



Rafah border terminal, for travel between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, was closed completely during July © WHO

## Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip

Ref: RAD 7 (Aug. 28, 2015)

### Summary: July 2015

#### Patient arrested at Erez; Rafah terminal closed in July

- **Rafah border:** Rafah terminal was completely closed both directions in July, preventing access for all travellers including patients, in either direction and preventing entry of medical aid and medical delegations to Gaza. The border has been opened a total of only 15 days so far this year, allowing only 127 patients to cross into Egypt for health care. Before the July 2013 closure, more than 4000 Gaza residents crossed Rafah monthly for health-related access.
- **Patient arrested at Erez crossing:** (page 6).
- **Erez:** 1,764 patients applied for permits to exit Gaza through Erez checkpoint for hospital appointments in July. According to the Palestinian District Liaison office in Gaza, 82.82% of patients were approved, 15.59% received no response to their applications (275 patients, including 91 children) and 1.59% were denied permits (28 patients, including 2 children and 1 elderly patient over 60 years old). 23 patients (17 males; 6 females) were requested to attend Israeli security interviews after applying for a permit, the highest number in a month since January 2014. None received permits.

#### MoH referrals in July

- **Ministry of Health referred 1,647 Gaza patients in July for outside care.** The July totals were 6% less than the monthly average so far in 2015: According to the Ministry of Health Referral Abroad Department (RAD) in Gaza, oncology, hematology, orthopaedic surgery, nuclear medicine, and ophthalmology were the main referral specialties needed in July.
- **Gender gap:** The gender gap in Gaza referrals remained very wide: 56.28% male patients versus 43.72% female patients. 28.3% of all referrals were for children aged 0-17 years and 16.94% were for patients aged over 60 years.
- **Estimated cost of referrals for July:** NIS 10,449,197.

## REFERRALS

### Referrals of Gaza patients

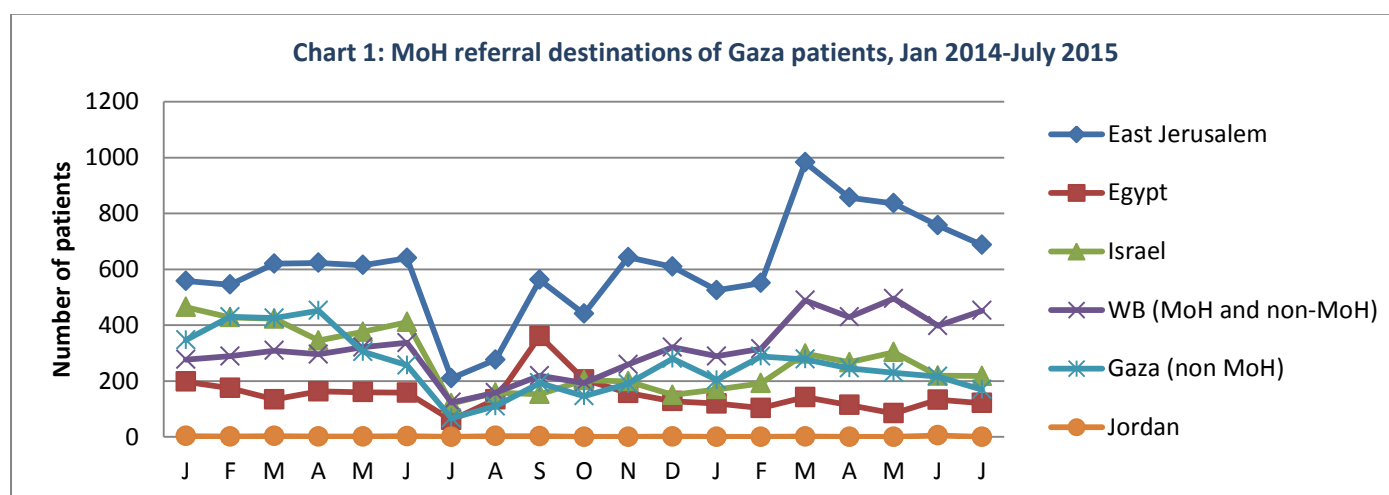
The Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 1,647 referrals for Gaza patients in July, according to the Referral Abroad Department (RAD) data in Gaza<sup>1</sup> (**Table 1**). Before the July 2013 closure, more than 4000 Gaza residents crossed Rafah monthly for health-related access.

