



# MONTHLY REPORT

## October 2021

## Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **8,752**

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

**2,032** Gaza

**6,596** West Bank

 **61%**

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

**38%**

of Gaza companion permit applications approved

 **88%**

of West Bank patient permit applications approved

**82%**

of West Bank companion permit applications approved

 **8**

Gaza patients called for security interrogation

### IN FOCUS

*Zaina, 10, unable to access cancer treatment since February*

# Part 1 Referrals

## October referrals by the Ministry of Health

In October, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 8,752 referrals to health care services delivered by non-MoH providers, which was similar to September and 13% higher than the monthly average (7,768) for the first half of 2021. Referrals from the West Bank comprised 75% (6,596) of the total, including 1,023 referrals for patients from East Jerusalem, while the West Bank population comprises approximately 60% of the total population in the oPt. Referrals for the Gaza Strip accounted for 23% (2,032) of the total, with 0.1% (5) referrals for Palestinians present in Jordan during the month. The origin of 119 (1%) of referrals was not reported.

Palestinian MoH referrals to hospitals in the West Bank, outside East Jerusalem, comprised 50% of referrals in October; to East Jerusalem hospitals 36%; within the Gaza Strip 4% (reduced from 8% in 2020); to Egypt 5%; to Israeli hospitals 4%; to Jordan 0.5% (44 referrals) and 0.03% (3) to Turkey.

The top needed specialties for referrals were oncology (25%); cardiac catheterization (8%); cardiology (7%); urology & nephrology (6%); ophthalmology (5%); haematology (4%); medical imaging (4%); with 3% each for paediatrics, endoscopy, radiotherapy. The remaining 29% were for 25 other medical specialties.

Referrals for patients under 18 years of age comprised 21% (1,864) of the total, while 29% (2,506) were for those aged 60 years or older. Referrals for female patients comprised 46% of the total.

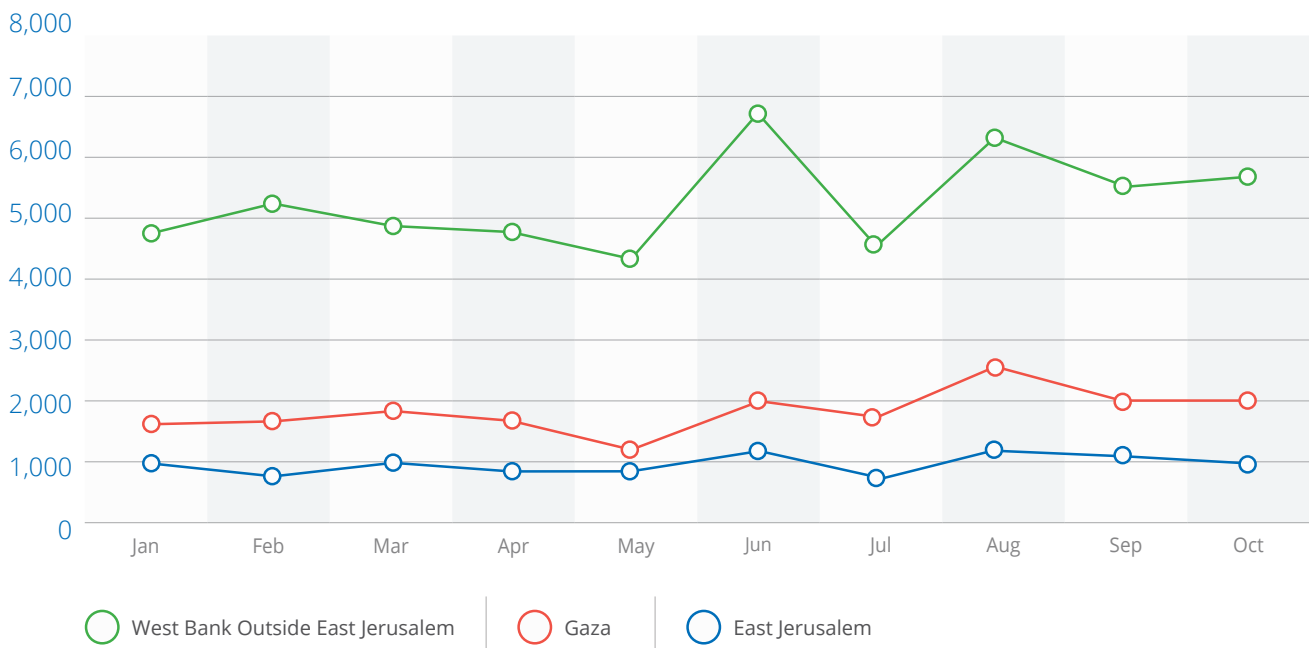
 **2,032**  
Gaza Strip

 **6,596**  
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, January to October 2021



# Part 2 Access

## The Gaza Strip

There were 1,696 (M: 905; F: 791) patient permit applications for patients from the Gaza Strip to Israeli authorities in October 2021.

