



MONTHLY REPORT

January 2019

Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **1,963**

referrals issued to Gaza patients to access health facilities outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health (bimonthly average for January and February)

 **67%**

of Gaza patient permit applications to Israeli authorities for exit via Erez approved

53% Gaza patient companions

 **84%**

of West Bank patient permit applications to Israeli authorities approved

78% West Bank patient companions

 **1**

Gaza patient called for security interview, approved

IN FOCUS


Mobile clinic brings mammography services to remote

Part 1 Referrals

January Referrals by the Ministry of Health

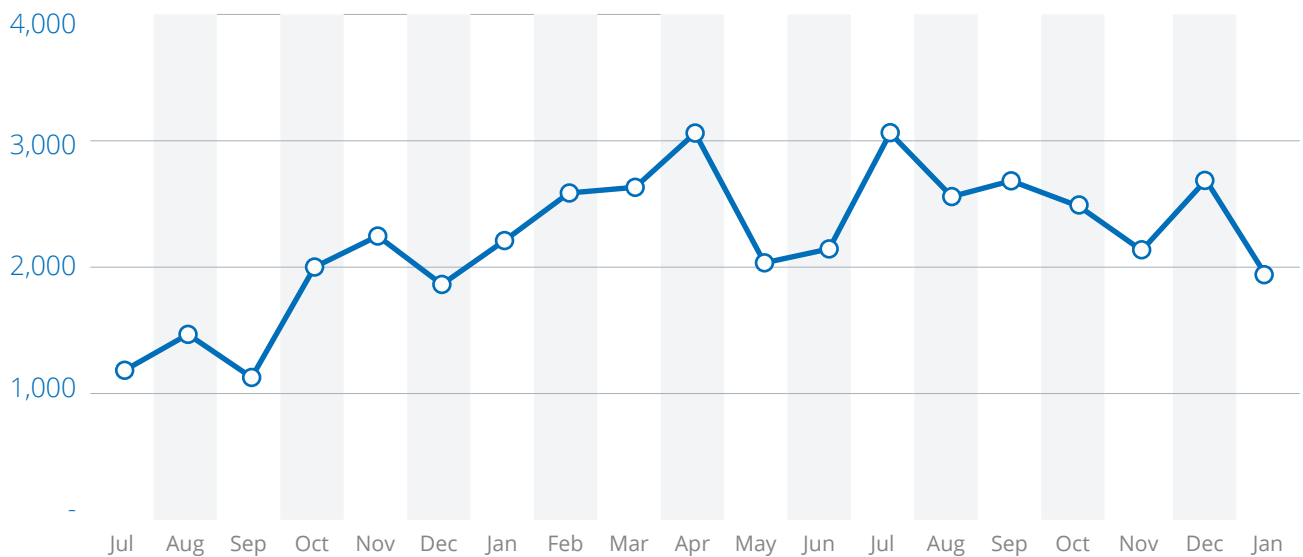
In January and February, the Palestinian Ministry of Health approved 3,925 referrals for Gaza patients to non-Ministry of Health facilities (an average 1,963 referrals per month), with an estimated cost of 57 million NIS (28.5 million NIS per month). This is lower than the average monthly number of referrals for Gaza patients in 2018, which was 2,579 referrals per month. 77% of referrals required access through Erez crossing to reach hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, while 4% required access through Rafah terminal to access health care in Egypt.

Chart 1 shows the number of referral documents issued to patients in Gaza from July 2017 to January 2019.

 **1,963** referrals

approved for financial coverage for Gaza patients outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health (bimonthly average for January and February)

Chart 1: Total number of referrals approved for Gaza patients, July 2017 - January 2019



Part 2 ACCESS

The Gaza Strip

Of 2,401 applications to cross Erez for health care in January, 31% were for children under age of 18 and 16% were for patients aged 60 years or older. 43% of applications were for female patients and 90% of applications were for medical care funded by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

Three fifths (60%) of applications to cross Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, more than a fifth (22%) were for hospitals in Israel, and less than a fifth for West Bank hospitals (18%). Makassed Hospital (30%) and Augusta Victoria Hospital (23%), both in East Jerusalem, received more than half of referrals. Permit applications for the top five specialties accounted for 59% of referrals: oncology (27%); orthopaedics (10%); paediatrics (8%); cardiology (7%); and haematology (7%). The remaining 41% referrals were for 28 other specialties.

