



Rafah border terminal was closed for exit for the whole of April, including for patients. No medical aid or medical delegates entered Gaza via Rafah during the month © WHO

Health Access for Referral Patients from the Gaza Strip

Ref: 4
(Published 31st May 2017)

Summary: April 2017

Difficult access through Gaza exits

- **3 patients die awaiting Israeli permits to access health care:** a 5 year-old girl, 53 year-old woman and 59 year-old man (see page 5)
- **Woman accompanying patient arrested by Israeli security at Erez crossing:** court session due 1st June (see page 6)
- **Number of referrals for Gaza patients reaches lowest in seven months:** 14% lower than the monthly average for 2016
- **More than 42% of patients denied/delayed permits:** Of 1,980 patient applications for a permit to exit Gaza through Erez checkpoint for hospital appointments in April 2017: 1,142 (58%) were approved, 62 patients (3%) were denied, while 776 (39%) were delayed with no response by the time of hospital appointment. Among those delayed were 178 children aged 18 years or younger and 93 people aged 60 years or older (Palestinian Health Liaison and Coordination office in Gaza).
- **117 patients denied access by the de facto authority in late March and early April** (see page 5)
- **53% of patient companions denied/delayed permits:** The approval rate of permit applications for patient companions was 47%. 3% of companions were denied permits and the remaining 50% were still pending by the patients' scheduled hospital appointment dates.
- **Security interrogations for patients:** 37 patients (26 males; 11 females), including 5 men over 60, were requested for interview by the General Security Services at Erez during April. Two were approved permits, one denied and 34 were pending at the time of the patient's appointment.
- **No access to Egypt:** Rafah terminal only opened exceptionally to return the bodies of seven patients who died while attending for treatment in Egypt, and to allow the passage of their 13 companions.

Table 1: Humanitarian health workers access through Erez:

	Requests	Approved	Denied	Delayed
WHO for Jerusalem staff to enter	1	1	0	0
WHO for Gaza staff to exit	7	6	0	1
Health Cluster partners	3	0	0	3
International medical delegates	4	4	0	0
Total	15	11 (73%)	0 (0%)	4 (27%)

