



Ambulance waits at Rafah crossing, July 2014. © WHO

Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip

Ref: RAD 7 (August 25, 2014)

Summary: July 2014

The sharp escalation of violence in Gaza after July 7 resulted in 1418 killed and 8265 injured (as of July 31), widespread damage to buildings and infrastructure, including health facilities, and remains ongoing.

The number of patients referred for routine specialized medical care was low due to the severe security restrictions on patient access within Gaza and to outside facilities, as well as the Ministry of Health priorities of addressing the emergency health situation and treating casualties.

Access

- **Casualty patients:** 203 war-casualty patients were referred (and travel was coordinated as urgent):
 - 56 war-casualty patients crossed Erez: A total of 60 casualty patients who had initially been treated in hospitals in Gaza were referred to outside hospitals by the Ministry of Health during July, although access within Gaza to Erez checkpoint was difficult due to the security situation. (Out of the 60, 4 casualty patients had access difficulties through Erez: one patient changed the destination to Egypt, 2 patients did not yet receive approvals and one patient was asked to attend a security interview.)
 - 143 war-casualty patients crossed Rafah: Egypt permitted 143 patients and 149 companions to exit Gaza via ambulance at Rafah for treatment in Egypt.
- **Permit applications low and approval rate drops:** 1,093 patients had applied for Israeli permits to exit Gaza via Erez to outside referral hospitals in July, a drop of one third. Only 65.51% of applicants were approved (down from the 2014 average of 84% for the first half of 2014. **70 patients (20 females and 50 males, including 14 children and 9 elderly) were denied permits (6.4%), the highest monthly number of patients denied in 4 years.** 307 patients (122 females and 185 males, including 76 children and 27 elderly people over 60) 28.09% of applicants, received no response to their applications; their medical treatment was delayed as a result.
- **9 patients interrogated:** 8 patients (including 2 females) aged between 18-60 years and 1 male patient over 60 were requested to attend Israeli security interviews after applying for a permit to cross Erez.

Referrals

- **Regular referrals down by 2/3rds:** In July, especially following the escalation of violence after July 7, the number of patients referred to hospitals outside of Ministry of Health (MoH) facilities in Gaza by the Referral Abroad Department (RAD) dropped to 580, only 31% of the monthly average for 2014.
- **Gender gap:** The gender gap in referrals continued: 53.45% male patients versus 46.55% female patients. 27% of all referrals were for children aged 0-17 years and 19.8% were for patients aged over 60 years.

Referrals of Gaza patients dramatically decreased during July because of the crisis

The Ministry of Health (MoH) in Gaza issued 580 patient referrals to outside hospitals in July, less than one-third of the monthly average (1849) for the first half of the year 2014 (**Table 1** and **Chart 1**). **Thus, more than 1,200 patients were “missing” from the referral lists for specialized medical treatment in July.** Patients had difficulty in traveling to the Referral Abroad Department (RAD) of the MoH due to the general lack of security. The Ministry of Health employees in the RAD office also had difficulty with access and much of the referral processing work was completed at home. 54% of applications for referral were processed by RAD within one week, 24% from 1-2 weeks, the remaining 22% took longer.