Close to a third (30%) of applications were for children under 18 and close to a fifth (17%) were for patients over 60 years old. 47% were for female patients, while 84% were for referrals funded by the Palestinian MoH. A half (51%) of applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals; 34% for West Bank hospitals outside East Jerusalem; 14% for Israeli hospitals; and 1 application for a hospital in Jordan. 42% of applications were for appointments at either Augusta Victoria Hospital (19%) or Makassed Hospital (23%), both in East Jerusalem. The top five specialties accounted for 67% of permit applications: oncology (33%); cardiology (11%); haematology (8%); ophthalmology (8%); and paediatrics (7%). The remaining 33% of applications were for 24 other specialties.

A further 115 permit applications for patients and companions were submitted through the Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs during October 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 115 applications, 32 (28%) were approved, 8 (7%) were denied and 75 (65%) remained pending at the time of monthly reporting.

**Approved permit applications:** 1,043 (M: 532; F: 511) or 61% of the 1,696 patient applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez in October 2021 were approved, 11% lower than the average approval rate (72%) in 2021 before the escalation in May. In May 2021, the approval rate dropped to 31% during the military escalation then improved in June and July. In August and September, the approval rate had declined to 64% and 54% respectively, with May and September among the lowest monthly approval rates in the past 3 years.

Of approved applications, 51% were for female patients, a third (31%) for children under 18 and a fifth (22%) for patients over 60. Two-fifths (42%) of approved applications were for oncology patients, 10% for cardiology, 10% for haematology, 7% for paediatrics, 6% for internal medicine and the remaining 25% were for other 21 medical specialties.

 **1,696**  
patient applications  
to Israeli authorities to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez to access health care

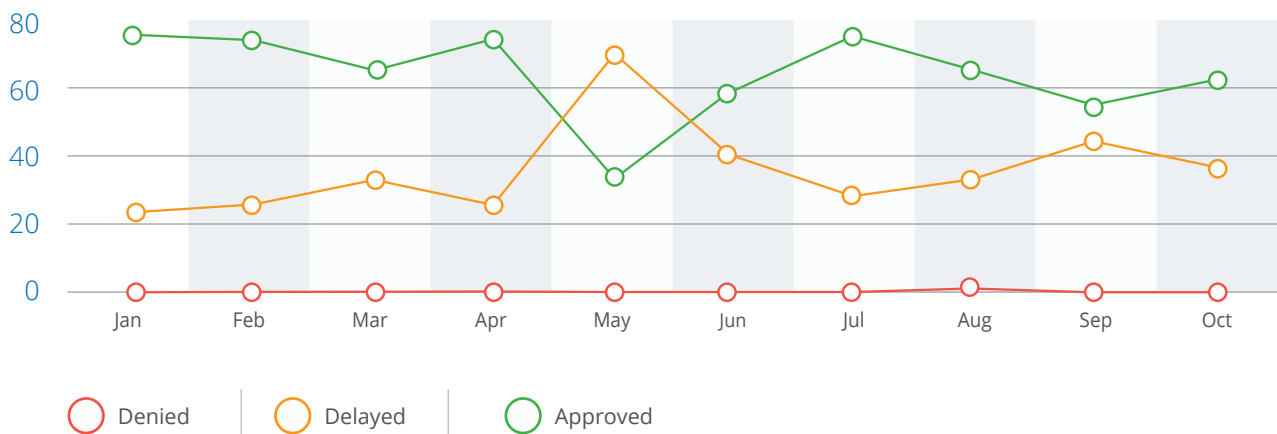
 **61%**  
approved

 **1%**  
denied

 **38%**  
delayed

### Chart 2

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, January to October 2021



**Denied care:** 12 (M: 10; F: 2) patients were denied in October: one child less than 18 years, six adults aged 18 to 40, two adults aged 41 to 60 years and three patients over 60 years old. The child denied was a 16-year-old boy with an aneurysmal bone cyst in the sacrum needing orthopaedic surgery. Four other patients had appointments for orthopaedics; two had appointments for urology; and the other patients each had appointments for cardiology, nuclear medicine, neurosurgery, oncology, and ophthalmology. Seven were destined for hospitals in the West Bank, four for East Jerusalem, and one for an Israeli hospital.

