



The Rafah border terminal was open for 3 days during July, during which 79 people were able to travel to Egypt for health treatment. ©WHO

## Health Access for Referral Patients from the Gaza Strip

Ref: 7 (September 7, 2016)

### Summary: July 2016

#### Erez crossing

- **More than 3 in 10 patients denied/delayed Gaza exit:** Of 2,040 patient permit applications to exit Gaza through Erez checkpoint for hospital appointments in July, 67.5% were approved. 190 patients (9.5%) were denied, including 8 children and 14 elderly persons over 60 years. 473 patients (23%) received no response, including 138 children and 57 elderly people over 60 (Palestinian District Liaison office in Gaza).
- **More than 4 in 10 patients' companions denied/delayed:** The approval rate for patient companions' permit applications was 57.5%, but 10.5% were denied and the remaining 32% were pending.
- **Security interrogations:** 20 patients, among them 4 females, were requested for General Security Services interviews at Erez during July. Three were approved and three were denied permits.
- **3 of 17 requests approved for humanitarian health workers through Erez.**

#### Rafah exit

- **Border open briefly:** According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the Rafah border terminal was open for 3 days during the July allowing 79 people to travel for health reasons to Egypt including 28 patients transferred by ambulance. No medical delegates or medical aid entered Gaza through Egypt during the month.

#### Ministry of Health referrals in July

- The Ministry of Health referred 1,881 patients in July to outside care with an estimated cost of **NIS 9,227,765**. Referrals to Gaza non-MoH facilities sharply declined in the last 4 months. The top 5 needed specialties for Gaza patients were in oncology, paediatrics, orthopaedics, hematology and ophthalmology.

## REFERRALS

The Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 1,881 referrals for Gaza patients in July, according to the Medical Referral Directorate data in Ramallah (**Table 1**), 5.5% lower than the monthly average in 2015. Most referrals were to East Jerusalem hospitals (46%), and the highest percentage of the year; the remaining were to West Bank hospitals (20%), Israeli hospitals (19%) and to medical centers within Gaza (8%). Referrals to Egypt (6%) rose slightly due to Rafah terminal opening in July and waiting patients renewing their referrals. Of the total patients referred in July, 1,635 (86%) required Israeli permits for access through Erez checkpoint and 111 (6%) required approval from Egypt to exit through Rafah (and the Rafah border to be accessible).

**Table 1: Monthly referrals of Gaza patients 2016 compared to average 2015 (no. and %)**

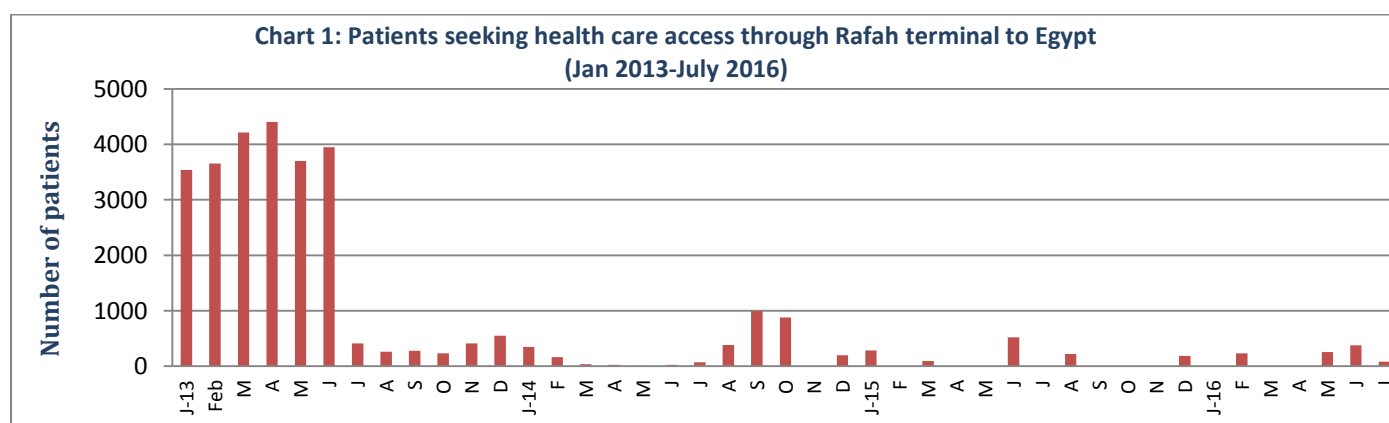
Referral destination	2015 monthly average		Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Total no. and average % 2016
	#	%								
Gaza (non-MoH)	#	251	323	363	402	313	255	139	153	1,948
	%	12.61%	15.7%	16%	17.01%	16.43%	11.63%	7.38%	8.13%	13.18%
WB (MoH / non-MoH)	#	477	430	460	503	407	473	403	379	3,055
	%	23.96%	20.9%	20.27%	21.29%	21.36%	21.58%	21.4%	20.15%	20.99%
East Jerusalem	#	809	865	998	1,000	756	988	840	871	6,318
	%	40.6%	42.05	43.98	42.32	39.69	45.07	44.61	46.31%	43.43%
Jordan	#	3	3	2	0	2	2	1	2	12
	%	0.15%	0.15%	0.09%	0.00%	0.10%	0.09%	0.05%	0.11%	0.08%
Israel	#	312	357	359	365	343	392	391	365	2,572
	%	15.67%	17.36%	15.82%	15.45%	18.01%	17.88%	20.76%	19.4%	17.81%
Egypt	#	139	79	84	93	84	82	109	111	645
	%	6.98%	3.84%	3.83%	3.94%	4.41%	3.73%	5.79%	5.9%	4.49%
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,991</b>	<b>2,057</b>	<b>2,269</b>	<b>2,363</b>	<b>1,905</b>	<b>2,192</b>	<b>1,883</b>	<b>1,881</b>	<b>14,550</b>