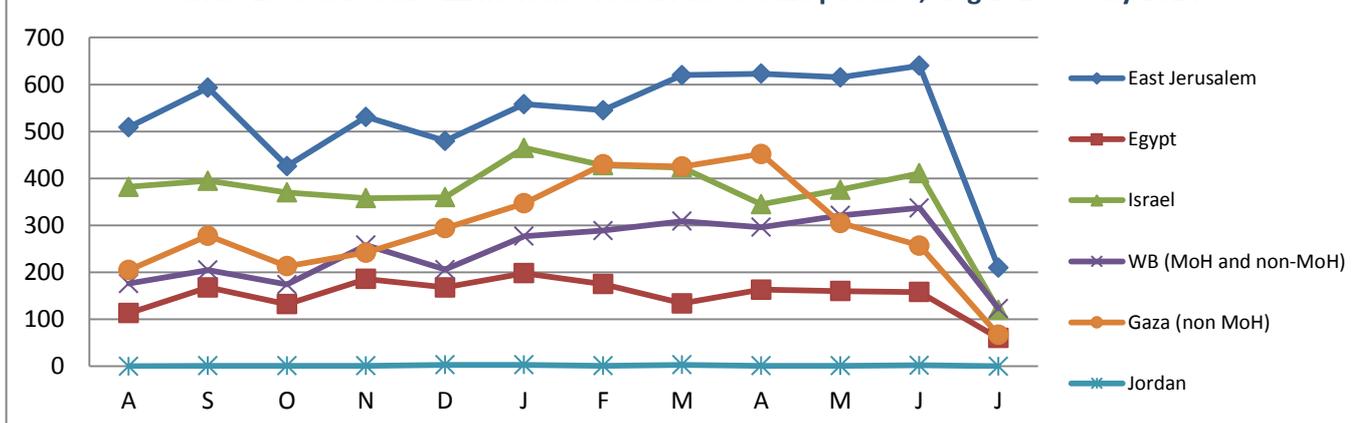
Medical reasons for referrals: The top ten specialties requiring referrals for treatment were: oncology—112 referrals (19.31%), heart catheterization—52 (8.97%), nuclear medicine—47 (8.10%), paediatrics—41 (7.07%), haematology—35 (6.03%), ophthalmology—35 (6.03%), heart surgery—29 (5%), orthopaedics—28 (4.83%), neurosurgery—27 (4.66%), and MRI—26 (4.88%). The remaining 25.52% of referrals were to 19 other specialities. Estimated cost of referrals for July 2014: NIS 4,255,196.

Table 1: Palestinian MoH Referrals, by destination and planned exit route
January – July 2014

Referral Destination	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Total	Semi-annual monthly average 2014
Gaza (non-MoH facilities)	347	430	425	452	305	257	67	2,283	369
WB (MoH and non-MoH)	277	289	309	296	321	337	123	1,952	305
East Jerusalem	558	545	620	623	615	640	210	3,811	600
Jordan	3	1	3	1	1	2	0	11	2
Israel	465	428	423	345	376	411	120	2,568	408
Egypt	198	175	134	163	160	158	60	1,048	165
Total	1,848	1,868	1,914	1,880	1,778	1,805	580	11,673	1,849

Source: MoH Referral Abroad Department, Gaza

Chart 1: Trend of last 12 months of referrals of Gaza patients, Aug 2013 to July 2014

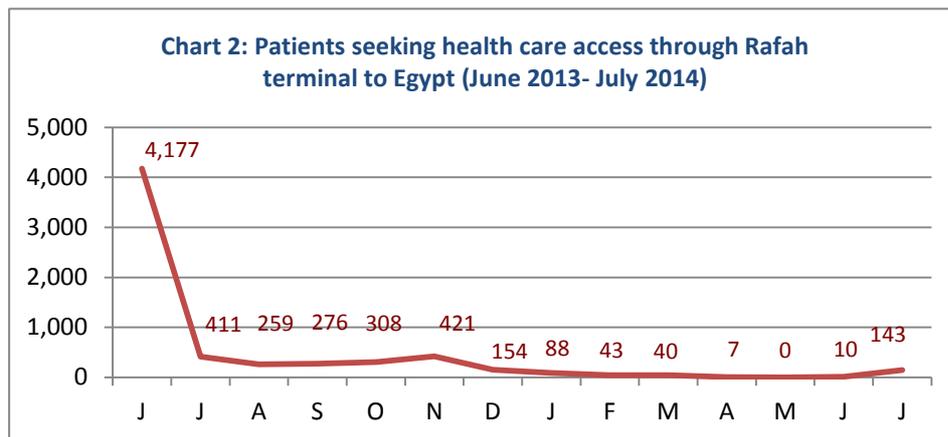


27% of patients referred were children aged 0-17 years and 19.8% were elderly patients over 60. Female referral patients were 46.55% of the total. 52% of all Gaza Strip referrals were for Gaza governorate residents. Referral destinations need coordination for exit through Erez crossing were 453 (78%) out of 580 referrals during July. The RAD in Ramallah registered 670 Gaza patients referred during July with a total of NIS 4,255,196.

Limited improvement in patients’ access to Egypt: On July 9, two days after violence escalated on Gaza, the Egyptian authorities declared that casualties would be allowed to cross through Rafah terminal to Egypt for medical treatment, although the border was still closed for other patients. Thirteen casualties with 11 companions crossed the following day to Egypt. During July, 143 were casualties with 149 companions crossed to Egypt by 116 ambulance transfers between the two sides of the terminal (**Chart 2**). A number of families reported that the ambulances transferring patients were held at the border area until the terminal closed in late afternoon, when all

patients were permitted to proceed together. There were also reported from ambulance services that several patients were returned by Egyptian authorities and denied access to Egypt.