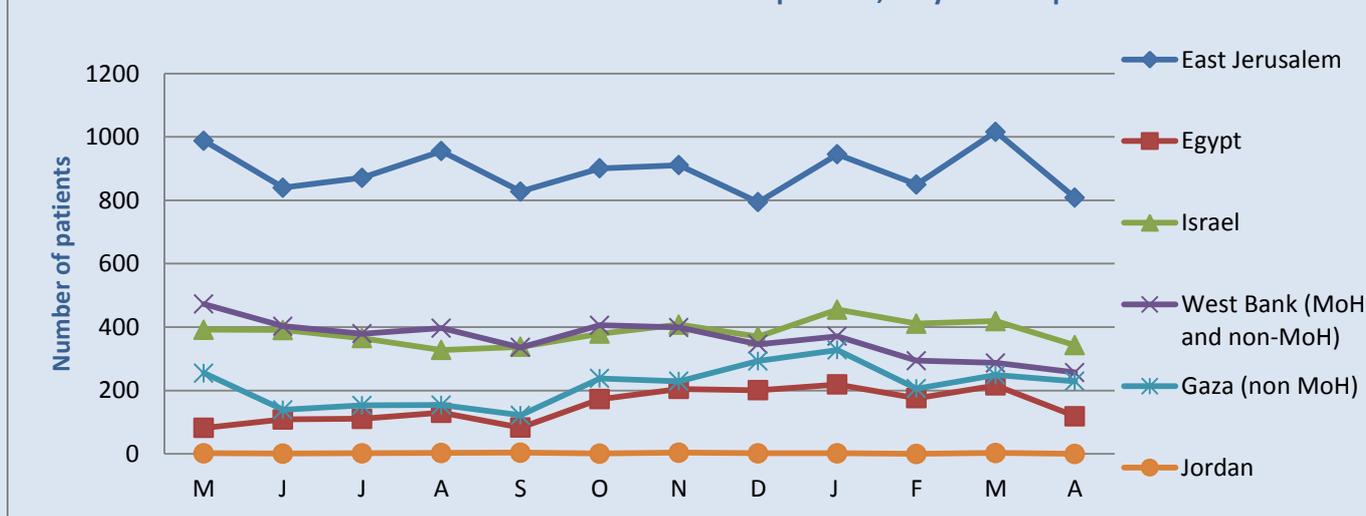
Ministry of Health Referrals

Referrals and financial coverage: In April, the Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 1,756 referral decisions, the lowest number of referrals for Gaza patients since September 2016 and 14% lower than the monthly average for 2016. Referrals were for 1,618 Gaza patients (48% female patients and 52% male patients) for outside care, with an estimated cost of NIS 7,770,025. 29% of referrals were for children under 18 and 22% were for elderly people over 60 years old.

Table 2: Ministry of Health Referrals in April 2017*

Medical Referral	Patients	Percentage	Medical Referral	Patients	Percentage
Oncology	418	23.8%	Ophthalmology	72	4.1%
Hematology	153	8.7%	Internal medicine	66	3.8%
Heart catheterization	148	8.4%	Cardiology	56	3.2%
Pediatrics	139	7.9%	Neurosurgery	56	3.2%
Orthopaedics	102	5.8%	23 other specialties	464	26.4%
Nuclear medicine	82	4.7%	* N = 1,756		

Chart 1: 12-month trend for referrals of Gaza patients, May 2016 - April 2017

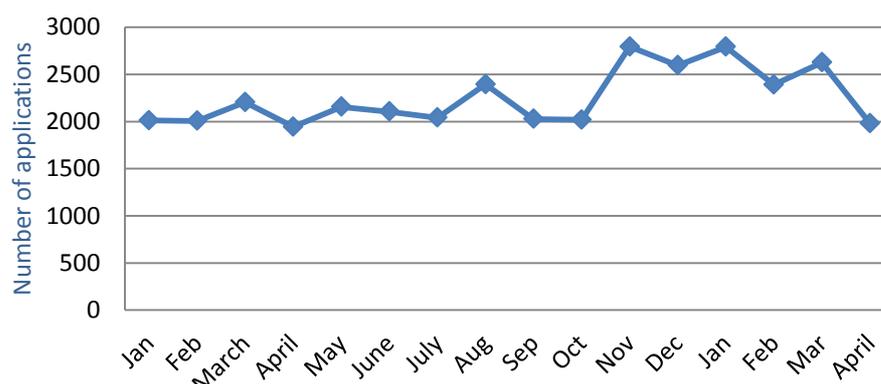


1,408 referrals (80%) were to hospitals in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Israel and Jordan, requiring Israeli permits for access through Erez checkpoint. 119 (7%) referrals were to Egypt, requiring approval from Egypt for exit through Rafah and access to the Rafah border. The remaining 13% were to non-MoH medical facilities within Gaza.