**Table 1: Palestinian MoH referrals, by destination, January-July 2015**

Referral Destination	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	TOTAL
Gaza (non-MoH facilities)	204	288	278	246	230	216	169	<b>1,631</b>
WB (MoH and non-MoH)	289	315	489	429	495	398	452	<b>2,867</b>
East Jerusalem	525	551	983	857	836	757	687	<b>5,196</b>
Jordan	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Israel	170	192	298	267	303	219	218	<b>1,667</b>
Egypt	119	103	142	114	84	133	121	<b>816</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,307</b>	<b>1,449</b>	<b>2,191</b>	<b>1,913</b>	<b>1,948</b>	<b>1,723</b>	<b>1,647</b>	<b>12,178</b>

Source: MoH Referral Abroad Department, Gaza

In comparison with the monthly average of the first half of 2015, referrals to West Bank were 12% higher, to Egypt 4% higher, and referrals to East Jerusalem, to Israel and to non-MoH facilities within Gaza continued downward trends, 9%, 10% and 31% lower, respectively (**Chart 1**). The 169 Gaza non-MoH referrals were mainly for MRI (88), heart catheterization (42), rehabilitation (13) and the remaining (26) were for 9 different specialties.

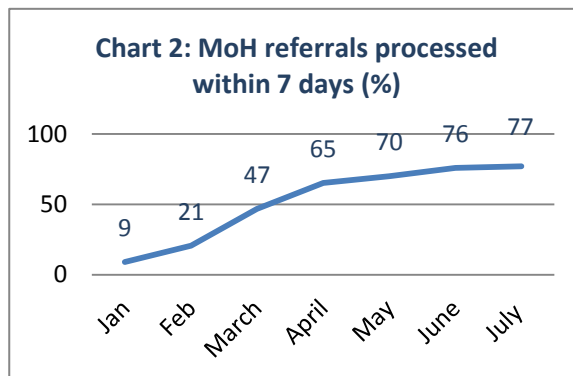


Of the 1,647 patients issued Ministry of Health referrals in July, 1,357 patients (82.39%) required Israeli permits to exit through Erez crossing and 121 (7.35%) required approvals from Egypt to exit through Rafah (on the chance the Rafah border would be opened).

28.3% of all patients referred were children aged 0-17 years and 16.94% were patients over 60 years. Female referral patients were 43.72% of the total, compared to 56.28% male patients. 90.95% of referrals in July were for hospital admissions and 9.05% for outpatient clinics.

<sup>1</sup> The MoH Referral Abroad Department (RAD) in Gaza data reflects the number of patient applications approved for financial coverage by the central RAD office in Ramallah.

The Ministry of Health has showed significant progress in efficiency in processing patients' applications for referrals, at the level of the local office in Gaza and by the central Service Purchasing Department (SPD) in Ramallah (**Chart 2**). More than three-fourths of all applications are processed within one week. WHO supported the Ministry by providing a web-based approval tracking system to shorten communication time between the Gaza and Ramallah offices. However, management of non-MoH hospital appointments remains slow.