- 7,520 travellers registered in the terminal to cross towards Egypt; 320 were denied access and returned to Gaza.
- 5,740 were holders of Egyptian or foreign passports.
- 1,168 travellers were pilgrims with special coordination to travel to Saudi Arabia.
- The bodies of 14 patients who had been transferred to Egypt and died were returned to Gaza in July.



Limited access to medical delegates and medical aid into Gaza suppresses the coping mechanisms of the MoH

The Palestinian authorities of Rafah terminal reported that 5 medical delegations were allowed to cross into Gaza from Egypt during July; 2 delegations from the Union of Palestinian Physicians in Europe (5 physicians), 2 delegations from the United Arab Emirates (21 physicians) and a Sudanese medical delegation of 12 persons. Some medical aid entered Gaza during July: 2 truckloads of medical supplies donated by the Union of Arab Physicians, and 10 tons of medical aid donated by the Egyptian Red Crescent, in addition to 8 ambulances.

Access through Erez

Volume: There was a 34.55% drop in the total number of permit applications from the monthly average of 2014.

In July, only 2 out of 3 applications by patients for a permit were approved (716 patient permits of 1093 applicants) reflecting more barriers to healthcare (Table 2 and Chart 4). The average approval rate for the first half of 2014 was (84%). The volume of permit applications for the period from January-July this year was 52% higher than the same period in 2013, while the approval rate for the same period was 3.74% lower, the likelihood of being denied was 15 times higher than in the same period last year (Table 3).

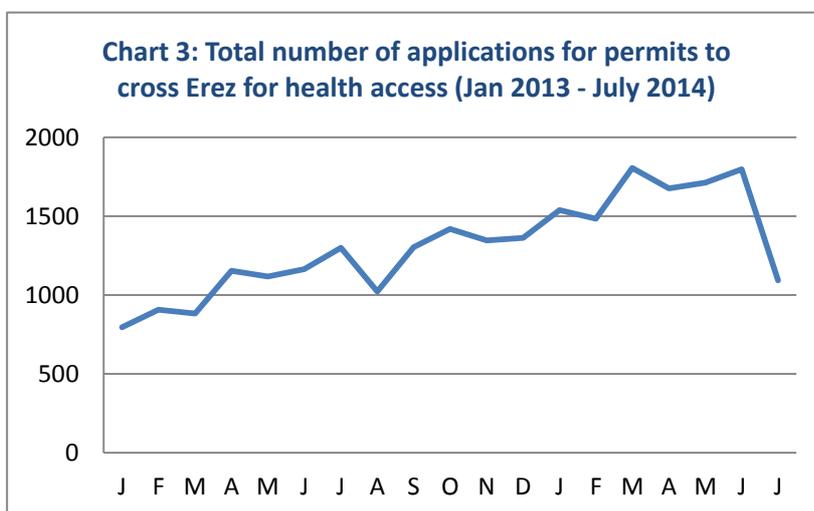
Table 2: Decisions by Israeli District Liaison Office on patient permit applications to cross Erez by age, sex and GSS risk, July 2014

Age group	Total		Approved		Denied		Delayed		Called for GSS interrogation	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
0 - 3	37	53	23	40	1	0	13	13	0	0
4 - 17	96	111	64	80	4	9	28	22	0	0
18 - 40	148	197	85	83	10	19	53	95	2	5
41 - 60	149	153	129	99	1	17	19	37	0	1
Over 60	68	81	55	58	4	5	9	18	0	1
Sub-total	498	595	356	360	20	50	122	185	2	7
Total	1093		716 (65.51%)		70 (6.4%)		307 (28.09%)		9 (0.82%)	

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

Denied: 70 patients (20 females; 50 males) were denied permits to access through Erez to specialized hospitals during July; including 14 children and 9 elderly persons over 60 years. July 2014 represented the highest number of patients denied permits since August 2010. 60 of the denied patients had appointments in East Jerusalem and West Bank hospitals, 7 in Israel, and 3 in Jordan.

62 of the denied patients were funded by the MoH, 5 were self-funded, 2 by Peres Center, and 1 by Physicians for Human Rights. 20 patients waited 8-14 days, 26 patients waited 15-30 days and 3 waited more than 30 days before their applications were denied.