Approved permit applications: 1,611 (867 male; 744 female), or 67% of the 2,401 applications to cross Erez in January 2019 were approved. Chart 2 shows a 12-month trend for Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications. Over a third (35%) of permits approved were for children under age of 18 and a fifth (19%) were for people aged 60 years or older.



2,401

patients applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to access health care



67%

approved



8%

denied

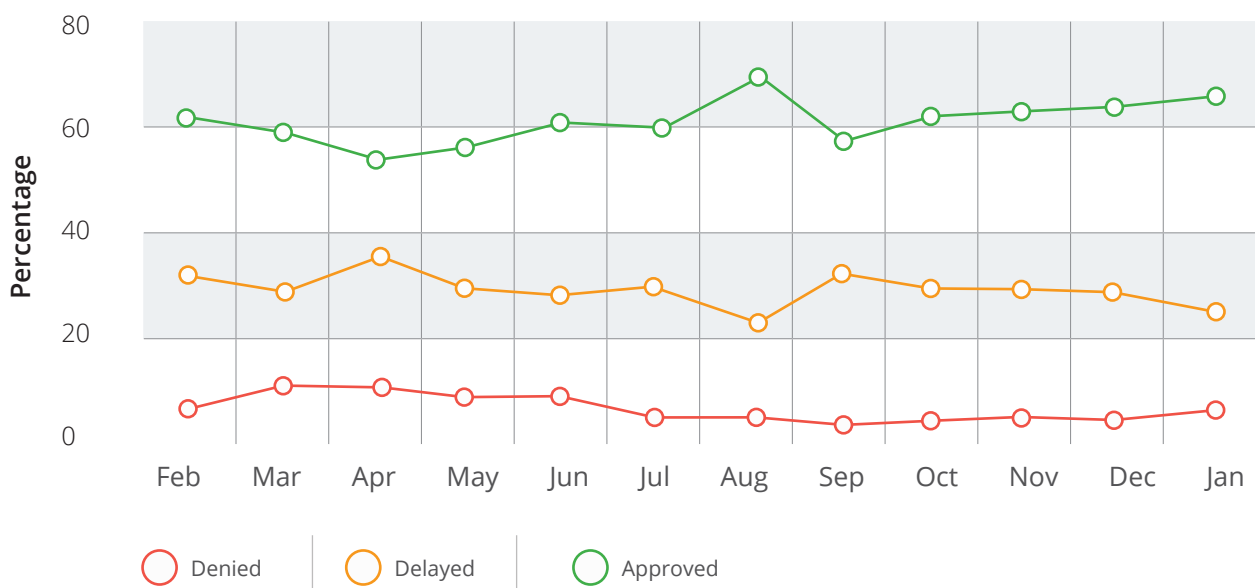


25%

delayed

Chart 2

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, February 2018- January 2019



Denied care: 191 patient applications (125 male; 66 female), or 8% of the total, were denied permission to cross Erez for health care in January. Those denied included 14 children under the age of 18 years and 19 patients aged 60 years or older. 29% of denied applications were for appointments in orthopaedics, 27% for neurosurgery, 8% for ophthalmology, and 8% for general surgery. More than 93% of denied permit applications were for appointments at hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Delayed care: 599 patient applications (385 male; 214 female), or 25% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. Of these, 152 applications were for children under the age of 18 and 59 applications were for patients aged 60 years or older. 16% of those delayed had appointments for orthopaedics and 13% for oncology. The remaining two-thirds (71%) were for 26 other specialties. 419 (70%) of the delayed applications were 'under study' at the time of appointment, while 14 applications were delayed because patients allegedly had relatives staying in the West Bank.

