



MONTHLY REPORT

February 2022

Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **8,195**

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

1,868 Gaza

6,191 West Bank

 **69%**

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

43%

of Gaza companion permit applications approved



West Bank

Data on patient and companion permit approvals awaited

 **3**

Gaza patient called for security interrogation

IN FOCUS

Closure and blockade restrict health care supplies to Gaza

Part 1 Referrals

February referrals by the Ministry of Health

In February, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 8,195 referrals to health care services delivered by non-MoH providers, close to the monthly average (8,308) for 2021. Referrals from the West Bank comprised 75% (6,191) of the total, including 857 referrals for patients from East Jerusalem, while referrals for the Gaza Strip accounted for 23% (1,868) of the total. Two referral was issued for a Palestinian patients present in Jordan, while the origin of 134 referrals (2%) was not reported.

Palestinian MoH referrals to hospitals in the West Bank, outside East Jerusalem, comprised 49% of referrals in February; to East Jerusalem hospitals 35%; within the Gaza Strip 7%; to Israeli hospitals 7%; to Egypt 2%; to Jordan 0.2% (19 referrals) and 0.01% (5) to Turkey.

The top needed specialties for referrals were oncology (26%); cardiac catheterization (9%); urology & nephrology (7%); cardiology (6%); ophthalmology (4%); medical imaging (4%); haematology (4%); radiation therapy (4%); paediatrics (3%); and 2% each for endoscopy, vascular surgery, orthopaedics, nuclear medicine, obstetrics, general surgery, rehabilitation and laboratory examination. The remaining 17% were for 20 other medical specialties.

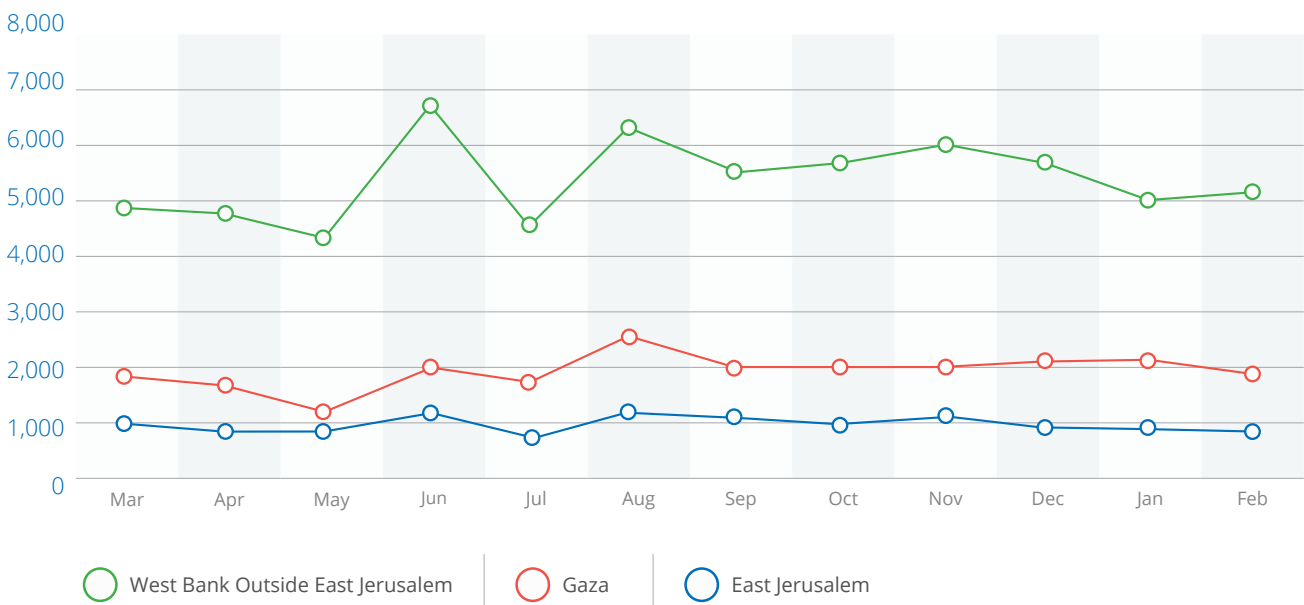
Referrals for patients under 18 years of age comprised 22% (1,633) of the total, while 30% (2,477) were for those aged 60 years or older. Referrals for female patients comprised 45% of the total.

 **8,195**
Gaza Strip

 **6,191**
West Bank

referrals approved financial coverage for health care outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health

Chart 1 Number of referrals issued by the Palestinian MoH by place of origin, March 2021 to February 2022



Part 2 Access


The Gaza Strip

There were 1,445 (M: 794; F: 651) patient permit applications for patients from the Gaza Strip to Israeli authorities in February 2022.

