

MONTHLY REPORT

June 2020



Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **7,399**

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

1,288 Gaza

6,018 West Bank

 **119**

Gaza patients exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez for healthcare

104

Gaza patient companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez



No comprehensive data available for West Bank patient and companion permit applications following suspension to functioning of Civil Affairs Office; 983 permits approved for patients to access Augusta

 **0**

Gaza patients and companions called for security interrogation

IN FOCUS

Severe barriers to access for Gaza parents continue

Part 1 Referrals

June Referrals by the Ministry of Health

In June, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 7,399 referrals to non-MoH facilities, representing a substantial increase from May when 4,610 referrals were issued. This trend reflects the easing of movement restrictions due to relatively lower numbers of COVID-19 cases in oPt and Israel in the first part of June – though incidence of new cases began to increase again considerably from around 20 June.

However, the trend of referrals issued differed significantly for the Gaza Strip, compared to the West Bank. In Gaza, a lower number of MoH referrals persisted for patients in the Gaza Strip during June, with 1,288 issued in June representing approximately half (52%) of the average monthly number of referrals issued for Gaza patients in the first quarter of 2020 (2,481). Meanwhile, in the West Bank the number of referrals issued in June of 6,018 was almost a fifth (17%) higher than the average monthly number of referrals issued in the first quarter (5,133).

In the Gaza Strip, persistent severe movement restrictions are likely to have been a significant contributing factor to the low number of referrals issued. In 2019, 70% of referrals from Palestinian MoH required Israeli-issued permits to exit: 67% to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and 3% to Israeli hospitals. In the West Bank, the higher number may relate to the 'rebound' demand on services as COVID-19 restrictions eased.

The proportion of referrals destined for hospitals within the West Bank, outside East Jerusalem, increased from 40% on average for the first quarter to 52% in June. Similarly, referrals within Gaza increased from 7% to 13%. Meanwhile, referrals to East Jerusalem hospitals decreased from 41% to 33%; to Israeli hospitals from 5% to 2% and to Egypt from 6% to 1%. 0.2% were to Jordan.

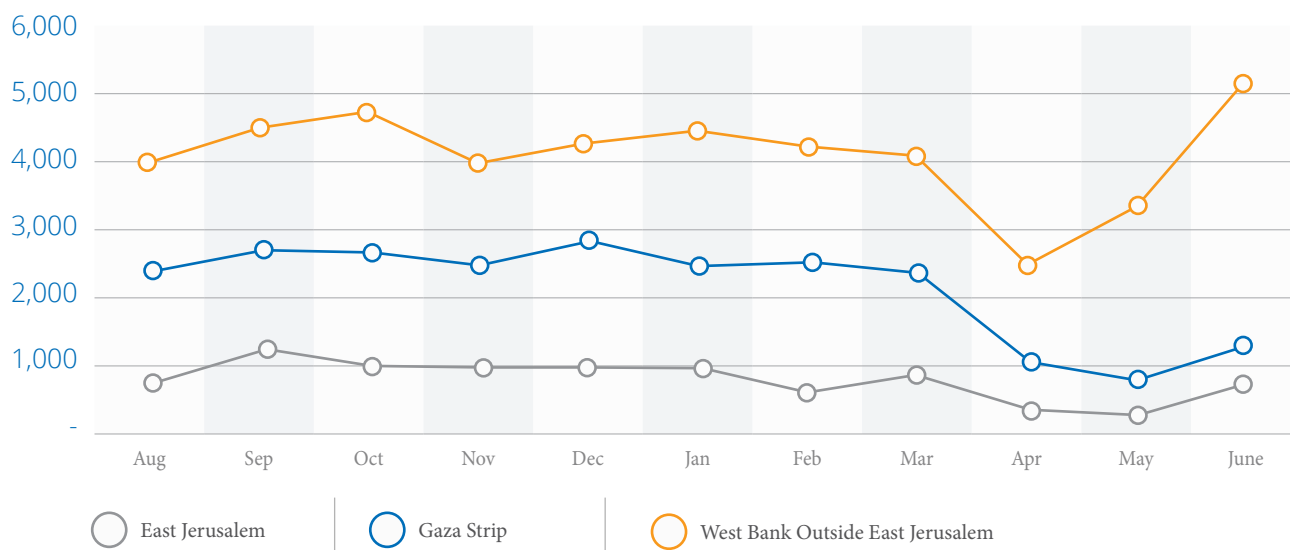
19% (402) of referrals were for patients under 18-year-old and 31% (2,259) were for those aged 60 years or older. 47% of referrals were for female patients.

