

Up to 45% of medicines and lab supplies are not available at clinic level in Gaza (Sourani primary health centre pharmacy, Shujaiya, Gaza Strip, September 2016) ©WHO



## Health Access for Referral Patients from the Gaza Strip

Ref: 8 (October 11, 2016)

### Summary: August 2016

#### Erez crossing

- **Highest number of permit applications ever – lowest approval rate for patients in 7 years:** Of 2,394 patient permit applications to exit Gaza through Erez checkpoint for hospital appointments in August, 60.3% were approved, the lowest approval rate since May 2009. 186 patients (7.8%) were denied permits, including 5 children and 16 elderly persons over 60 years. 764 patients (32%) received no response, including 199 children and 88 elderly people over 60 (Palestinian District Liaison office in Gaza).
- **A father who took his 10-year-old daughter to hospital – detained at Erez and released after 6 days.**
- **1 in 2 patient companions denied/delayed:** The approval rate for permit applications of patient companions was 51.2%; 8.6% of the companions were denied and the remaining 40.2% were pending.
- **Security interrogations:** 24 patients, among them 4 females, were requested by the General Security Services for interviews at Erez during August. Four were approved and the rest were pending.
- **Humanitarian health workers through Erez:** Of 10 requests, 6 approved, 3 denied and 1 pending.

#### Rafah exit

- **No exit for patients:** Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal reported that the Rafah border terminal was open for exit on two days only in August, and restricted to pilgrims. No patients were allowed to travel for health reasons to Egypt. No medical delegates or medical aid entered Gaza through Egypt during the month.

#### Ministry of Health referrals in August

- The Ministry of Health issued 1,967 referrals for 1,918 patients in August to outside care with an estimated cost of **NIS 8,982,054**. The top 5 needed specialties for Gaza patients were in oncology, orthopaedics, paediatrics, ophthalmology and hematology.

## MoH Referrals in August

The Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 1,967 referrals for patients (representing 1,918 individuals) in August, according to the Medical Referral Directorate data in Ramallah (**Table 1**), similar to the monthly average in 2015. Most referrals were to East Jerusalem hospitals (48.5%), the highest percentage of the year; the remaining were to West Bank hospitals (20%), Israeli hospitals (17%) and to medical centers within Gaza (8%). Referrals to Egypt (6.6%) rose slightly from July, despite the closure of Rafah border this month. Of total referrals in August, 1,683 (85.6%) required Israeli permits for access through Erez checkpoint and 130 (6.6%) 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	Aug	Total / % 2016
Gaza (non-MoH)	#	251	323	363	402	313	255	139	153	2,102
	%	12.61%	15.7%	16%	17.01%	16.43%	11.63%	7.38%	8.13%	12.73%
WB (MoH / non-MoH)	#	477	430	460	503	407	473	403	379	3,452
	%	23.96%	20.9%	20.27%	21.29%	21.36%	21.58%	21.4%	20.15%	20.9%
East Jerusalem	#	809	865	998	1,000	756	988	840	871	7,273
	%	40.6%	42.05	43.98	42.32	39.69	45.07	44.61	46.31%	44.03%
Jordan	#	3	3	2	0	2	2	1	2	15
	%	0.15%	0.15%	0.09%	0.00%	0.10%	0.09%	0.05%	0.11%	0.09%
Israel	#	312	357	359	365	343	392	391	365	2,900
	%	15.67%	17.36%	15.82%	15.45%	18.01%	17.88%	20.76%	19.4%	17.56%
Egypt	#	139	79	84	93	84	82	109	111	775
	%	6.98%	3.84%	3.83%	3.94%	4.41%	3.73%	5.79%	5.9%	4.69%
<b>Total</b>		1,991	2,057	2,269	2,363	1,905	2,192	1,883	1,881	1,967