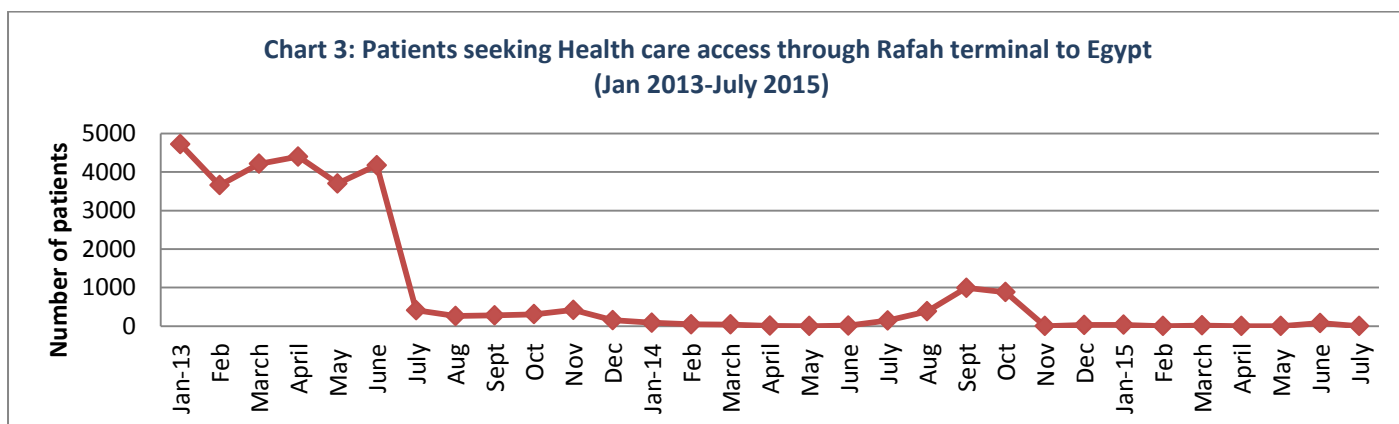
Out of the 1,647 referrals, the three top destinations were Makassed Hospital (19.55%), Augusta Victoria Hospital (15.36%), and AnNajah National University Hospital (12.99%). The remaining appointments (52%) were in 41 other hospitals.

The RAD in Ramallah reported 1,857 referrals for Gaza patients in July, 210 referrals<sup>2</sup> more than what registered in Gaza peripheral office with an estimated cost of **NIS 10,449,197**.

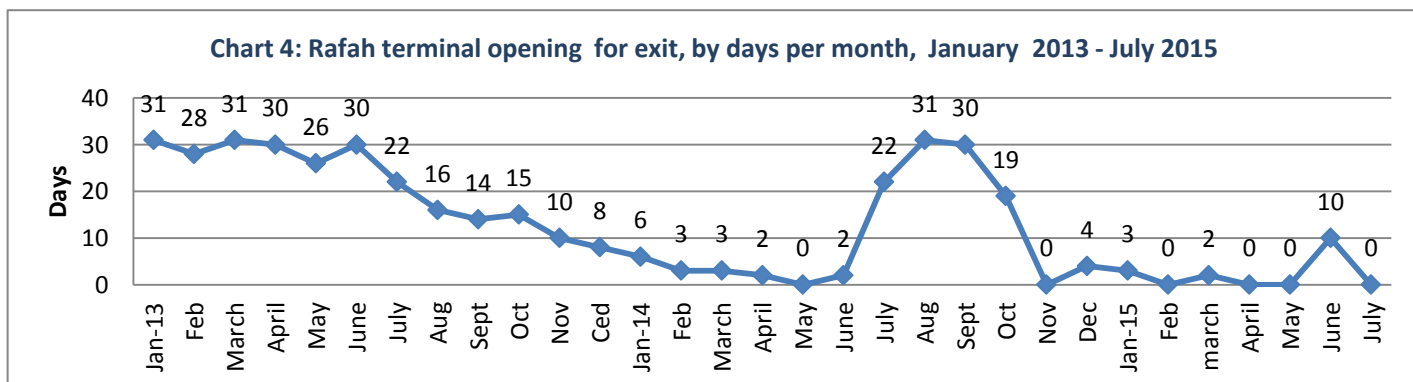
**Medical reasons for referrals:** The top ten specialties for referrals in July were: oncology—339 referrals (20.58%), hematology—116 (7.04%), orthopaedic surgery—112 (6.8%), nuclear medicine—100 (6.07%), ophthalmology—98 (5.95%), pediatrics—95 (5.77%), MRI—93 (5.65%), neurosurgery—83 (5.04%), heart catheterization—83 (5.04%), heart surgery—80 (4.86%); the remaining 448 (27.2%) referrals were to 20 other specialities.