Close to a third (29%) of applications were for children under 18 and close to a fifth (18%) was for patients over 60 years old. 45% were for female patients, while 82% were for referrals funded by the Palestinian MOH. More than half (52%) of applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals; 29% for West Bank hospitals outside East Jerusalem; 19% for Israeli hospitals; and 4 applications for hospitals in Jordan. More than two fifths (44%) of applications were for appointments at either Augusta Victoria Hospital (22%) or Makassed Hospital (22%), both in East Jerusalem. The top five specialties accounted for 71% of permit applications: oncology (35%); cardiology (13%); haematology (9%); paediatrics (7%); and ophthalmology (7%). The remaining 29% of applications were for 22 other specialties.

A further 75 permit applications for patients and companions were submitted through the Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs during February for travel by shuttle to Jordan, which requires approval of Israeli and Jordanian authorities for direct transfer from Beit Hanoun/Erez to the King Hussein Bridge crossing to Jordan, without formal entry to Israel or the West Bank. Jordanian hospitals issue an open appointment (rather than specifying a date) for these permit applications. Of the 75 applications, 40 (53%) were approved, 34 (45%) were denied and one (1%) remained pending at the time of monthly reporting.

Approved permit applications: 1,002 (M: 525; F: 477) or 69% of the 1,445 patient applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez in February 2022 were approved, 6% higher than the approval rate for 2021. The approval rate of patient permit applications varies by sex and age of patients. In February, the average approval for male patient permit applications was 66%, while the approval rate for female patient applications was 73%. Men aged 18 to 40 had the lowest approval rate, at 55%, while women over 60 years of age had the highest approval rate of 85% - see Table 1.

 **1,445**
patient applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez to access health care

 **69%**
approved

 **1%**
denied

 **30%**
delayed

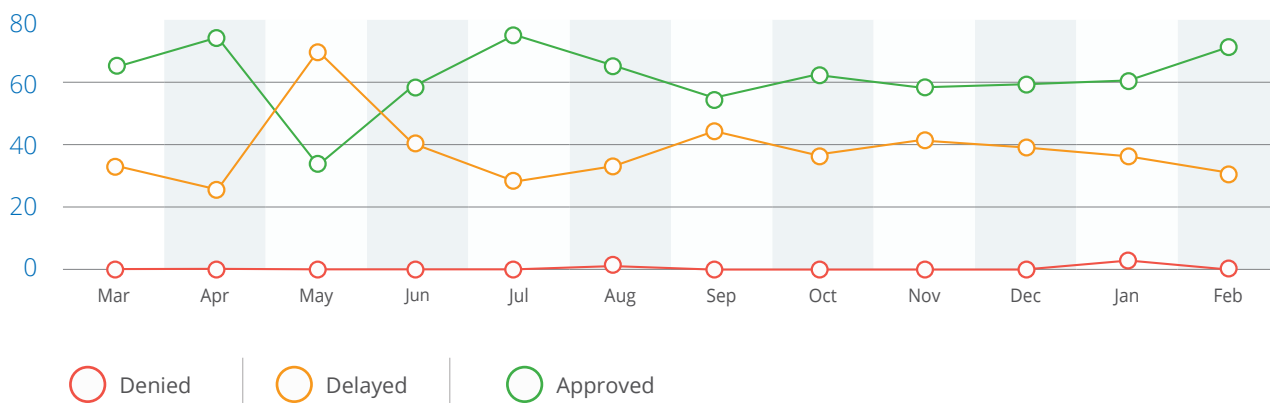
Table 1 Approval rate for patient permit applications in February 2022, by age and sex

Feb 2022 AGE	Number of applications		Approved	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
0-3	65	49	78%	69%
4-17	188	122	69%	73%
18-40	199	179	55%	71%
41-60	192	191	59%	70%
over 60	150	110	82%	85%
sub-total	794	651	66%	73%
Total	1445			
General approval rate			69.3%	

Similarly, approval rates vary by referred specialty. In February, specialties with an approval rate higher than the average of 69% included neurology at 92%, paediatrics at 80%, cancer care (oncology) at 79%, nephrology at 77%, blood disorders (haematology) at 76%, and heart surgery at 73%. Specialties with an approval rate lower than the average of 69% included vascular surgery and ENT 68%; general surgery 65%; cardiology and orthopaedics 62%; neurosurgery 61%; internal medicine 60%; nuclear medicine (48%); and urology 40%.

Chart 2

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, March 2021 to February 2022



Denied care: 10 (M: 7; F: 3) patients were denied in February: three children under 18; two adults aged 18 to 40; four adults aged 41 to 60 years; and one patient over 60 years old. Six patients were referred for oncology; two for paediatrics; one for ophthalmology, and one for haematology. Eight patients were referred to hospitals in the West Bank outside East Jerusalem and two were referred to East Jerusalem.

Delayed care: 433 (M: 262; F: 171) patient permit applications, or 30% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. 27% (118 applications) were for children under the age of 18, while 10% (42) were over 60 years. Close to quarter (23%) of those delayed had appointments for cancer care (oncology); 16% for cardiology; 12% for ophthalmology; 7% for haematology; 7% for orthopaedics; 5% for internal medicine; 5% for neurosurgery; 4% for urology; 4% for paediatrics; and 4% for general surgery. The remaining 13% were for 14 other specialties. Of delayed applications, 45% were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, 30% for the West Bank, and 25% for Israeli hospitals. Most delayed applications (405 or 94%) were 'under study' at the time of appointment.