 **1,288**
Gaza Strip

 **6,018**
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, August 2019 to June 2020



Part 2 Access

The Gaza Strip

After 19 May 2020, the Health Liaison Office of the Palestinian MoH ceased the coordination of permit applications and movements for patients, companions and ambulances from the Gaza Strip. In June, a number of organizations intervened to assist patients and their companions. Five organizations provided data to WHO on permits applications for Gaza patients. In total, there were 139 recorded approvals for patient permits and 299 recorded applications for patients during the month.

The Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR), [prior to ending permits applications for patients on 9 June](#), submitted 78 applications for patients. Of these applications, 60 (77%) applications were approved with companions while 3 patients from those approved did not travel.

Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI) made 39 applications for permits on behalf of patients and 31 on behalf of patient companions. Of the 39 patient applications, 23 (59%) were approved while 7 (18%) were denied and 9 (23%) were delayed. Of the 31 applications for companions, 15 (48%) were approved, 9 (29%) were denied and 7 (23%) were delayed.

Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) submitted 177 requests for Gaza patients, of whom 51 (29%) were approved and 126 (71%) were either pending response or delayed, missing their initial hospital appointments.

The International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) coordinated the exit of 5 patients from 28-30 June. All cases were referred by ambulance. 3 of the patients were infants funded by the Shevet Achim and 2 were adult patients funded by the Palestinian MoH.

Full disaggregation was not available for all data. Of available disaggregated data, 55% of applications were for male patients; 30% were for children under the age of 18; and 14% were for patients aged 60 years or older. For children under the age of 18, 78% were approved, 8% denied and 14% delayed. For all patient applications, 72% had appointments for oncology, 10% for cardiology, 7% nephrology, 3% each for metabolic disorders, neurosurgery, and respiratory medicine, with 2% for urology and 1% for neurology. 75% of these patient permit applications were for travel with a companion.

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 119 Gaza patients and 104 companions crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez in June to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of these, 22 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 20 companions. During the month, Beit Hanoun/Erez crossing was open for 26 days for daytime working hours and closed on 4 days (4 Saturdays).

Security interrogation

No patients or companions were called for security interrogation as a prerequisite to their permit applications in June.



139

recorded approvals
for patient permits



119

patients
crossed Beit Hanoun/
Erez for healthcare



86

patient companions
patient companions
crossed Beit Hanoun/
Erez



0

patients or companions
called for security
interrogation

Rafah crossing – Egypt



In June, there were 14 entries and 0 exits through Rafah. The terminal was open for return in 4 days during the month, in the 2nd, the 15th, the 21st, and the 24th. Three dead bodies were returned. No specific data on patient crossings was reported by Rafah terminal authorities.

The West Bank

In June, an unknown number of applications were submitted to Israeli authorities for permits for patients and their companions from the West Bank.

In the context of the permits system imposed by Israel, and following suspension of coordination of permit applications between Palestinian and Israeli authorities on 19 May, patients and companions from the West Bank no longer applied through the Palestinian Civil Affairs Office for permits to enter East Jerusalem and Israel and instead have been applying directly to Israeli authorities present in the West Bank.

Currently, there is no comprehensive data available for patient and companion permit applications to Israeli authorities. For patients requiring access to Augusta Victoria Hospital, the hospital had 983 permit applications for patients approved during June.



No comprehensive data available for West Bank patient and companion permit applications following suspension to functioning of Civil Affairs Office; 983 permits approved for patients to access Augusta Victoria Hospital



In Focus

6-year-old Manal returns to Gaza after being unable to cross to Jordan for treatment

Manal is a 6-year-old girl from Jabalia refugee camp in the north of the Gaza Strip. She had surgery back in July 2019 to remove a type of cancer called a neuroblastoma. Afterwards, she needed intensive chemotherapy only available outside the Gaza Strip and had to apply for Israeli-issued permits to exit for treatment.

