

Press release

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Availability and integration of health data for refugees and migrants in Europe

The WHO Regional Office for Europe has commissioned a new report reviewing evidence on the availability and integration of data for health and health care among refugees and migrants in health information systems across the WHO European Region. Results are intended to support the 53 Member States by informing national policies and international cooperation activities to improve refugee and migrant data. The research was conducted under the leadership of Professor Dr. Kayvan Bozorgmehr, Department of Population Medicine and Health Services Research and research group leader at the University Hospital Heidelberg.

“Reliable, population-based data on health and health care are essential for evidence-based planning of required services and policies,” says Kayvan Bozorgmehr, Professor for Population Medicine and Health Services Research.

“However, many gaps in the evidence-base exist for refugees and migrants. This means that social inequities and important morbidities are missed. Our study summarizes currently available evidence on the data situation among countries of the WHO European region and deduces important policy options to improve the current situation.”

The aim of the report is to analyze the availability and integration of data on health and health care among refugees and migrants in the 53 Member States of the WHO European Region. In a comprehensive literature review, researchers examined data sources and results of over 700 studies, published between 2000 and 2018, reporting health data for refugees and migrants in Member States.

„Our study shows that only 25 of the 53 Member States routinely collect and report data on health and health care among refugees and migrants,” says Louise Biddle, co-author of the report and researcher at the University Hospital Heidelberg. “Few countries have integrated data collection systems and population-based registers which allow for meaningful results at a national level. Fragmented systems based on notifiable illnesses or on medical records are much more common.” Furthermore, existing options to improve the data situation are not sufficiently utilized. “Expanding migration-sensitive health monitoring surveys, as well as providing options for targeted data linkage among existing data collection systems could improve the data situation, even in those countries without population-based registers,” concludes Rosa Jahn, co-author and researcher at the University Hospital Heidelberg.

“The aim of the report was not just to capture the status quo,” says Kayvan Bozorgmehr. “The report is intended to support political decision-makers by deducting relevant and practicable policy options from the evidence to improve the data situation for refugees and migrants. These options include the harmonization of population group definitions, improved coordination and governance of routine data collection, regular analysis of available evidence, the inclusion of refugees and migrants in existing data collection systems, as well the exchange of experiences and expertise on data collection systems between Member States.” The Migration and Health programme at the Office of the Regional Director in the WHO European Region facilitates this process. “The report is a key publication and part of our broader work to inform policymakers with evidence on public health issues related to migration,” explains Santino Severoni, WHO Special Advisor for Migration and Health and head of the programme.

Finally, the report highlights the necessity of preventing the misuse of health data for political and bureaucratic purposes outside of the health sector. In this matter, it ascribes particular importance to the WHO to take on a coordinating role as part of their mandate for health issues in the multi-lateral system of the United Nations.

The report was published as part of the „Health Evidence Network“ (HEN), an information service for public health decision-makers in the WHO European Region, which supports public health decision-makers to use the best available evidence in their own decision-making in consideration of their national contexts. The HEN reports aim to strengthen links between evidence, health policies and improvements in public health.

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Prof. Dr. Kayvan Bozorgmehr
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