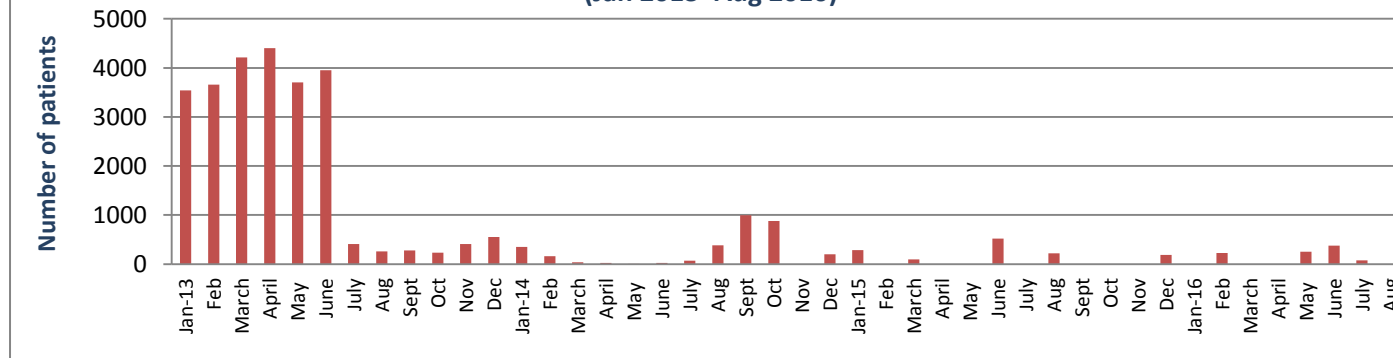
Source: MoH Medical Referral Directorate, Ramallah, September 28, 2016.

Of Gaza patients referred, 46.5% were females and 53.5% were males. 33% of referrals were children under the age of 18; 18% were elderly patients over 60 years old. Gaza referral patients required treatment in the following specialties: oncology – 18.5%, orthopedics - 9.5%, pediatrics - 8%, ophthalmology – 6.6%, hematology – 6.6%, nuclear medicine - 6%, cardiology –3.8%, general surgery – 3.7%, neurosurgery- 3%, urology 3%. The remaining 31.3% were for 22 other specialties. The Referral Directorate in Ramallah reported an estimated cost of NIS 8,982,054 for the 1,967 referrals for Gaza patients in August.

## ACCESS

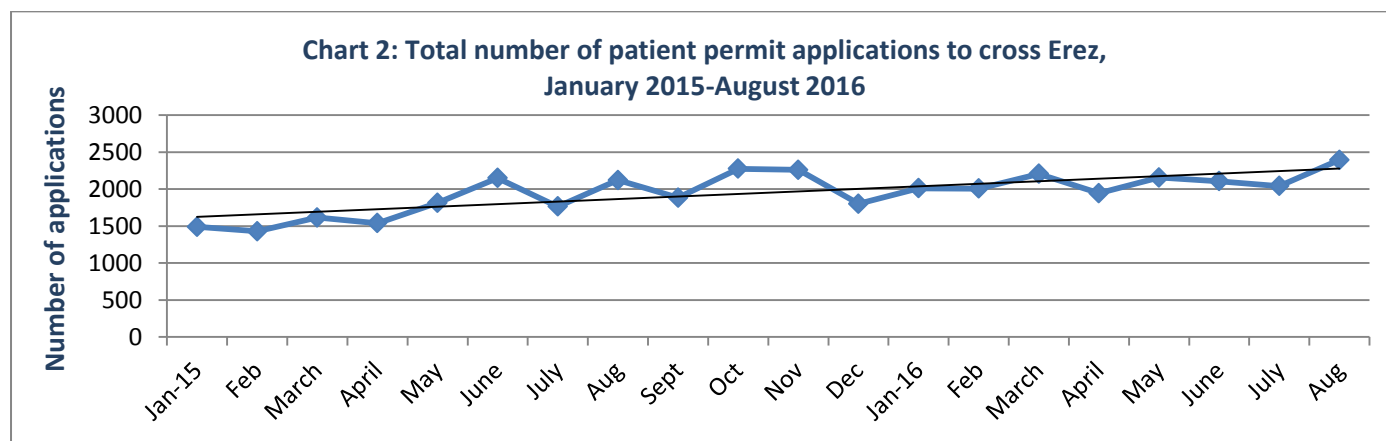
**No patient access to Egypt during August:** According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the Rafah border terminal was open on 2 days during August for exit for pilgrims only allowing 1,564 pilgrims to travel to Saudi Arabia through Egypt. No medical delegates or medical aid entered Gaza during the month. From January to August 2016, the Rafah crossing was open only 16 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**).

