

Toolkit for assessing health system capacity to manage large influxes of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants



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International Organization for Migration (IOM)
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Abstract

In recent years, the WHO European Region has seen a marked increase in arrivals of mixed flows of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. Their journey to Europe is often long and treacherous, with numerous health and safety risks along the way. It is imperative that the health needs of these vulnerable groups be addressed by transiting and receiving countries using human rights principles and with careful coordination across sectors.

The toolkit for assessing health system capacity to manage large influxes of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants was developed by the WHO Public Health Aspects of Migration in Europe (PHAME) project of the Migration and Health Programme because refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants arriving in large groups present a particular set of individual and public health needs, and assessment of preparedness and capacity requires a specialized approach. The aim of the toolkit is to support national ministries of health in leading multisectoral collaboration to optimize the capacity of the health sector to manage large influxes of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants, consequently improving their health and reducing health inequities.

Keywords

MIGRANTS, REFUGEES, HEALTH SYSTEM CAPACITY, PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE

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Edited by: Teresa Lander

Designed by: Marta Pasqualato

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Foreword

The toolkit for assessing health system capacity to manage large influxes of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants comes at a crucial time. Migration is a growing worldwide phenomenon: an unprecedented situation that constitutes not merely a humanitarian crisis in our Region, but a crisis of humanity. Over the past 70 years, the WHO European Region has experienced a major increase in migration, with a current peak of over one million migrants arriving in Europe in 2015 alone. This influx requires an urgent and coordinated response which respects the fundamental right of health for all and places a special emphasis on the most vulnerable people. In line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations, in which countries pledged that “no-one will be left behind”, migrants are recognized as vulnerable people. Thus, there is an urgent demand for evidence-based public health interventions to address the health needs of migrants that could save a significant number of lives and reduce suffering and ill health.

In 2012, the WHO Regional Office for Europe established the Public Health Aspects of Migration in Europe (PHAME) project with the financial support of the Ministry of Health of Italy. In order to protect the health of migrants and of the host population, the WHO PHAME project aims to assist Member States in responding adequately to the public health challenges of migration. Member States have repeatedly called for a technical guide to assessing health system capacity and preparedness at the initial phase of migrant arrival; consequently, this tailored toolkit was jointly developed with the European countries at the front line of the

crisis. Close collaboration with Member States and interagency partnerships made it possible to develop this distinctive and effective self-assessment toolkit. Not only was the mutually driven development supported by agencies including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM); it has also been piloted in a number of Member States in recent years, namely Albania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Serbia, Spain and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

This toolkit is a good example of the application of Health 2020 policies to an existing and devastating scenario. The toolkit provides a basis for the preparation of migrant-sensitive health systems and makes a strong case for investment and action through whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches. It gives national ministries of health the opportunity to lead a multisectoral collaboration to optimize their health system preparedness and capacity. The area of migration and health is a highly complex and multifaceted one, in which many different stakeholders interact. In due course, it will also be essential to adopt an intersectoral approach of jointly identifying and addressing health system gaps in collaboration with other actors, including ministries of the interior, education, social affairs and employment, and with civil society, in order to address the social determinants of health of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants.

Dr Zsuzsanna Jakab
WHO Regional Director for Europe

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