

Bulgaria: assessing health-system capacity to manage large influxes of migrants



REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

Joint report on a mission
of the Ministry of Health
of Bulgaria and the WHO
Regional Office for Europe



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Abstract

Health 2020, the European health policy framework, provides a comprehensive framework for action to respond to public health needs in the field of migration. The large numbers of migrants entering the WHO European Region from North Africa and the Middle East are posing new challenges to health systems in recipient countries, which must strengthen their capacity to respond appropriately to the needs of migrants and the resident population. An efficient policy dialogue is needed between the main stakeholders involved in the field of health and migration, who should share experiences and identify best practices. The WHO Regional Office for Europe provides technical assistance to countries in this area through the project Public Health Aspects of Migration in Europe (PHAME). An assessment mission to Bulgaria took place in February 2015, intended to strengthen the country's capacity to address the public health implications of sudden large-scale influxes of migrants. The WHO toolkit for assessing health system capacity to manage large influxes of migrants in the acute phase was used during interviews and field visits, and the results are summarized in the present report.

Keywords

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Abbreviations

GP	general practitioner
PHAME	Public Health Aspects of Migration in Europe
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Executive summary

In response to the recent increase in migration to the WHO European Region and the adoption of World Health Assembly resolution WHA61.17 on the health of migrants, the WHO Office for Investment for Health and Development of the WHO Regional Office for Europe launched the project Public Health Aspects of Migration in Europe (PHAME) in 2011. The project aims to address the challenges posed by migration to the Region in response to emergencies. To assist in strengthening capacity within European countries to receive large influxes of migrants, a toolkit for assessing health system capacity to manage large influxes of migrants in the acute phase has been developed. The Toolkit was produced in a consultative process involving experts from various European countries during the first half of 2013, in collaboration with the International Centre for Migration, Health and Development, a WHO collaborating centre based in Geneva. The toolkit was piloted in six countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain) and was then revised during a workshop in Palermo, Italy in February 2015. The revised version was piloted in a mission to Bulgaria on 23–26 February 2015.

In the second half of 2013, Bulgaria was affected by an influx of approximately 15 000 migrants crossing the land border with Turkey. The country was not prepared for an influx on this scale, and the initial response was poorly organized. Delays in the administration of basic services and appalling conditions at reception centres were widely reported by national and international organizations (1). With European Union and other bilateral funding, the Government was able to renovate the migrant reception centres in 2014 in order to improve living conditions. At the time of the mission, it was reported that poor management and lack of structural funding remained problems.

The Bulgarian response mechanism is highly dependent on external donors, with a shortage of investment in structural, sustainable interventions. In addition, the national plan responding to the migrant influx focuses overall on strengthening border security measures rather than improving the reception mechanism.

The State Agency for Refugees has recently reported that migrant centres in Bulgaria currently provide shelter for 3800 migrants, including 700 people who have been granted refugee status. Additionally, many of the migrants who crossed the border in 2013 continued their journey to other countries such as France and Germany.

Under the biennial collaborative agreement between the Government of Bulgaria and the WHO Regional Office for Europe, the PHAME project can play a technical advisory role in addressing challenges identified during the assessment. Specific attention will be paid to the revision

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