Security interrogation and arrests

Three male patients were called for security interrogation in February. One was 18-40 years, while two were between 41 and 60 years of age. One had an appointment for cancer care (oncology) in Augusta Victoria Hospital and one for orthopedics in Makassed Hospital – both in East Jerusalem. The third patient had an appointment for internal medicine at Ahli Hospital in Al-Khalil (Hebron), in the West Bank. The applications of the three patients remained under study and they lost their hospital appointments.

Patient companions

The Health Liaison Office submitted 1,774 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities to accompany patients in February. These applications include parents or other companions applying to travel with children. Patients are eligible to apply to Israeli authorities for one companion to accompany them for health care outside the Gaza Strip. In February, 755 companion permit applications (43% of the total) were approved, 20 applications (1%) were denied and the remaining 999 (56%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's appointment.



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Gaza patient

called for security interrogation



1,774

companion applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez to accompany patients



43% approved



1% denied



56% delayed

Patients and companions crossing Beit Hanoun/Erez

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,112 Gaza patients and 801 companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in February to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of the 1,112 patients, 75 were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 75 companions. These numbers show that more than a quarter 311 (28%) of patients crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint without a companion, 6% higher than the average for 2021. The bodies of 12 deceased patients were returned to Gaza in February. During the month, Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint was open for 24 days for daytime working hours and closed on 4 days (4 Saturdays).



1,112
patients
exited through Beit
Hanoun/Erez



801
companions
exited through Beit
Hanoun/Erez

Rafah crossing - Egypt



In February, there were **10,126** entries and **9,803** exits through Rafah crossing. Another **732** Palestinians seeking to exit from the Palestinian side were denied access by the Egyptian authorities and returned to Gaza. The crossing was open on **20 days** and closed on **8 days** (weekends). The crossing was declared open in both directions from 9 February 2021. Specific data on patient crossings during the month has not been made available by the Rafah terminal authorities. The ambulance service of the Ministry of Health in Gaza reported that their ambulance transferred 137 patients from the Palestinian side to the Egyptian side of the terminal and returned 14 bodies of deceased persons during the month.

The West Bank

Data is currently pending for West Bank patient and companion permit applications

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.

In Focus

Closure and blockade restrict health care supplies to Gaza

Israel's dual use list has a significant impact on the provision and maintenance of medical equipment in the Gaza Strip. Certain technology, such as nuclear medicine imaging, is not available, while other equipment like x-ray machine spare parts and oxygen generators are subject to complex coordination and approval processes. Needed items are frequently denied entry, while substantial delays in approvals further contribute to lack of availability of essential equipment for proper medical investigation and treatment of patients.

In 2021, the Presidential Committee for Commodities Coordination of the Palestinian Authority submitted 120 requests to Israel for the entry of x-ray machines, x-ray spare parts, and CT spare parts into the Gaza Strip. Of these applications, 69% (83 requests) were denied, 5% (6) were cancelled, 1% (1) remained under study by the end of February 2022, and 25% (30) were approved. The average processing time for approval of x-ray and CT equipment was 58 days. Similarly, of 13 requests submitted for the entry of oxygen generators and related installation/spare parts, 69% (9/13) were denied.

Lack of equipment affects patient management:

Sohaila, 35, unable to receive MRI when critically unwell

On 4 January 2022, Sohaila was admitted to Al Aqsa Hospital in Deir Al-Balah in the Middle Area of the Gaza Strip after she had felt unwell and subsequently lost consciousness. Doctors suspected she had inflammation of her brain and its protective membranes, known as meningoencephalitis, and they needed to carry out imaging of her head as part of investigations to confirm her diagnosis. Although MRI imaging would be the first-line investigation, no MRI facility in the Gaza Strip could accommodate patients intubated and in a critical condition like Sohaila. She was transferred to Shifa Hospital, also in Gaza City, for CT imaging before being returned to the intensive care unit at Al Aqsa Hospital.

Sohaila's brother commented: "I don't want to remember the agony we felt as my sister was moved in a critical condition and unconscious. She could have lost her life at any moment, we were nervous wrecks. To add to the difficulty, the CT scan did not lead to a clear diagnosis. The doctors needed to carry out an MRI but there was none available to accommodate Sohaila in her condition."

A test examining fluid from spinal surrounding Sohaila's spinal cord (cerebrospinal fluid) confirmed her diagnosis of meningoencephalitis. She spent 22 days in the intensive care unit at Al Aqsa Hospital, and afterwards was transferred to Al Wafa Hospital for rehabilitation, where she spent a further 32 days. Finally, she was discharged home on 27 February 2022.

"My sister reacted well to the medication and her situation began to improve. When they disconnected her from the ventilator, she was able to have an MRI at the European Gaza Hospital in the south of the Gaza Strip. Now she is coming back to life and starting to walk again. She asks us not to mention hospitals or intensive care, as it is still too difficult for her to speak about."