

World Health Organization
occupied Palestinian territory

MONTHLY REPORT
February 2018

Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

2,719

referrals to health facilities outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health were issued for Gaza patients

56%

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

- **63%** Gaza patients
- **49%** Gaza patient companions

85%

of West Bank patient and companion permit applications to Israeli authorities approved

8

Gaza patients called for security interview

CASE STUDY *Gaza patients face heavy financial costs to travel out of Gaza for health care*

Address: 10 Abu Obaida Street, Sheikh Jarrah, Jerusalem
Tel: +972-2-581-0193 | www.emro.who.int/countries/pse
Email: emacopseadv@who.int

Ref: Two
(Published 11 April 2018)

Part 1 Referrals

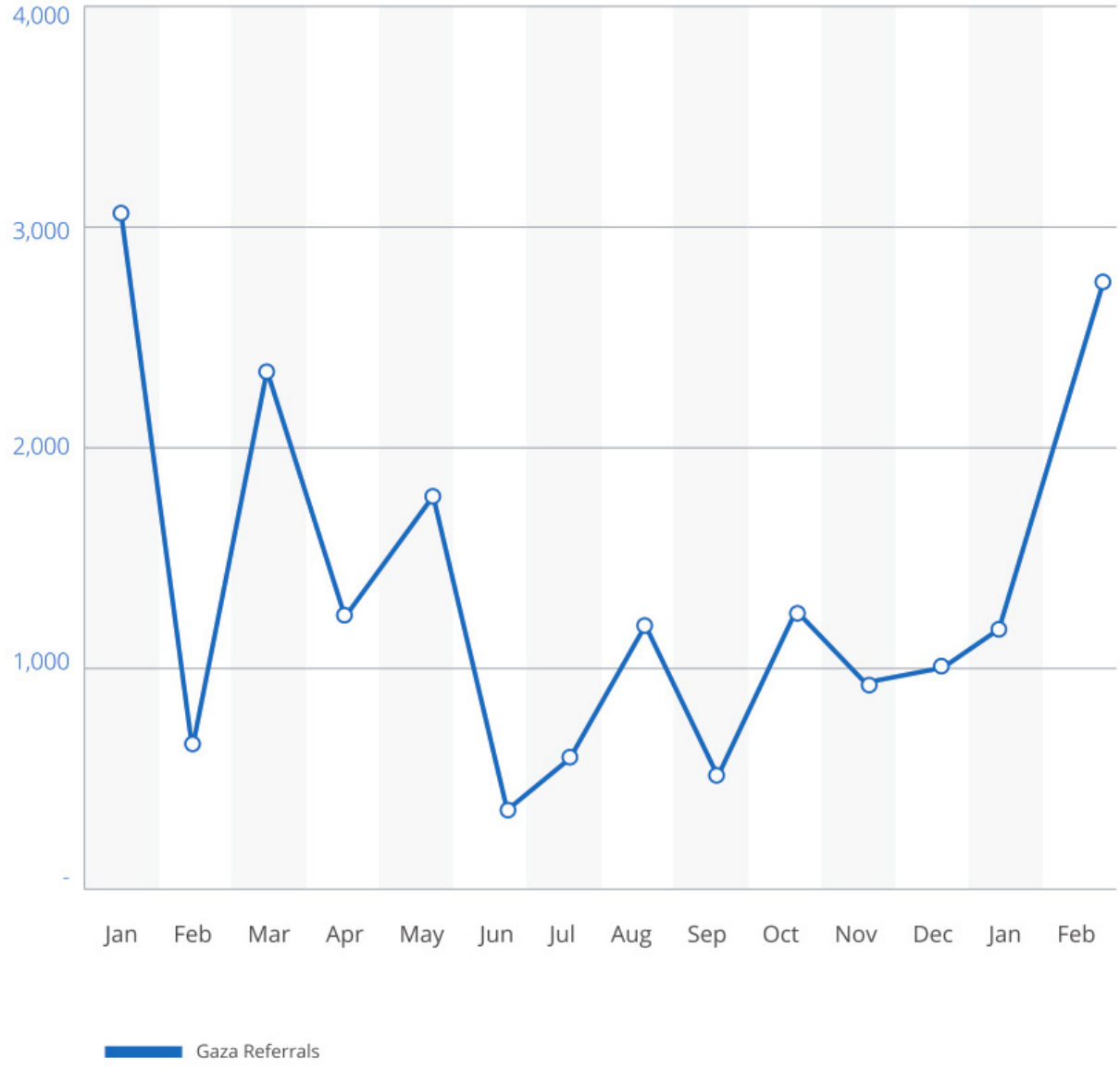
February Referrals by the Ministry of Health