ACCESS

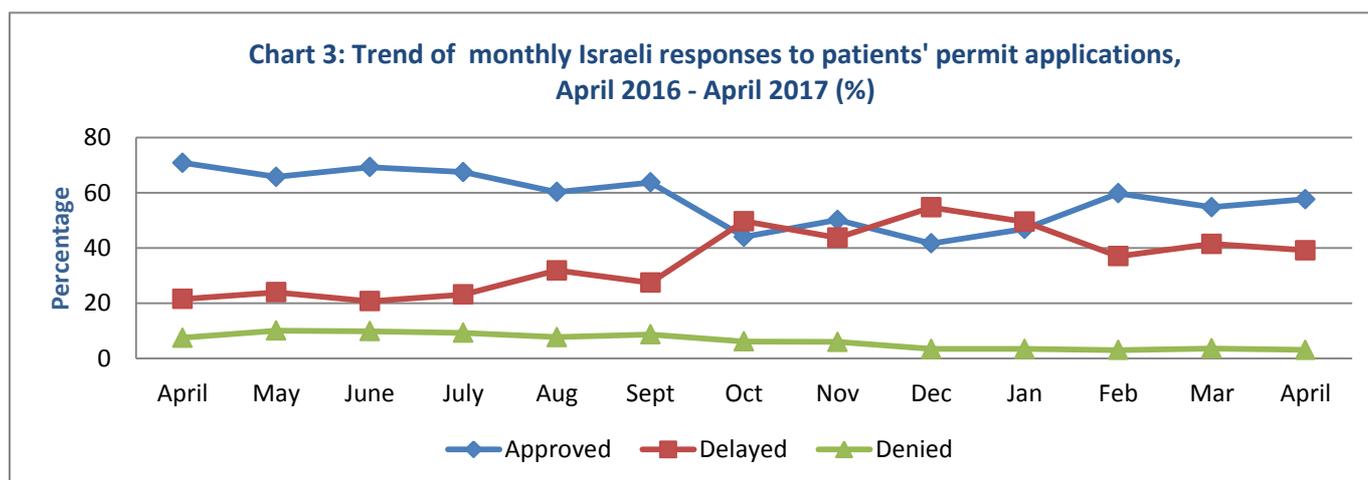
Erez crossing – drop in permit approval rates: In April, there were 1,980 applications from patients for permits to cross Erez for health care, the lowest number of applications since April 2016 (Chart 2). 18% (359) of patient exit permit requests in April were repeated attempts: five attempts for one patient; three attempts for ten patients; and two attempts for 162 patients. The remaining 82% (1,621) of applications represented single attempts by patients during the month.

Chart 2: Total number of patient permit applications to cross Erez, January 2016 - April 2017



In April, around three in every five permit applications to cross Erez were for access to hospitals in East Jerusalem: 557 referrals (28% of the total number of referrals) to Augusta Victoria Hospital; 498 (25%) to Makassed Hospital; 96 (5%) to St John Hospital ; and 39 (2%) to St Joseph Hospital. Of the remainder, the majority of permit applications to cross Erez were for access to hospitals in Israel (23%) and the West Bank (17%), with a minority of applications to Jordan (0.5%). In Israel, there were 166 referrals (8% of the total) to Hadassah; 95 (5%) to Tel-Hashomir; 60 (3%) to Ichilov Hospital; and 45 (2%) to Assuta hospital. In the West Bank, there were 129 (7%) to Najah University Hospital in Nablus and 34 (2%) to Nablus Specialized Hospital. The remaining 261 referrals (13% of the total) were to 28 other hospitals and medical centers.

In April, the Palestinian Health Liaison and Coordination office reported that 58% (1,142) of applications for patient permits were approved, approximately 4% lower than the average for 2016 (62%), see **Chart 3**. Of those not approved, 62 applicants (3%) were denied access and 776 (39%) applications were pending at the time of the patient's hospital appointments, meaning that patients lost the appointments and their medical care was delayed. 37 patients were requested for Israeli security interviews.



Of the 1,980 patients applying for permits to cross Erez, 94.7% received referrals from the Ministry of Health, 3.2% were self-funded, 1.6% were supported by Noor Ala Al-alam charity and the remaining 0.5% by other organizations.

Denied care: 62 patients (47 males; 15 females) were denied permits to access health care through Erez, including three children under 18 years old and one patient over 60 years old. 40 had appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, 14 in hospitals in the West Bank and 8 in Israeli hospitals. The following specialties were needed by patients who were denied permits: orthopedics (14); neurosurgery (9); oncology (8); general surgery (6); internal medicine (4); cardiology (3) and vascular surgery (3) The remaining 15 were for 10 other specialties.

Delayed care: 776 patients (424 males; 352 females) experienced delays in accessing health care in April, among them 178 children aged 18 years or younger and 93 patients aged 60 years or older. Those delayed received no response to their applications and consequently lost their scheduled hospital appointments. The delayed patients (776) had treatment appointments in: oncology (224), cardiology (65), pediatrics (64), orthopedics (59), hematology (57), neurosurgery (46), ophthalmology (45), general surgery (26), urology (26), internal medicine (25), and the remaining 136 were for 12 other specialties.