Access for those injured during demonstrations:

39 permit applications (1.6% of the total) in January were for those injured during demonstrations. The approval rate for this group was significantly lower than the overall approval rate in January: 2 applications were approved (5% of the total); 7 denied (18%); and 30 delayed (77%). As of 31 January, according to Gaza's Coordination and Liaison Office, there had been 474 applications to Israeli authorities by those injured in demonstrations to exit Gaza via Erez crossing for health care. Of those applications, 84 (18%) were approved, 137 (29%) were denied and 253 (53%) were delayed.¹

Security interrogation

In January, one patient was called for security interrogation as a prerequisite to travel for health care: a 65-year-old man referred for vascular surgery. His permit application was approved.

Patient companions:

In January, there were 2,641 permit applications to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to accompany patients. These applications include parents or other companions applying to accompany children. Only one companion is permitted to accompany each Gaza patient and permits are conditional on security clearance. In January, 1,405 (53%) patient companion applications were approved, 271 applications (10%) were denied and the remaining 965 (37%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's application. Chart 3 shows the trend over the last 12 months for Israeli responses to patient companion applications.



1

patient called for security interrogation

Approved



2,641

patient companion applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to accompany patients

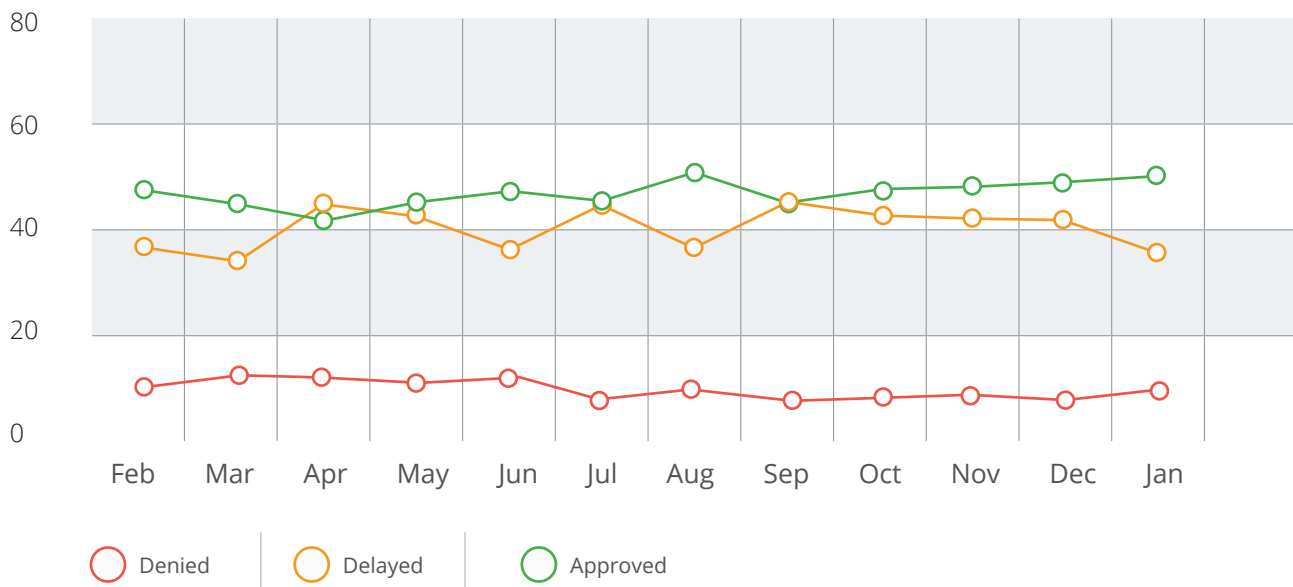
53% approved

10% denied

37% pending

Chart 3

Israeli responses to Gaza patient companion applications, February 2018- January 2019



Patients and companions crossing Erez:

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,713 Gaza patients and 1,500 companions crossed Erez in January to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of these, 108 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 109 companions. During the month, Erez crossing was open for 27 days for daytime working hours and closed on four days (four Saturdays).