### Access through Rafah terminal

**No access to Egypt in July:** According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the terminal was completely closed and no travellers were allowed to or from Egypt during July, including patients, medical aid or medical delegations. Rafah terminal has been closed by the Egyptian authorities since July 2013 except for the exit of a very limited number of humanitarian cases (**Chart 3**).



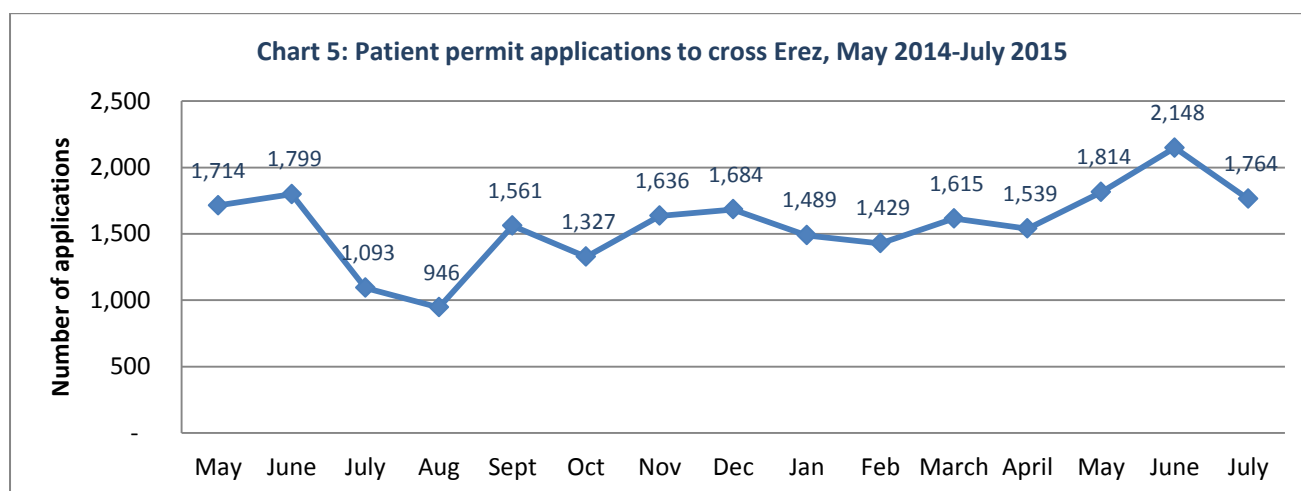
So far in 2015, 695 patients were referred by the Ministry of Health to Egypt but only 127 were able to travel on the 15 days that the border was open (**Chart 4**).



<sup>2</sup> This figure includes renewals of referrals to Egypt for patients still waiting for access whose original referrals expired.

## Access through Erez

In July, the total number of patients' applications for Israeli permits to cross Erez was 1,764, still very high demand but lower than the two previous months (**Chart 5**). Referrals reflect shortages and the lack of specialized services available in the health sector in Gaza and blocked access to private medical care in Egypt. Out of the 1,764 permit applications, 831 (47.11%) were for patients destined to hospitals in East Jerusalem, 493 (27.95% to the West Bank, 424 (24.04%) to Israel, and 16 (0.91%) to Jordan.



In July, the Palestinian District Coordination office reported 1,461 (82.82%) patients' permits applications were approved (**Table 2**). 28 applicants (1.59%) were denied access and 275 (15.59%) did not receive an answer to their applications in time for their hospital appointments and therefore suffered delay in health care.

Patients should submit their applications to the district liaison office 7-10 days prior to the appointment date but in July 587 applications (33.28%) out of the total 1,764 were submitted in less than 7 days.