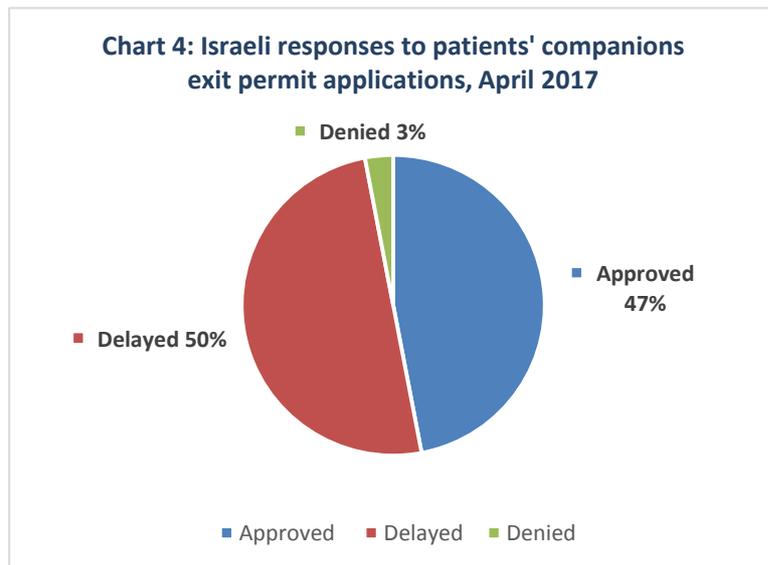
Patients need to submit their applications at least ten days prior to the hospital appointment. In April, out of the 776 delayed patients about 90% submitted their applications ten days or more prior to the appointment date.

Table 3. Israeli responses to health permit requests from patients and companions for exit via Erez crossing: a comparison between the 2016 average and the monthly average for January to April 2017 (%)

	Patients			Companions		
	Approved	Denied	Delayed	Approved	Denied	Delayed
2016 Average	62.1	6.6	31.4	53.1	9.8	37.1
January 2017	47.0	3.5	53.1	38.6	5.9	61.4
February 2017	59.9	3.1	37.1	50.4	4.5	45.1
March 2017	54.8	3.7	41.5	45.5	4.1	50.4
April 2017	57.7	3.1	39.2	47.2	3.1	49.7

Patients' companions:

In April, 2,227 applications for permits to cross Erez for relatives accompanying patients (including parents of children) were submitted to the Israeli authorities. Only one first-degree relative is permitted to accompany a Gaza patient and permits are conditional on security clearance for all persons under the age of 55 years. Approval rates for patient companions have declined steadily from 2012 to December 2016, when it was the lowest ever (35%). The situation slightly improved in February but declined again in March 2017. In April, 47% were approved, 3% were denied and 50% were still under process on the date of the patient's medical appointment, **Chart 4**.



Security interviews: 37 patients (26 males; 11 females), among them five men over 60 years, were called for security interviews by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS). Of these, two were approved, one was denied and 34 were pending after the interview. There has been a steady increase in the number of patients requested for GSS since December 2015.

Patients and companions cross Erez: The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 979 Gaza patients and 881 companions crossed Erez in April to access Palestinian, Israeli, or Jordanian hospitals. Of these, 58 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulances, with 57 companions. Erez crossing was open for 23 days during daytime working hours and closed on seven days (five Saturdays and two Jewish holidays) in April.

Rafah crossing – no access to Egypt: According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the Rafah border terminal was closed for exit for the whole of April, including for patients. No medical aid or medical delegates entered Gaza via Rafah during the month. The terminal was opened exceptionally to return the bodies of seven patients who died while attending for treatment in Egypt, and for the passage of 13 companions. In 2016, the Rafah crossing was open for only 38 days for humanitarian cases, allowing a total of 1,690 patients to travel into Egypt for health care. Before the July 2013 closure, more than 4,000 Gaza residents crossed Rafah terminal to Egypt monthly for health-related reasons.