**Delayed care:** 641 (M: 363; F: 278) patient permit applications, or 38% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. 28% (182 applications) were for children under the age of 18, while 9% (59) were over 60 years. A fifth (19%) of those delayed had appointments for cancer care (oncology); 13% for ophthalmology; 12% for cardiology; 7% for orthopaedics; 7% for paediatrics, 6% for haematology 5% for neurosurgery and 5% for internal medicine. The remaining 26% were for 17 other specialties. Of delayed applications, 49% were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, 37% for the West Bank, 14% for Israeli hospitals and 1 application was to Jordan. Most delayed applications (628 or 98%) were 'under study' at the time of appointment.

## Security interrogation and arrests

In October, 8 (M: 5; F: 3) patients were requested for security interrogation as a prerequisite to processing their permit application. Three were aged 18-40, two were aged 41-60, and three were over 60 years old. Five had appointments for oncology, one for vascular surgery, one for hematology and one for internal medicine. Five were destined to East Jerusalem and three to the West Bank hospitals. By the end of the month, only one patient was approved a permit, 5 remained under study, and 2 were waiting for an appointment for security interrogation.


There were no arrests of patients or companions en route to receiving care in October.

## Patient companions


The Health Liaison Office submitted 2,101 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities to accompany patients in October. 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 October, 798 companion permit applications (38% of the total) were approved, 49 applications (2%) were denied and the remaining 1,254 (60%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's appointment.

## Patients and companions crossing Beit Hanoun/Erez


The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,081 Gaza patients and 851 companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in October to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of the 1,081 patients, 83 were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 81 companions. These numbers show that **a fifth 230 (21%) of patients** crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint without a companion. The bodies of 16 deceased patients were returned to Gaza in October. During the month, Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint was open for 26 days for daytime working hours and closed on 5 days (5 Saturdays).