Delayed: According to the Palestinian District Coordination office, 307 patient applicants (185 males; 122 females), including 76 children and 27 patients over the age of 60, received no response to their applications and consequently lost their hospital appointments. Of the 307 patients delayed, 42.02% had scheduled appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, 18.24% in West Bank hospitals, 37.79% in Israel and 1.95% in Jordan. The Ministry of Health financially covered 92.5% of these referrals while 2.61% were self-funded, 2.61% covered by Physicians for Human Rights, and 2.28% by Noor Al-Alam.

Patients should apply 10 days prior to their appointments and Israeli authorities should give a response to applicants within that time. Of the patients delayed, 38.44% of applications (118 of 307) were submitted within 1 week prior to the scheduled appointment. 92 patients were still awaiting a response up to 2 weeks, 87 up to one month and 10 after one month. Out of the 307 applications, 9 were eventually approved but after the appointment date had passed.

Security Interviews: 9 patients (7 males; 2 female) were called for security interviews by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS) as a condition to process their application.

Financial Coverage: In July, 93.59% of all patients applying for Israeli permits were referrals from the Palestinian MoH, 3.2% were self-funded, and the remaining patients were funded by the Peres Center for Peace, Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, Nour Al-Alam foundation, and other organizations. Patients and companions often face financial problems during long stays in hospitals due to uncovered costs such as transportation, companion costs and some patient care items such as medicines not available in the hospital supply.

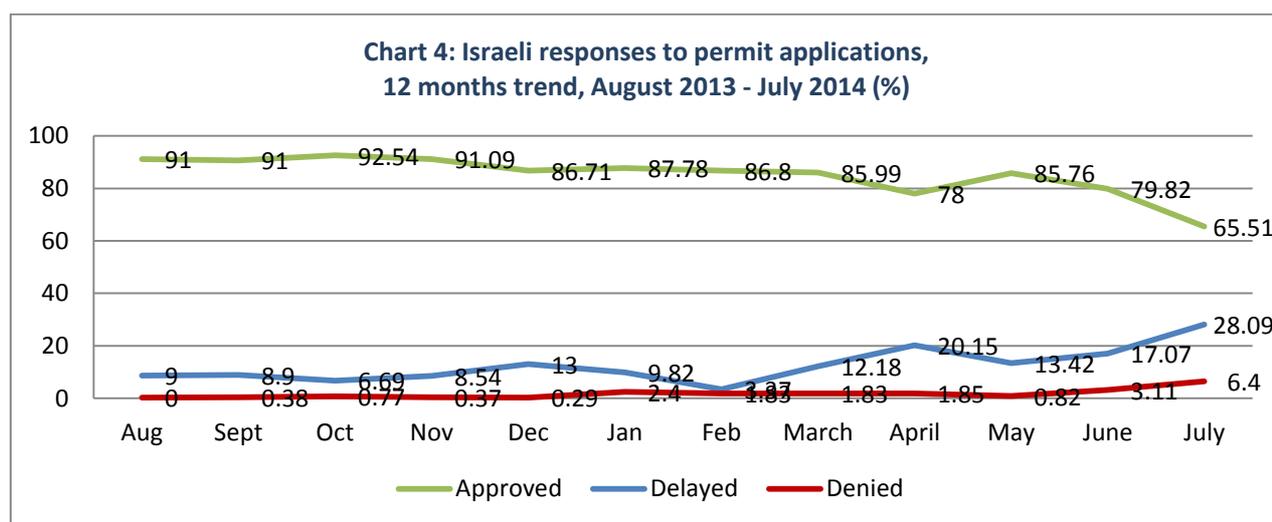


Table 3: Decisions by Israeli District Liaison Office on permit requests to cross Erez, by response, sex of applicant and comparison with corresponding periods in 2013 and 2014 (number and %)

Period	July 2013		July 2014		January-July 2013		January – July 2014	
Total	1,299 (F:603; M:696)		1,093 (F:498; M:595)		7,321 (F:3,461; M:3,860)		11,112 (F:4,712;M:5,456)	
Approved	1,106 (F:547; M:559)	85.14%	716 (F:356; M:360)	65.51%	6,284 (F:3,066; M:3,218)	85.83%	9,122 (F:4,437;M:4,383)	82.09%
Denied	7 (F: 0; M:7)	0.54%	70 (F:20; M:50)	6.4%	13 (F:2; M:11)	0.18%	291 (F:97;M:194)	2.62%
Delayed	186 (F:56; M:130)	14.32%	307 (F:122; M:185)	28.09%	1,024 (F:392; M:632)	13.99%	1,699 (F:608;M:1091)	15.29%
-- called for GSS interrogation (of total applicants)	21 (F:0;M:21)	1.62%	9 (F:2; M:7)	0.82%	107 (F:21; M:86)	1.46%	99 (F:13;M:86)	0.89%