**Chart 1: Patients seeking health care access through Rafah terminal to Egypt (Jan 2013- Aug 2016)**



Source: Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal.

**Access through Erez crossing:** In August, there were 2,394 applications from patients (56% male and 44% female) for permits to cross Erez for health care, the highest number of patient applications ever submitted in one month (**Chart 2**). Of the total permit applications, 1,284 (53.6%) were for patients seeking treatment in hospitals in East Jerusalem, 637 (26.6%) in the West Bank, 468 (19.5%) in Israel, and 5 (0.21%) in Jordan. The top receiving hospitals in August were Makassed, 648 (27%) and Augusta Victoria, 442 (18.5%) in East Jerusalem; Najah University in Nablus, 229 (9.6%); Tel-Hashomir 123 (5%) and Hadassah, 121 (5%) in Israel; Al-Ahli hospital in Hebron, 111 (4.6%); St. John hospital, 111 (4.6%) in East Jerusalem; Msalam center, 85 (3.5%) in Ramallah; St. Joseph hospital, 83 (3.5%) in East Jerusalem; and Asuta hospital 60 (2.5%) in Israel. The remaining 381 (15.9%) were to 29 other hospitals and medical centers.



In August, the Palestinian District Coordination office reported that 60.32% applications for permits for patients were approved (**Table 2**), considerably lower (16.3%) than the monthly average in 2015 (76.66%) and the lowest rate in more than 7 years, since May 2009 (57.8%). 186 applicants (7.8%) were denied access and 764 (32%) did not receive an answer to their applications in time for their hospital appointments, delaying their medical care. 24 patients were requested for security interviews with the Israeli security. Of patients applying for permits to cross Erez, 93% received referrals from the Ministry of Health, 3.5% were self-funded, and 2% were supported by Noor Ala-Alam, and 1.5% by other organizations. 10.7% were children aged 0-3 years, 20.7% were children aged 4-17, 25.5% were adults aged 18-40 years, 27.3% were 41-60 years and 15.8% were aged over 60 years.

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

Age group	Total		Approved		Denied		Delayed		Called by GSS*	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
0 - 3	95	162	76	122	0	0	19	40	0	0
4 - 17	186	309	134	216	1	4	51	89	0	0
18 - 40	278	332	140	118	29	80	109	134	2	9
41 - 60	329	325	206	158	20	36	103	131	2	5
Over 60	171	207	136	138	4	12	31	57	1	5
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>1059</b>	<b>1335</b>	<b>692</b>	<b>752</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>313</b>	<b>451</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,394</b>		<b>1,444 (60.32%)</b>		<b>186 (7.77%)</b>		<b>764 (31.91%)</b>		<b>24 (1%)</b>	

\* GSS = Israeli General Security Services

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH –Gaza

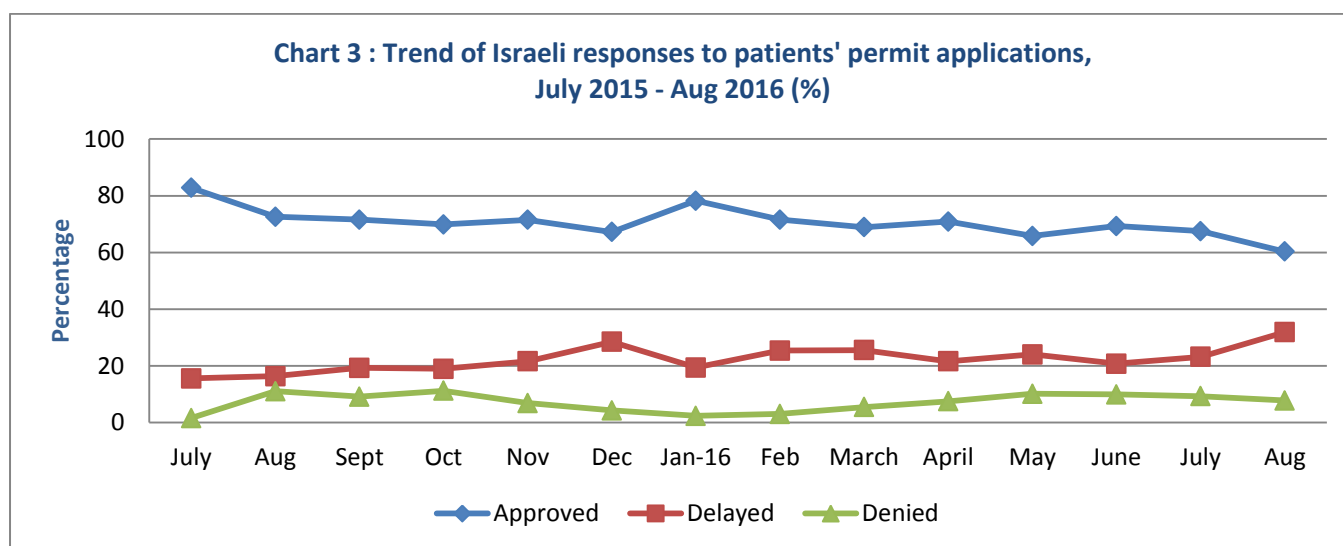
**Table 3** shows that total number of permit applications from patients from January to August 2016 were 21% higher than the corresponding period in 2015 and the approval rate was 11.7% lower. The denial rate was 2.6% and the delayed rate was 9% higher in 2016.

