

## Press release

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Research projects  
Nutrition / healthcare / nursing, Psychology, Social studies  
transregional, national



## KU psychologists develop an educational Covid app for refugees

**Educating young refugees about the path of infection of the coronavirus via a smartphone app and providing them with a basis for an informed decision about the covid vaccination - these are the goals of a project coordinated by the Chair of Clinical and Biological Psychology (Prof. Dr. Rita Rosner) at the KU in which the University of Würzburg and the HSD Regensburg are also involved.**

The one-year project is funded by the German Research Foundation DFG, which set up a special funding program for research into epidemics and pandemics after the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. The DFG received 280 proposals for this program. The KU's cooperative project is one of 51 projects nationwide that have been granted funding.

Since 2015, about 1.7 million refugees have sought asylum in Germany. Most of them still live in mass accommodation facilities. The media has reported on the large risk of high covid incidence rates occurring in collective housing for refugees. In addition, children, adolescents, and young adults are more likely to remain asymptomatic when infected. Thus, they may inadvertently transmit the virus.

The aim of the project "Covid apps for young refugees to prevent infection and promote vaccination readiness" is to empower the participants to take adequate preventive measures against a coronavirus transmission and to help them make an informed decision on vaccination. Project coordinator Dr. Hannah Comteße of the Department of Clinical and Biological Psychology explains: "Many of the adolescents and young adults have fled as early as in childhood or adolescence, so their educational biography in terms of biological and medical knowledge has also been interrupted. Likewise, they have often lacked access to culturally sensitive information during the pandemic." That is why, as Comteße stresses, especially in the confined environment of collective housing, it is important to keep relying on preventative education.

The researchers deliberately chose a smartphone app as the primary channel for communicating information. For one thing, this corresponds to the everyday habits of the age group and therefore offers the possibility of reaching a significantly larger number of individuals. On the other hand, an app makes it possible to systematically capture the increase in knowledge. Technically, the project is based on an existing application of the University of Würzburg, which has been adapted in terms of content and expanded to include playful elements. "We want to use it to convey basic biological knowledge and explain, for example, what viruses are and how vaccines work in the body, how an infection takes place and what you can do to protect yourself," explains Comteße. The content will be communicated in several languages and in a culturally appropriate way using people with whom users can identify. In addition, the researchers want to respond to current myths and rumors that also circulate in collective housing - such as the fear that mRNA vaccines might be able to change a person's genome or lead to infertility.

To complement the app, KU researchers are developing a psychological intervention that some of the app users will additionally take part in. "Behavioral change first and foremost requires a solid foundation of knowledge. For some people, however, other variables are also relevant that either hinder or motivate - such as concerns about personal risks," says Comteße. The project therefore also analyzes, whether the app itself is sufficient to for example increase

people's willingness to get vaccinated, or whether personal interaction is also required. In a next step, the researchers will now use their contacts in shelters to recruit participants.

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