She received her initial treatment at An-Najah Hospital in Nablus, in the north of the West Bank. However, afterwards she required bone marrow transplant, a procedure not offered in any Palestinian hospital. She was referred to the King Hussein Cancer Center in Amman, with an appointment in March 2020. However, after the outbreak of COVID-19, the Jordanian border closed and Manal and her aunt were unable to reach Jordan. They remained in hospital accommodation in Nablus, with Manal in and out of hospital because of her health during their wait.

Manal had continued to receive chemotherapy treatment at An-Najah Hospital in Nablus, but she and her aunt were never able to cross the border to Jordan for her bone marrow transplant. After more than four months of waiting, the doctors advised for



Manal to return to Gaza. She and her aunt reached the Gaza Strip on 30 June 2020 and went into quarantine at the Turkish Hospital for 21 days. Manal's father commented, ***"Manal's treatment was delayed for months, and her situation is critical. She needs a bone marrow transplant, and we appeal to any organizations that can help us to save Manal's life."***



Exam success for Palestinian patient despite barriers to accessing essential healthcare

Asrar, from Jabalia in the north of Gaza Strip, was diagnosed with a bone cancer called an osteosarcoma in her left lower leg in April 2018. She required radiotherapy, only available outside the Gaza Strip. From October 2018, Asrar attended Tel Hashomer Hospital, east of Jaffa, where she underwent extensive investigations, amputation of her leg, radiotherapy and chemotherapy, as well as subsequent physiotherapy to prepare her for use of her new artificial limb.

She continued to receive follow up at Tel Hashomer Hospital until February this year. After the start of the COVID-19 outbreak and limitations on movements, a local alternative for a selection of chemotherapy patients was established at Al-Haya Specialized Hospital in Gaza City. The centre began provision of a limited chemotherapy service on 21 April 2020, but is not equipped to replace the multidisciplinary and specialized services available at major Palestinian cancer referral centres.

Asrar was happy to receive care closer to home, but she missed the support of the multidisciplinary team that previously managed her care. Asrar said, ***“My aunt accompanied me at Tel-Hashomer but actually she did not have to do a lot in terms of care, because the health staff there do a lot for the patients, and they took care of me with respect. Even though I was far away from my family, I received good care and my family kept in touch with me every day by phone.”***

In July, Asrar successfully completed her high school (tawjihi) exams and her family celebrated her success. Asrar’s father commented, ***“She succeeded despite all the difficult circumstances and the long periods of treatment in and outside Gaza. I’m so proud of her and I hope she achieves all her dreams!”***

Now Asrar is planning to study Information Technology (IT) at Al Quds (Jerusalem) Open University. She said, ***“I think that this area of study would accommodate my current state of health, because it depends more on mental than physical ability.”***

Currently there are severe barriers to access for patients requiring exit from the Gaza Strip for essential health services. The escalating numbers of COVID-19 cases in the West Bank and Israel mean continued restrictions on referrals and movement, while the end to coordination between Palestinian and Israeli authorities and of referrals to Israeli institutions have added difficulties to the already cumbersome and arbitrary permits process.

WHO is working with authorities for the protection of Gaza patients and for promoting their unhindered access to essential health services, even in the context of COVID-19.



Two infants died while awaiting exit for medical treatment

Omar Ahmed Yaghi, an 8-month-old infant, died on 18 June at Rantisi Hospital while awaiting a permit to exit the Gaza Strip for surgery for congenital heart anomalies. He had an appointment at Tel Hashomer Hospital for 20 May, but his permit application was delayed; he received no response from Israeli authorities by the date of the appointment. He had a further appointment scheduled for 21 June, funded by the organization Shevet Achim, but Omar died 3 days before he could travel.

Anwar Mohammed Harb, a 9-day-old newborn child, died at Shifa Hospital in Gaza on 22 June while awaiting ambulance coordination to travel to Makassed Hospital in East Jerusalem. Physicians for Human Rights Israel had coordinated a permit for Anwar, but the family faced difficulties arranging ambulance transport. Anwar died before any ambulance was able to transfer him.