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

Period	January-August 2015		January-August 2016	
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,919</b> (F:6,495; M:7,424)		<b>16,861</b> (F:7,734;M:9,127)	
<b>Approved</b>	11,206 (F:5,520; M:5,686)	80.51%	11,606 (F:5,690 ;M:5,916)	68.83%
<b>Denied</b>	608 (F:168; M:440)	4.37%	1,179 (F:356;M:823)	6.99%
<b>Delayed</b>	2,105 (F:807; M:1,298)	15.12%	4,076 (F:1,688 ;M:2,388)	24.18%
<b>GSS</b>	132 (F:32; M:100)	0.95%	540 (F:180;M:360)	3.2%

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

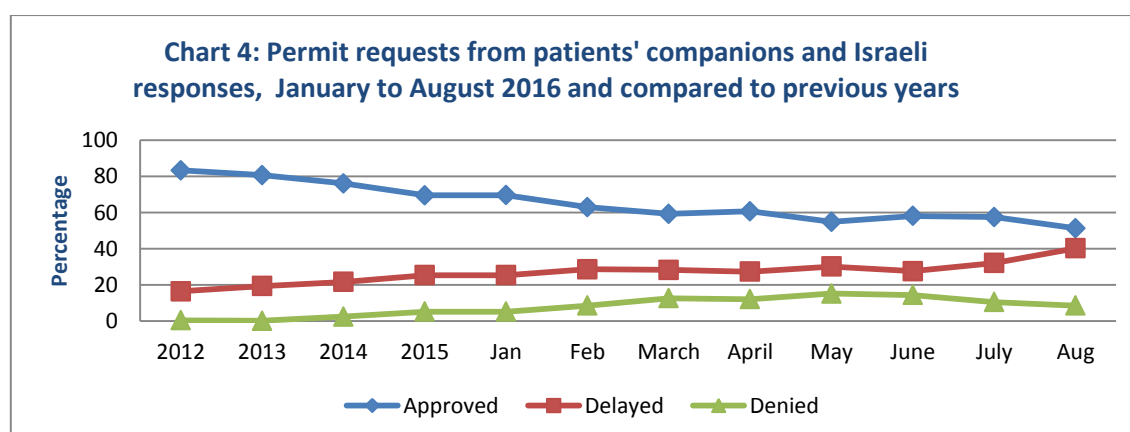
Israeli approvals declined after July 2015 for patients' permit applications and delays increased possibly due to an increase in GSS requests for security interviews, seen in **Chart 3**. In 2016, the approval rate has dropped 18% from a high in January of 78.2% to 60.3% in August.



Patients sometimes reapply after being denied a permit, or if urgent treatment is needed and no response has been received. August data showed that out of the 2,394 applications submitted in the Palestinian coordination office, 311 (13%) were repeat applications for patients: 5 attempts for 2 patients, 4 attempts for 1 patient, 3 attempts for 25 patients and 2 attempts for 249 patients.

**Denied care:** 186 patients (132 males; 54 females) were denied permits to access through Erez, including 5 children and 16 patients over 60 years old. 90% of the denied patients had appointments in East Jerusalem and West Bank hospitals and 10% in Israel. The following specialties were needed by patients who were denied permits: orthopedics (71); neurosurgery (20); oncology (13); Internal medicine (10); urology (10); and the remaining 62 referrals were for 17 other specialties.