 **8**  
Gaza patient  
called for security interrogation


 **2,101**  
companion applications  
to Israeli authorities to cross  
Beit Hanoun/Erez to accompany  
patients

 **38% approved**

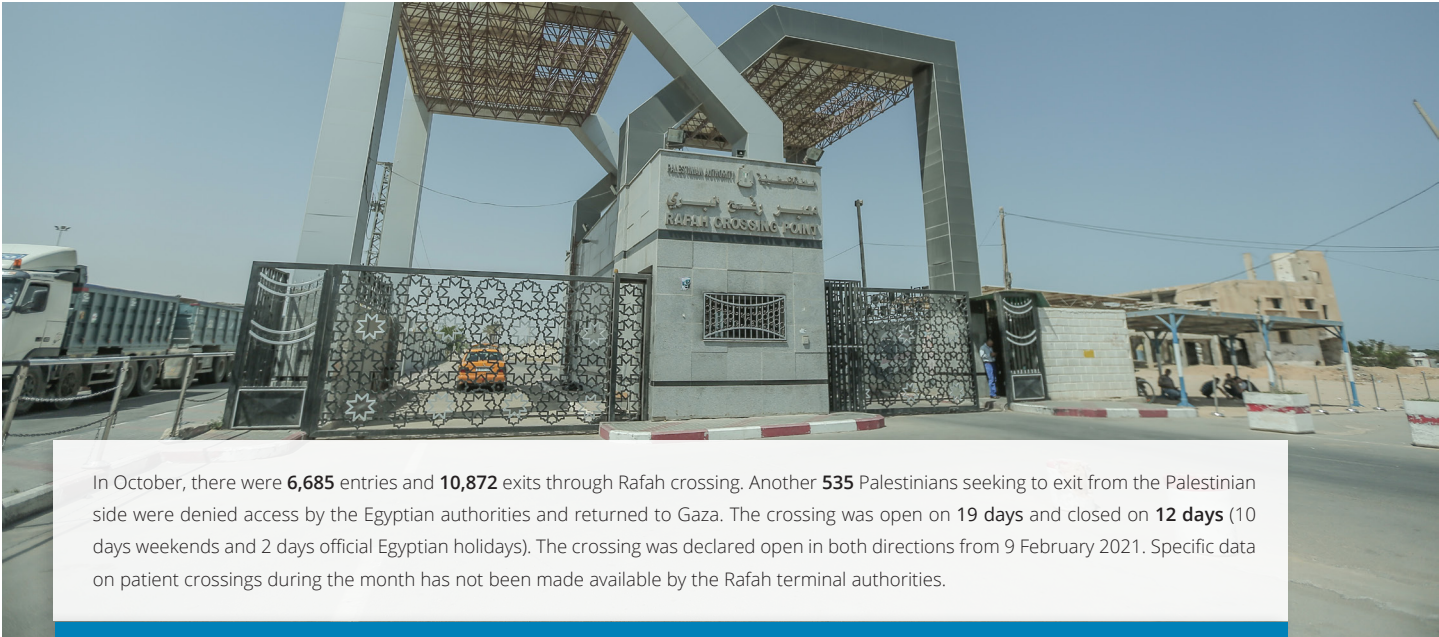
 **2% denied**

 **60% delayed**

 **1,081**  
patients  
exited through Beit  
Hanoun/Erez

 **851**  
companions  
exited through Beit  
Hanoun/Erez

## Rafah crossing – Egypt



In October, there were **6,685** entries and **10,872** exits through Rafah crossing. Another **535** Palestinians seeking to exit from the Palestinian side were denied access by the Egyptian authorities and returned to Gaza. The crossing was open on **19 days** and closed on **12 days** (10 days weekends and 2 days official Egyptian holidays). 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 West Bank

In October 2021, there were 8,285 permit applications by patients and 8,704 by patient companions from the West Bank outside East Jerusalem 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, 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 8,285 West Bank patient applications, 7,331 (88%) were approved, 659 (8%) were unsuccessful (denied) and 295 (4%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.


Of the 8,704 West Bank companion applications, 7,121 (82%) were approved, 1,120 (13%) were unsuccessful and 463 (5%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.


 **8,285**  
patient permit  
applications

for Israeli permits to access  
healthcare in East Jerusalem  
and Israel


 **88% approved**


 **8% unsuccessful**


 **4% pending**  
at the time of monthly  
reporting

 **8,704**  
patient companion  
applications

to access healthcare in East  
Jerusalem and Israel

 **82% approved**

 **13% unsuccessful**

 **5% pending**  
at the time of monthly  
reporting

## In Focus

### Zaina, 10, unable to access cancer treatment since February

Zaina is a 10-year-old girl from the Gaza Strip, who was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma in June 2020.

After her initial diagnosis, Zaina received chemotherapy at Rantisi Hospital in the Gaza Strip. It was a difficult time for Zaina and her family.

"Zaina suffered with pain and with side effects from the chemotherapy," her father commented. "When she lost her hair, she kept asking me to buy her wigs. We bought several, but she didn't like them, she kept saying that her hair is better. Every time I took her out with me, she would ask for a new one – she has at least twenty! It was very tough for us as a family and for my wife especially. She used to ask what we had done to deserve this. Luckily our families were really supportive." Zaina is the oldest of five children and her family lives in Gaza City, where her mother works as to keep the family home and her father works in a mobile phone store.

Zaina completed the course of chemotherapy in November 2020, after showing early improvements. However, during her follow up in December, doctors found that the tumour was still there. She needed a special type of scan called a PET scan, to assess the activity of the tumour, and decide the next steps for treatment – including potential radiotherapy. Neither the scan nor radiotherapy is available in the Gaza Strip, so Zaina was referred to Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) in East Jerusalem for an appointment in February 2021.

From February to October 2021, Zaina's family submitted four applications for appointments for her to receive investigations and treatment at AVH. None was approved in time for her appointments.



**Table 1**

**Dates of Zaina's hospital appointments and the responses to her permit requests**

Appointments	Referral hospital	Israeli permit response
7 Feb 2021	Augusta Victoria Hospital	Delayed: under study
28 Feb 2021	Augusta Victoria Hospital	Delayed: under study
19 April 2021	Augusta Victoria Hospital	Application not submitted
3 Oct 2021	Augusta Victoria Hospital	Delayed: under study
31 Oct 2021	Augusta Victoria Hospital	Delayed: under study



*Zaina loves to draw. In these pictures she drew the first rain when it arrived to Gaza in November and two people holding the hands of a person in a hospital bed.*

Zaina's family is currently waiting for a further hospital appointment, then they will apply for a fifth time for Zaina to reach the care she needs.