In February, the Palestinian Ministry of Health approved 2,719 referral requests for Palestinian patients in Gaza to non-Ministry of Health facilities. Chart 1 shows the number of referral documents issued to patients in Gaza from January 2017 to February 2018.

2,719
referrals

approved for financial coverage for Gaza patients outside the Palestinian MoH

Chart 1: **Total referrals approved for West Bank and Gaza patients, Jan 2017 - Jan 2018**



Part 2 ACCESS

The Gaza Strip

Of 1,801 applications to cross Erez for health care in February, approximately a third (30%) were for children under age of 18 and one in six (17.5%) for patients over age of 60. Almost half (48%) of applications were for female patients and 92% of applications were for medical care funded by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

More than half (53%) of applications to cross Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, a quarter (26%) for Israeli hospitals, a fifth (20%) for hospitals in the West Bank and one referral was to Jordan. Makassed Hospital (27%) and Augusta Victoria Hospital (22%), both in East Jerusalem, were the receiving hospitals for almost half of referrals. The top four specialties accounted for more than half of referrals (55.5%): oncology (27%); cardiology (10%); haematology (10%); and paediatrics (8%). The remaining 44.5% were for 25 other specialties.

Approved permit applications: 1,132 (M: 568; F: 564), or 63% of the 1,801 applications to cross Erez in February 2018 were approved, a slight increase compared to the 2017 acceptance rate of 54%, see Chart 2. Over a third (36%) of those approved were children under age of 18 and more than a fifth (22%) were elderly people over 60 years of age.

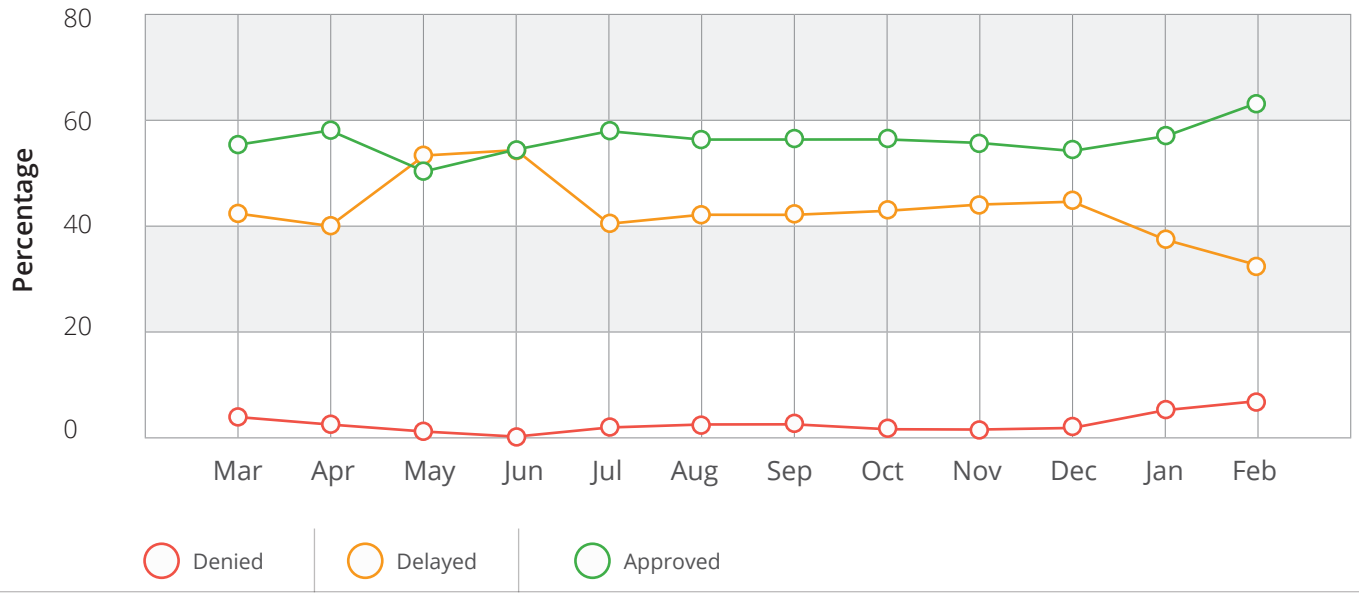
1,801
Patients applications
to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to access health care