Source: MoH Medical Referral Directorate, Ramallah, August 11, 2016.

Of Gaza patients referred, 47% were females and 53% were males. 34% of referrals were children under the age of 18; 19% were elderly patients over 60 years old. Gaza referral patients required treatment in the following specialties: oncology - 446 (24%), pediatrics - 154 (8%), orthopedics - 144 (7.5%), hematology - 137 (7%), ophthalmology - 119 (6%), nuclear medicine - 115 (6%), MRI - 71 (4%), cardiology - 62 (3%), internal medicine - 59 (3%), heart surgery - 55 (3%). The remaining 369 (20%) were for 21 other specialties. The Referral Directorate in Ramallah reported an estimated cost of NIS 9,227,765 for the 1,881 referrals for Gaza patients in July.

## ACCESS

**3 days access to Egypt during July:** According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the Rafah border terminal was open on 3 days during July allowing 2,011 travellers to exit to Egypt, among them 79 who reported they were travelling for health reasons. 28 were transferred by ambulances with 27 companions. No medical delegates or medical aid entered Gaza during the month. From January to July 2016, the Rafah crossing was open a total of only 14 days for humanitarian cases, allowing only 937 patients (138 by ambulance) 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 (**Chart 1**).



Source: Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal.

**Access through Erez crossing:** In July, there were 2,040 applications from patients for permits to cross Erez for health care (56% males and 44% females). 32% were applications for children under 18 years and 16% were for elderly people above 60. Of the total permit applications, 1,085 (53%) were for patients destined to hospitals in East Jerusalem, 530 (26%) to the West Bank, 421 (21%) to Israel, and 4 (0.20%) to Jordan. The top receiving hospitals in July were Makassed, 533 (26%), Augusta Victoria, 405 (20%), Najah University in Nablus, 202 (10%), Tel-Hashomir (Israel) 141 (7%), Al-Ahli hospital in Hebron, 107 (5%), Hadassah (Israel), 106 (5%), St. John hospital, 97 (5%), Msalam center, 75 (4%), and Ichilov (Israel), 49 (2.5%). The remaining 342 (17%) were to 26 other hospitals and medical centers.

In July, the Palestinian District Coordination office reported that 67.5% applications for permits for patients were approved (**Table 2**), 9.16% lower than the monthly average in 2015 (76.66%). 190 applicants (9.31%) were denied access. 473 (23%) did not receive an answer to their applications in time for their hospital appointments and therefore suffered delay in health care. 20 patients were requested for interview with the Israeli security. Of patients applying for permits to cross Erez, 94% received referrals from the Ministry of Health, 3% were self-funded, 1% were funded by charities, and the remaining 2% were covered by other insurance.