**Table 2: Israeli responses to permit requests to cross Erez, by age, sex and GSS interviews, July 2015**

Age group	Total		Approved		Denied		Delayed		Called by GSS*	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
0 - 3	68	92	62	82	0	0	6	10	0	0
4 - 17	157	227	124	183	0	2	33	42	0	0
18- 40	211	245	168	161	8	11	35	73	4	12
41 - 60	249	230	227	192	0	6	22	32	2	5
Over 60	144	141	135	127	0	1	9	13	0	0
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>829</b>	<b>935</b>	<b>716</b>	<b>745</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,764</b>		<b>1,461 (82.82%)</b>		<b>28 (1.59%)</b>		<b>275 (15.59%)</b>		<b>23 (1.3%)</b>	

\* GSS = Israeli General Security Services

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza

**Table 3: Israeli District Liaison Office decisions on permit requests to cross Erez, by response, sex of applicant, 2015 compared to 2014**

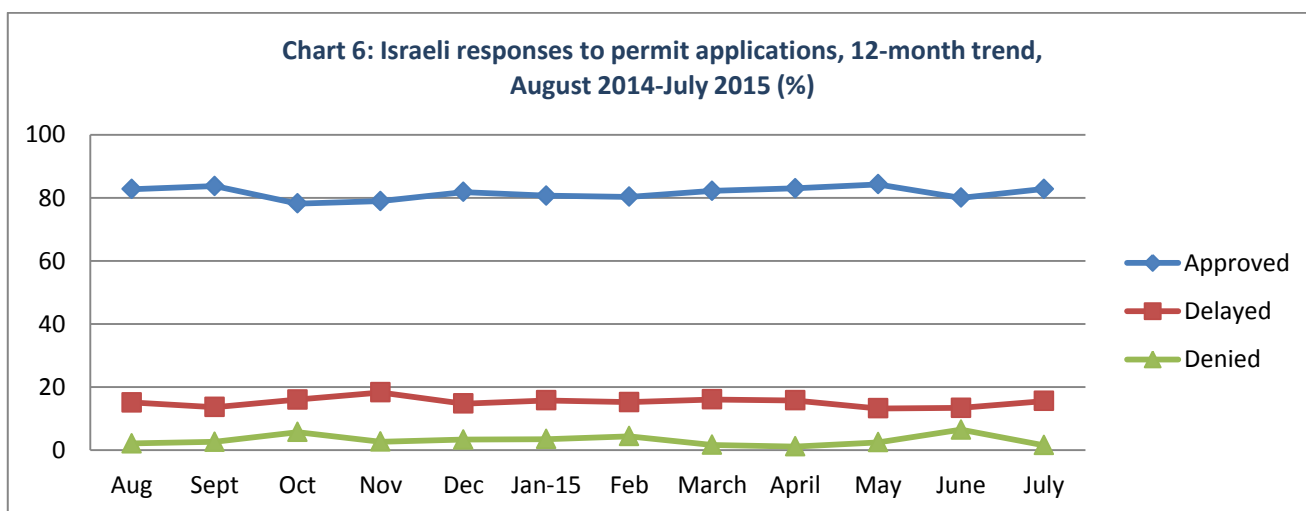
Period	July 2014		July 2015		Jan-July 2014		January – July 2015	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1093</b> (F:498; M:595)		<b>1,764</b> (F:829; M:935)		<b>11,112</b> (F:5,142; M:5,970)		<b>11,798</b> (F:5,470; M:6,328)	
Approved	716 (F:356; M:360)	65.51%	1,461 (F:716; M:745)	82.82%	9,122 (F:4,437; M:4,685)	82.09%	9,667 (F:4,705; M:4,962)	81.94%
Denied	70 (F:20; M:50)	6.4%	28 (F:8; M:20)	1.59%	291 (F:97; M:194)	2.62%	373 (F:81; M:292)	3.16%
Delayed	307 (F:122; M:185)	28.09%	275 (F:105; M:170)	15.59%	1,699 (F:608; M:1091)	15.29%	1,758 (F:684; M:1,074)	14.9%
-- of which called for GSS interrogation (of total applicants)	<b>9</b> (F2; M:7)	0.82%	<b>23</b> (F:6; M:17)	1.3%	<b>99</b> (F:13; M:86)	0.98%	<b>121</b> (F:30; M:91)	1.03%

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

**Patient companions:** In July, 1,846 applications for patient companions (including parents of children) were submitted to the Israeli authorities. 74.7% of them were approved, 23.46% were pending and 1.84% were denied.