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

Access through Erez crossing

The office of the Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs registered 381 regular referral patients and 361 companions during July (although data was not registered systematically during the emergency conditions, and may be underreported). The Ministry of Health office within the District Liaison office in Gaza reported the coordinated travel of 165 ambulances to Erez during the month (**Table 4**). On days when military activities were affecting the road to Erez terminal, both casualty and regular patients were transferred by ambulance from Gaza city to Erez with special coordination.

More than one third of patients who were approved permits to cross Erez during July did not show up on their travel date. There has been no exploration of the reasons for this although it is likely due to the limitations on secure movement within Gaza. The staff of Palestinian General Authority for Civil Affairs at Erez crossing worked in dangerous conditions during July. Military activities in the area prevented them from reaching their offices so they used the ambulance station in Gaza city as the daily gathering place for coordinating with casualty and regular patients who had been approved permits. They arranged for the travel of the patients in ambulances to Erez with Israeli coordination officers during the days of intense bombardments.

Table 4: Gaza Health Access through Erez, July 2014

Point of exit	Patient Exit	Crossing by ambulance (back-to-back transfers)	Days open in month
Erez crossing (north) via Israel)*	381 regular patients/ and their companions 361	70 patients and 70 companions (preliminary data only)	Open 27 days; Closed 4 days (4 Saturdays)

*Source: Palestinian General Authority for Civil Affairs

During July, 60 permit applications for casualty patients were submitted to the Israeli coordination office for permits; 56 were approved, and 4 were delayed: 1 patient was requested for GSS interview, 1 changed the destination to Egypt and 2 received no response from the Israeli authorities. **Table 6** shows the referral destinations for casualties from July 7 to 31 through Erez, referred for treatment of crush injuries of multiple body organs, extremities or amputations, severe head and neck trauma, injuries of pelvic organs, multiple chest trauma, eye and orbit trauma, and spinal cord injuries (**Table 5**).

Table 5: Casualties referred via Erez, by destination, July 2014

Destination hospital	# of casualties
St. Joseph Hospital, East J.	33
Makassed Hospital, East J.	13
An-Najah Hospital, Nablus	6
Jordan	2
Augusta Victoria Hospital, East J.	1
Beilenson Hospital, Israel	1
Total	56

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

Child denied access for urgent medical condition

Abdel Rahman Sami Al Najjar, a 10-year-old boy from Khan Younis, has been suffering from Type 1 (insulin-dependent) diabetes since 2009, and epilepsy since 2010. "He has been referred to an Israeli hospital (Ikhohov) for treatment over the past two years. Then the RAD referred us to Makassed hospital in Jerusalem," said Abdel Rahman's father, Sami. The treating doctors in Makassed hospital advised that Abdel Rahman needs an insulin pump implanted in his body to control his blood sugar, and follow up for his recurrent seizures. The child was referred to Shneider hospital in Israel but lost three appointments due to access problems, despite being granted permits many times in the past to cross Erez for medical treatment. On the last occasion, Abdel Rahman was denied access for his appointment in Shneider hospital on July 17, one of 70 patients denied a permit by Israel during July.

Recently, the child's blood sugar became very hard to control and his seizures became more frequent. "We check his blood sugar 8 times a day at home. It sometimes reaches 500 and sometimes goes down to 20. We give him the prescribed insulin and drugs but in the evening the seizures become worse, even with the drugs. We feel powerless and cannot help him. My wife and I stay beside him until he wakes up from the seizure," said the father. Abdel Rahman has received different types of insulin and anti-epileptic drugs, some of which are not available in Gaza. The family used to buy the drugs from an Israeli pharmacy but recently they could not find an important anti-epileptic drug for their child. "We missed three appointments since May, one because of the pope's visit and another two because of the war on Gaza," the father said. Meanwhile, the child's condition has deteriorated. "He has become incontinent and we started to put him diapers this past month. We expect that he will worsen if we cannot access proper medical care outside Gaza," said the father.