend on the test results. She is waiting to hear how long they will need to stay in Jerusalem and whether they will be able to go back to Gaza between treatments. The Palestinian Ministry of Health covers treatment costs, but the family has to pay for the transportation and other needs.

The process can become a costly one, placing strain on the families of patients from the Gaza Strip, which has some of the highest rates of unemployment in the world, with nearly half (46%) of people living below the poverty line¹.

Hundreds of children like Jana in the Gaza Strip continue to face barriers and delays to health access, as well as potential separation from their parents. In 2019, more than a quarter (28%) of the 7,566 permit applications for children to exit the Gaza Strip for healthcare were unsuccessful – either denied (5%) or delayed (23%), with families receiving no definitive response to their permit applications by the time of their hospital appointments. In the vast majority of cases, Israeli authorities provide no explanation for why permit applications are not successful. For children receiving permits to travel for healthcare, almost two-fifths (38% or 2,068 of the 5,459 approved permits for children) were approved for exit without the accompaniment of their parents.

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.



Jana's mother said the application process to access healthcare out of Gaza has been a difficult and stressful for her family.

¹OCHA, 2020. Humanitarian Needs Overview, December 2020. Available at: https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/hno_2020-final.pdf