**Table 2: Israeli responses to permit requests to cross Erez, by age, sex and GSS interviews, July 2016**

Age group	Total		Approved		Denied		Delayed		Called by GSS*	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
0 - 3	67	132	56	110	0	0	11	22	0	0
4 - 17	176	246	136	203	2	6	38	67	0	1
18 - 40	258	258	170	117	25	59	63	82	2	7
41 - 60	264	288	186	149	22	62	56	77	1	6
Over 60	137	184	115	135	3	11	19	38	1	2
<i>Sub-total</i>	<b>902</b>	<b>1138</b>	<b>663</b>	<b>714</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2040</b>		<b>1,377 (67.5%)</b>		<b>190 (9.31%)</b>		<b>473 (23%)</b>		<b>20 (0.98%)</b>	

\* GSS = Israeli General Security Services

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH –Gaza

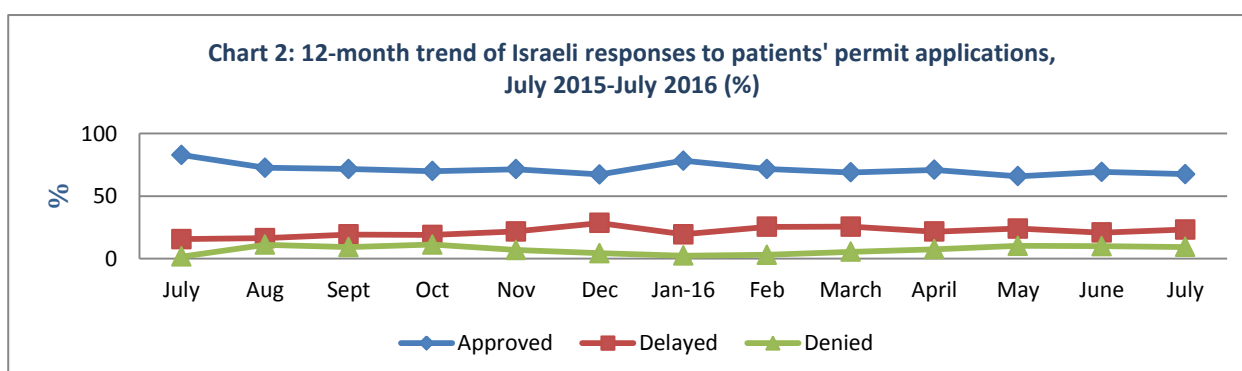
**Table 3** shows that total patient permit applications in the period from January to July 2016 were 22.6% higher than the corresponding month in 2015 and the approval rate was 11.7% lower. The denial rate was 3.7% and the delayed rate was 8% higher in 2016.

**Chart 2** shows a decline after July 2015 in Israeli approvals for patients' permit applications and an increase in delays. The decline in approval rate has been a trend in 2016 since January which had the highest approval rate this year (78.22%). Delays were higher in 2016 compared to the 2015 average, possibly due to an increase in GSS requests for security interviews. Denials have been increasing since the beginning of the year.

**Table 3: Israeli responses to permit requests to cross Erez, by sex of applicant, 2016 compared to 2015**

Period	January -July 2015		January-July 2016	
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,798</b>		<b>14,467</b>	
	(F:5,470; M:6,328)		(F:6,675;M:7,792)	
Approved	9,667	81.94%	10,162	70.24%
	(F:4,705; M:4,962)		(F:4,998 ;M:5,164)	
Denied	373	3.16%	993	6.86%
	(F:81; M:292)		(F:302;M:691)	
Delayed	1,758	14.9%	3,312	22.89%
	(F:684; M:1,074)		(F:1,375 ;M:1,937)	
GSS	121	1.03%	516	3.57%
	(F:30; M:91)		(F:176;M:340)	