De facto authority security measures at 4/4 checkpoint hinders patient access to outside health care

Following the killing of a Hamas activist in Gaza city on Friday 24th March 2017, the de facto authority announced the closure of “4/4” checkpoint in Beit Hanoun, located one kilometer before the Israeli-controlled Erez crossing. This effectively prevented the exit of all travelers from Gaza, including patients and their companions seeking health care. The closure began on 26th March, when 71 patients and 63 companions were returned from “4/4” checkpoint. On 27th March, the authorities opened the checkpoint for patients, but restricted exit for those patients and companions aged 15-45 years old. The closure, which was lifted on 6th April, prevented 117 patients from traveling to hospitals, including 39 oncology, 16 hematology, 9 cardiology, 8 orthopedics, 6 neurosurgery, 5 metabolic disease, and 5 neurology patients, as well as 29 patients for other specialties.

The April report of the Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs on people's movement through 5/5 checkpoint showed that nobody was registered for interview with the Israeli security after 5th April. Patients who had appointments for Israeli security between the 6th April and 30th April were returned to Gaza by the de facto authority, which delayed their application processing by Israeli security services and their access to health care.

Three patients die awaiting Israeli permits to access health care

- ***A 53 year-old woman with breast cancer dies while waiting for an Israeli permit to access health care***

Farha Al Fayomi was a 53 year-old widow diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer in 2008. At the beginning of 2017 the cancer had spread and after an initial chemotherapy in Gaza, doctors referred her to Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) in East Jerusalem in February 2017 for radio-chemotherapy. Her family submitted three applications for Israeli permits to cross Erez for appointments in AVH on 14th February, 7th March and 6th April 2017. Farha lost three appointments as a result of pending applications. While waiting for her permit Farha's health deteriorated. She was admitted to Rantisi Hospital where she died on 15th April. Three days after Farha died, the Aid and Hope program for cancer patients in Gaza informed the family that her permit had been approved.



- ***A 5 year-old girl with cerebral palsy dies while waiting for an Israeli permit to access health care***

Aya Abu Metleq was a five year-old girl from Khan Younis with cerebral palsy and delayed growth and development. In December 2016, doctors in the European Gaza Hospital (EGH) suspected a metabolic disorder and requested a referral to Makassed Hospital for investigations and diagnosis. Aya missed two appointments at Makassed Hospital on 5th February and 13th March 2017, while her permit applications were under study. Her father submitted an additional application for an appointment on 27th April 2017. In the morning of 17th April, while waiting for an Israeli response to the permit application Aya's health deteriorated and she stopped breathing. She was transferred to Nasser Hospital where doctors were unable to resuscitate her.

- ***A 59 year-old cancer patient died while waiting to access medical treatment in Augusta Victoria Hospital***

Waleed Kaoud was a 59 year-old cancer patient from Khan Younis. He was diagnosed with colon cancer in 2007 and underwent surgery and chemotherapy in Gaza. In September 2015, his health deteriorated and his oncologist referred him to Assuta Hospital in Tel Aviv for further assessment. After two permit denials in September and October 2015, he attended Assuta Hospital on 10th Nov 2015, where it was found that the cancer had spread to his lungs.

According to the Palestinian Health Liaison and Coordination office, Waleed applied for a permit six times in 2016. After he was denied twice and delayed four times, the family changed destination to Egypt in December 2016, where he stayed for 40 days. In 2017, Waleed lost two further appointments at AVH because of pending permit requests. On 21st March he was scheduled for a security interview, but missed the interview because he was hospitalized in EGH. On the evening of 2nd May 2017, he was brought to the emergency department of EGH, where he later died.

A patient companion arrested

Basima Attallah, a 56 year-old woman from Gaza suffering from colon cancer. On 19th April, accompanied by her 59 year old sister Ibtisam, Basima was on her way to AVH to receive chemotherapy but was stopped by Israeli security after their luggage was searched. The two sisters were then taken for interrogation. After several hours of interrogation, Israeli security services told Basima she could cross for medical treatment but that Ibtisam had been arrested. Basima opted to return to Gaza. At that time Israeli security services alleged that Ibtisam had hidden explosives in tubes.

According to the family, one week later on the evening of 26th April, Israeli security services requested Basima to attend Erez for security interview the next morning. Basima went for the interview, however the de facto authority security services at 4/4 denied her access to Erez.

Ibtisam was detained in Ashkelon prison and was not allowed to access to legal advice for the first 11 days of her arrest. A court session has been scheduled for 1st June 2017 to present charges against Ibtisam.