63%
approved

7%
denied

30%
delayed

Chart 2 Trend of 12 months Israeli responses to Gaza patients› permit Mar 2017 - Feb 2018 (%)



Denied care: 129 patient applications (66 male; 63 female), or 7% of the total, were denied permission to cross Erez for health care in February. These included five children under the age of 18 years and nine patients aged 60 years or older. A fifth (26 patients) of those denied had been referred for orthopaedics; 18 for neurosurgery, 15 for oncology and 12 for surgery.

Delayed care: 540 patient applications (306 male; 234 female), or 30% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. Of these, 130 applications were for children under the age of 18 and 54 applications were for patients aged 60 years or older. Half of applications were for the top four specialties: 111 or 21% of delayed patient applications were for oncology; 11% (61) for cardiology; 9% (50) for orthopaedics; and 9% (47) for hematology. More than 30% of the delayed patients submitted their applications over than 30 days prior to their hospital appointment.

Security interrogation

Eight adult male patients were called for security interviews by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS), among them two men over 60 years old. Two of the patients had been referred for cancer treatment or investigation and two for cardiology. None of the eight patients was approved during the month.

8

patients called for security interrogation

8 not approved

Patient companions:

In February there were 2,077 applications to Israeli authorities by relatives for permits to cross Erez to accompany patients. These include parents or other companions applying to accompany children. Only one first-degree relative is permitted to accompany each Gaza patient and permits are conditional to security clearance. In February, 1,019 (49%) patient companion applications were approved showing a slight increase compare to previous months, see Chart 3. 250 applications (12%) were denied and 1,179 (39%) remained pending by the date of the patient's medical appointment.

2,077

patient companion applications

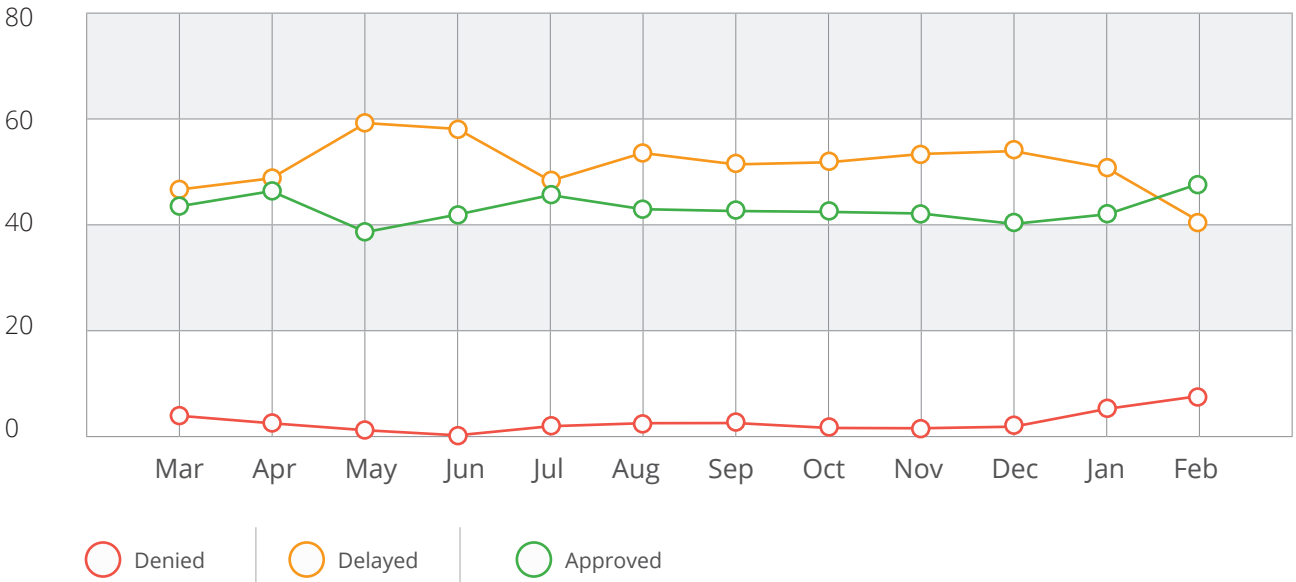
to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to accompany patients