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

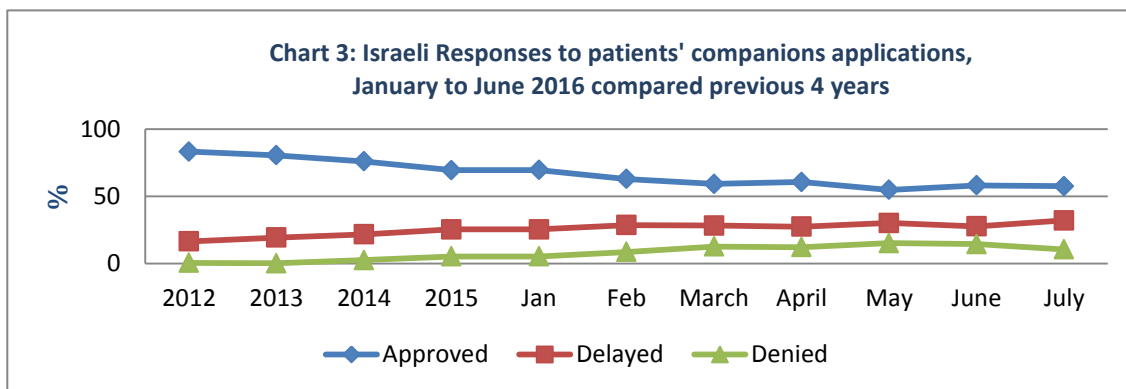


Patients sometimes reapply after being denied a permit, or if the treatment is urgent and no response has been received. July data showed that out of the 2,040 applications submitted in the Palestinian coordination office, 193 (9.46%) were repeat applications for patients: 4 attempts for 1 patient, 3 attempts for 13 patients, and 2 attempts for 164 patients.

**Denied care:** 190 patients (138 males; 52 females) were denied permits to access through Erez, including 8 children and 14 patients over 60 years old. 88.42% of the denied patients had appointments in East Jerusalem and West Bank hospitals, 10.53% in Israel and 1.05% in Jordan. Specialty wise, the following specialties were on the top of denied patients, orthopedics (66); neurosurgery (23); oncology (20); ophthalmology (11); urology (11); and the remaining 59 referrals were for 15 other specialties.

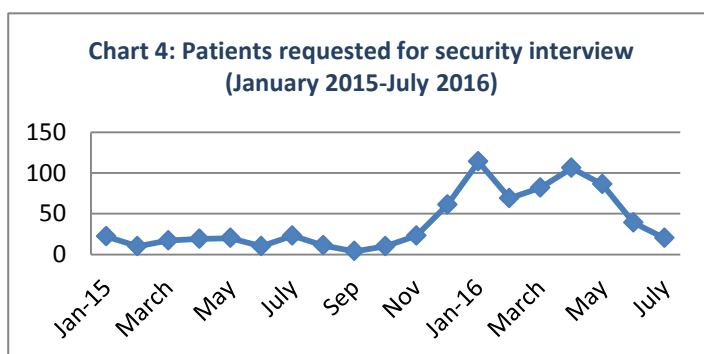
**Delayed care:** 473 patients (286 males; 187 females) were delayed in reaching health care in July, among them 138 children and 57 patients over the age of 60; they received no response to their applications and consequently lost their hospital appointments. The delayed patients had scheduled appointments in: oncology (107); ophthalmology (47); hematology (44); pediatrics (41); orthopedics (37); nuclear medicine and cardiology (29) each; neurosurgery (18); and the remaining 121 referrals were for 17 other specialties. Out of the 473 delayed patient applications, the status of 397 (84%) was pending but 30 (6%) were asked to change their companions, 18 were waiting for security interview appointment, 28 were asked to reapply. 32 patients out of the delayed were eventually approved late, within the first 2 weeks of August 2016.

**Patients' companions:** In July, 2,222 applications for relatives accompanying patients (including parents of children) were submitted to the Israeli authorities. Only



57.5% were approved; 10.5% were denied and 32% were delayed and pending (**Chart 3**). Only one first-degree relative is permitted to accompany patients and permits are conditional on security clearance for those aged 55 or younger. A clear decline can be noted in the approval rates for patients' companions from 2012 to May 2016.

**Security Interviews:** 20 patients (16 males; 4 females), among them 1 male patient under age of 18, and 3 (2 men and a women) over 60, were called for security interviews by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS). The 20 patients requested for interviews were seeking medical care for: oncology (6), hematology (4), cardiology (3), general surgery (2), neurosurgery (2), ophthalmology (1), orthopedics (1) and internal medicine (1). The number of patients requested for a security interview as a condition to process their permit applications has decreased since May 2016 to 2015 levels (**Chart 4**). Of the 20 patients requested for for GSS, only 3 were approved, 3 were denied and 14 were pending.



**Patients and companions cross Erez:** The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,334 Gaza patients (and 1,231 companions) crossed Erez in July to access Palestinian, Israeli, or Jordanian hospitals; of these, 65 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulances), with 63 companions. Erez crossing was open for 26 days during regular daytime working hours and closed for 5 days (5 Saturdays) in July.

**Humanitarian health workers face limited access through at Erez:** Of 17 permit applications for health personnel submitted by WHO for entrance or exit to the Gaza Strip, only 3 (18%) applications were approved. All WHO staff and 7 out of 10 (70%) for health cluster partners' applications were denied.