1,713

patients crossed Erez for health care



1,500

patient companions crossed Erez

¹ Data provided by the Palestinian Coordination and Liaison Office, Gaza

Rafah crossing – Egypt



Rafah crossing was closed by the Egyptian authorities for the exit of people from 7 to 28 January, following the Palestinian Authority's decision to remove its staff from the crossing. Rafah was open in both directions for seven days and in one direction for 14 days, for entry to Gaza. Aside from the recent closure, Rafah border terminal has been operating five days a week (Sunday to Thursday) since July 2018. 1,970 exits from Gaza towards Egypt were reported during January. No data has been made available for the number of patients crossing in the same month.

The West Bank


In January, there were 7,575 applications by West Bank patients 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 exempted from the requirement to obtain a permit to travel – provided they are not traveling on a Saturday or before 8am.

Of the 7,575 applications, 6,348 (84%) were approved, 1,012 (13%) were denied and 215 (3%) were pending any reply at the time of monthly reporting.


Of the 8,147 patient companion applications, 6,359 (78%) were approved, 1,401 (17%) were denied and 387 (5%) were pending any reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **7,575**
patient applications

to Israeli authorities to access health care in East Jerusalem and Israel

 **84% approved**


 **13% denied**

 **3% pending**




 **8,147**
patient companion applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to accompany patients

 **78% approved**

 **17% denied**

 **5% pending**

In Focus

Mobile clinic brings mammography services to remote communities in the West Bank

Murjan's days usually start at 5 am. She is a senior nurse with the mobile clinic that offers free mammography screening to women in the remote areas of the West Bank in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). A minibus leaves from Augusta Victoria Hospital - one of the main Palestinian cancer treatment centres - in East Jerusalem at 7 in the morning to take Murjan and her colleagues to one of the villages. It's often a few hours' drive - and not just because of the remoteness. Over a hundred fixed and over two thousand "flying" Israeli checkpoints hamper Palestinian free movement within the West Bank, including for ambulances and mobile health clinics. For Murjan, this is one of the biggest obstacles in her daily work. "Sometimes, a two-hour drive becomes five. Or, what's worse, a checkpoint might be closed without any prior notice and we have no other option but to come back."



During the visits, the mobile clinic team provides breast screening, raises awareness about breast cancer and its prevention, shows women how to do a self-examination and explains the importance of regular check-ups.

In Filamiya village, near Tulkarem seven women are waiting for Murjan and her colleagues at the municipality building. Nurses distribute information leaflets and answer the questions women might have about mammography or breast cancer. Then, after a one-on-one consultation, women go to a mammography van for screening.

Khaula came for a breast screening for the first time in her life: "Until today, all I knew about cancer was that people die from it. Thanks to information from the medical team, now I know that if you have cancer chances for successful treatment are high. Also, we can do our part to prevent this disease."

In many Palestinian communities people are not aware of cancer and the disease still carries a stigma. "Every village, every community is different," says Murjan, "We need to be sensitive to cultural norms and traditions". The mobile team may need to make multiple home visits to convince a woman, and often it requires conversation with her whole family, to come for mammography. "People have a lot of prejudices and fears, and we have to adjust and find a way to address them. 7 years of experience helped me to gain needed skills", says Murjan. As nothing speaks better than personal experience, women who survived cancer join for the visits from time to time to help spread the knowledge and share their own stories.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer occurring in Palestinian women and is responsible for 10% of all death in the oPt. Mobile mammography clinics run by Augusta Victoria Hospital helped to reduce the number of cases referred for treatment at palliative stage significantly. They provide follow-up support to women who were diagnosed with cancer to ensure they can get needed treatment.

"In spite of all the difficulties we face daily in our job, I do not despair," Murjan says. "I am a firm believer in what we do, and every time we successfully reach one more village to explain the importance of breast check-ups to women and provide our services, I know it is worth the effort."