**Financial coverage:** 92.69% of all patients applying for Israeli permits in July were referred by the Palestinian MoH, 3.46% were self-funded, 1.64% were funded by Nour Al-Alam foundation, 1.36% by Peres Center for Peace, 0.57% by Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, 0.23% by the Military Medical Services, and 0.06% by a private insurance company.

**Chart 6** shows a slight improvement in the Israeli approval rate for patients' permit applications in July, slightly exceeding the monthly average in 2015 (81.79%), due to a lower rate of denials. Delayed patients' applications were slightly higher than the average.



Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

**Denied care:** 28 patients (20 males; 8 females) were denied permits to access through Erez, including 2 children and 1 patient over 60 years. 26 of the denied patients had appointments in East Jerusalem and West Bank hospitals, and 2 in Israel. Of the denied patients, 27 were financially covered by the Palestinian MoH, and 1 was self-funded. 17.86% (5 patients) of those denied had submitted their applications in a period less than 8 days from the hospital appointment. 35.71% (10) had waited for a response for 8-14 days, 39.29% (11) waited 15-30 days, 2 patients waited more than 30 days before receiving a denial. Of those denied, 11 patients had appointments for orthopedics, 5 for neurosurgery, 4 for ophthalmology, 2 for ENT, 2 for urology, 2 for neurology, 1 for internal medicine and 1 for nuclear medicine.

**Delayed care:** 275 patient applicants (170 males; 105 females), including 91 children and 22 patients over the age of 60, received no response to their applications and consequently lost their hospital appointments. Of the 275 patients delayed, 80% had scheduled appointments in East Jerusalem or West Bank hospitals, 18.18% in Israel, and 1.8% in Jordan. The delayed patients had scheduled appointments in orthopedics (44), ophthalmology (31), oncology (27), hematology (25), cardiology (22), pediatrics (22), neurosurgery (18), nuclear medicine (12), nephrology (11), urology (10) and the rest (53) were for 15 different specialties.

Out of 275 delayed patient applicants, 38.55% had submitted their applications 1-7 days prior to the appointment date, but 34.91% waited 8-14 days, 22.18% waited 15-30 days and 4% waited more than 30 days for a response to their permit request. 1 application was missed. 31 patients out of the delayed were eventually approved late, within the first 2 weeks of August.

**Security Interviews:** 23 (17 males; 6 females) patients aged 18-60 were called for security interviews by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS), the highest number since January 2014. None was approved after the interview.

**Patients and companions crossed Erez:** The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,342 patients (and 1,301 companions) crossed Erez in July to access hospitals in the West Bank including Jerusalem, Israeli hospitals, or Jordanian hospitals, including 53 transferred by ambulance (back-to-back). Erez crossing was open for 27 days with regular day-time working hours and closed for 4 days (4 Saturdays) during the month.

## Patient arrested at Erez

Ibrahim Adel Al Shaer, 21 years old, from Rafah was referred to Ahli hospital in Hebron for investigation and treatment of an oral mass which developed following a wisdom tooth extraction at Nasser hospital in December. The growth had become large and he had difficulty eating. Ibrahim applied for a permit to cross Erez checkpoint in June for his hospital appointment but was denied. He applied a second time, and was granted a permit to cross on July 9, 2015, accompanied by his father. When father and son appeared at the terminal, Ibrahim was taken by Israeli security forces.



Ibrahim's father, Adel, recounted: "I waited until 7 at night to know whether Ibrahim would be allowed to go through or returned to Gaza. Then a soldier in the terminal told me to go back to Gaza and that my son would return to Gaza in 4 hours."

According to the father, he discovered later that Ibrahim had been taken to Ashkelon prison where he spent 20 days under interrogation, and then was moved to a prison in Beersheba. He was taken to court but the judge asked for a medical opinion on his health status before hearing his case. Ibrahim was taken to Soroka hospital in Beersheba for tests which reportedly showed a benign tumor in his mouth and a mild painkiller was prescribed.

Ibrahim's family appealed to human rights organization Addameer for legal assistance. The family also appealed to the ICRC to visit Ibrahim in prison but no family visits have been allowed so far.