49% approved

12% denied

39% delayed

Chart 3 **Israeli Responses to patients› companions applications, Mar 2017- Feb 2018**



Patients and companions crossing Erez:

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 999 Gaza patients and 891 companions crossed Erez in February to access Palestinian or Israeli hospitals. 94 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulances, with 92 companions. During the month, Erez crossing was open for 24 days for daytime working hours and closed on four days (Four Saturdays).

999 **patients** crossed Erez for health care

891

patient companions crossed Erez

Rafah crossing – Egypt



The Rafah border terminal was open in both directions for 3 days and for return only for one day during February. According to the terminal authority, 1,555 travelers exited towards Egypt, among them 160 (4%) were travelling for health reasons. No medical aid or medical delegates entered Gaza via Rafah during the month.

The West Bank

In February, there were 16,056 applications by West Bank patients and patient companions to Israeli authorities to access health care in East Jerusalem and Israel. Restrictions on the movement of Palestinians in the West Bank are less severe for certain sections of the population, with 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 16,056 applications, 84.7% (13,593) were approved, 14.0% (2,261) were unsuccessful and 1.3% (202) were pending any reply at the time of monthly reporting.

16,056
patient and companion applications
to Israeli authorities to access health care in East Jerusalem and Israel

84.7% approved

14.0% denied

1.3% pending
at the time of monthly reporting

Case Study

Siham is a 53-year-old woman from Gaza, diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL) in 2013



"I've had to borrow money from friends. I should be at the Augusta Victoria hospital in a week and I have a scan at Assuta hospital in Tel Aviv, but I don't have enough money for transport. Last time I was delayed at Erez for six hours. By the time I got out, it was 5:30 in the evening, so I had to take a taxi to Jerusalem by myself. The cost varies between NIS300 to NIS450 [approx. $85 to $130] depending on the taxi driver. The journey to Assuta would cost me NIS1200 [approx. $340]. I don't have that. I speak no Hebrew and I have to keep the driver with me as he's the only one who can translate for me or fill in all the forms. I just don't know what to do with myself. We sold all the furniture in the house and now we barely have anything left. I wish there was at least casual work available so we could cover the costs of my journey in and out of Jerusalem and the medicines we have to buy. I don't mind being physically tired as long as I know we can pay for my expenses. I've been avoiding looking people in the eye in the street, so I don't bump into people we owe money. I've been coming to Augusta Victoria Hospital since January 2017. All my travel expenses and the drugs I've had to buy are covered by loans my husband and I have borrowed. We haven't been able to pay anyone back. It's humiliating and distressing. I feel I have been stripped of my dignity.

> ***We sold all the furniture in the house and now we barely have anything left… I feel I have been stripped of my dignity.***

Being a cancer patient from Gaza is emotionally, physically and financially draining. They didn't have the medicines I needed in Gaza so I was referred outside. My chemotherapy treatment was interrupted for five months before I was finally allowed to leave Gaza in January 2017. By the time I left the cancer had spread. The course of treatment at the Augusta Victoria was supposed to finish in six months. It took me ten months because of delays getting a permit, meaning I had to miss and reschedule my appointments.

The treatment leaves me feeling frail and in need of a companion. But I've got no one. My husband is the only one in my family who meets the age restriction criteria [to not have additional lengthy security checks] to apply for a permit. He never made it out. We always receive a message that his application is still under consideration... I'd rather receive treatment in Gaza, to avoid all the costs and the humiliating experience we have to endure every time we have to go out of Gaza through Erez. I'm treated like I am a threat but I'm not a threat to anyone! I'm just a patient trying to get treatment."