**Delayed care:** 764 patients (451 males; 313 females) were delayed in reaching health care in August, among them 199 children and 88 patients over the age of 60; they had received no response to their applications and consequently lost their scheduled hospital appointments. The delayed patients had scheduled appointments in: oncology (151); ophthalmology (81); cardiology (79); hematology (65); orthopedics (64); pediatrics (49); nuclear medicine (44); neurosurgery (40); ENT (27); internal medicine (25); obstetrics/gynecology (20); and urology (20), and the remaining 99 referrals were for 15 other specialties. Out of the 764 delayed patient applications, the status of 571 (75%) was pending, 43 (5.6%) were asked to change their companions, 17 were waiting for an appointment for a security interview, 87 were asked to reapply, 5 were asked to make a new appointment, 24 were waiting for a response to their applications after having a security interview and 17 applications were returned ('not suitable'). 46 patients out of those delayed in August were eventually approved late, within the first 2 weeks of September 2016, requiring rescheduling of hospital appointments.

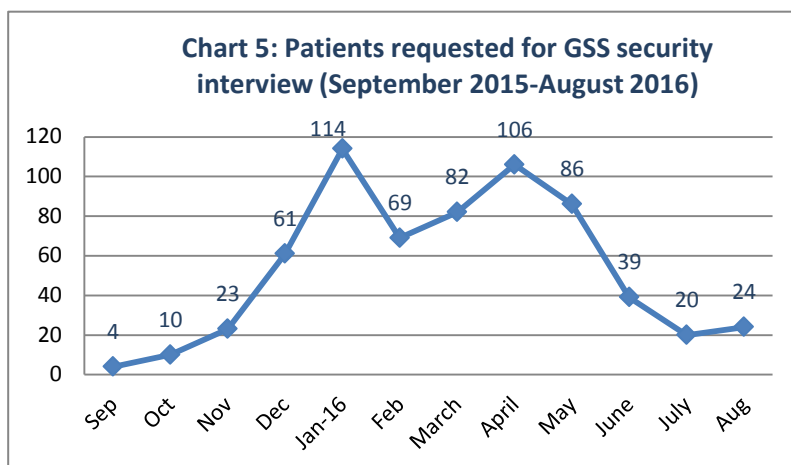


**Patients' companions:** In August, 2,564 applications for relatives accompanying patients (including parents of children) were submitted to the Israeli authorities. Only 51.2% were approved; 8.6% were denied and 40.2% were delayed and pending (**Chart 4**). Only one first-degree relative is permitted 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. A sharp decline in the approval rate and a sharp increase of delayed in August 2016.

**Security Interviews:** 24 patients (20 males; 4 females), among them 6 (5 males; 1 female) over 60 were called for security interviews by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS). The number of patients requested for a security interview as a condition to process their permit applications has varied widely by month in 2016 (**Chart 5**). Of the 24 patients requested for for GSS, 4 were approved, and the rest were pending.

**Patients and companions cross Erez:** The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,391 Gaza patients (and 1,298 companions) crossed Erez in August to access Palestinian, Israeli, or Jordanian hospitals; of these, 99 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulances, with 92 companions. Erez crossing was open for 27 days during regular daytime working hours and closed for 4 days (5 Saturdays) in August.

**Humanitarian health workers face limited access through at Erez:** The WHO submitted a total of 10 permit applications during August. Six WHO staff applied: 5 were approved and 1 (to enter Gaza) was denied. Three health cluster partners applied to exit Gaza: one was approved and two were denied. One application for an intenational medical delegate was pending.



#### Father of ill child detained at Erez and held for 6 days

Khalid Mustafa Al Lidawi, a 44 year old man from Rafah city was arrested on August, 10, 2016, at Erez checkpoint while accompanying his 10 year old daughter, Raghad, to Hadassah Medical Center in Jerusalem, according to Al Mezan Center for Human Rights in Gaza. Raghad suffers from a metabolic disease and has been receiving medical treatment at Hadassah Medical Center in Jerusalem. Her father had accompanied her several times previously after having obtained permits to travel via Erez crossing. Khalid was arrested for 6 days and released without charges.