

ApartTogether survey

PRELIMINARY OVERVIEW OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS
SELF-REPORTED IMPACT OF COVID-19



World Health
Organization

ApartTogether survey: preliminary overview of refugees and migrants self-reported impact of COVID-19

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Hand Sanitizer

This product is not for

COMPOSITION: Isopropyl alcohol (70%)

DIRECTIONS: Put a coin size of sanitizer on

CAUTION: Keep out of reach of children

Do not get in eyes, if irritates contact with

Permission of Department of Health

of Cox's Bay

in association with

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FOREWORD

Today we are seeing the largest population movements and displacement since the end of the Second World War. An estimated 1 billion people are on the move with more people than ever migrating or being displaced – about one in seven people worldwide.

Refugees and migrants contribute energy and ideas that drive economic and social development. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionately hard impact on these populations. They are often exposed to the virus with limited tools to protect themselves, and public health measures do not always reach them. Refugees and migrants may live highly insecure lives on the fringes of society, often in fear and without access to essential health and other services. Women may face the threat of violence and lack access to sexual and reproductive health services and social and financial protection. All these vulnerabilities may be further exacerbated by public health and social measures such as stay-at-home orders and border closures.

The pandemic has compromised the response capacities of health systems and highlighted existing inequities in access and utilization. Additionally, fear of the virus is exacerbating already high levels of xenophobia, racism and stigmatization and has even given rise to attacks against refugees and migrants. COVID-19 has entrenched restrictions on international movement and the curtailment of rights of people on the move.

To change this situation, it is vital that all countries include refugees and migrants in national health plans as part of their commitment to universal health coverage. Protecting the health of refugees and migrants is crucial in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Health for all means just that: health for all, including refugees and migrants. Everyone should enjoy access to quality health services without facing financial hardship. This right must be supported by national health policies and legal and financial frameworks that see health as an integrating force in society.

If we exclude refugees and migrants, we will all bear the costs. That exclusion will undermine development and promote exclusionary and sometimes racist politics and sentiments. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, refugees and migrants have been key contributors to the response and will have a significant role to play in the recovery.

Global frameworks exist to improve the health and well-being of refugees and migrants, including WHO's Global Action Plan, Promoting the Health of Refugees and Migrants, alongside the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

These international commitments provide blueprints for governments, international organizations and other stakeholders to ensure that refugees and migrants, as well as host communities, get the support they need to meet the health needs of everyone during the COVID-19 emergency and beyond.

Yet beyond international agreements, there are many individual stories to be heard from refugees and migrants. We must learn from their varied and vivid experiences. This is the intention of this preliminary overview : to take stock of the real-life experiences of refugees and migrants, listen to their stories and understand first-hand the real challenges when associated with limited access to health care and with stigmatization and discrimination.

WHO is committed to working with countries towards a shared mission to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable, including refugees and migrants. We shall continue this work alongside our many partners, including the International Organization for Migration, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and with many other international organizations and bodies to ensure that refugees and migrants are not left behind.



Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

WHO Director-General

PREFACE

The right to health as laid down in the WHO Constitution applies to every person, including refugees and migrants. Globally health has improved, yet there are profound differences and inequities. WHO's triple billion targets include 1 billion more people enjoying improved health and well-being. Here the key is that this improvement should be equitable and enjoyed by all people.

This report looks at the ways in which the pandemic has hit the lives of refugees and migrants. It takes the perspective of their own lived experiences during the COVID-19 crisis. There is clear evidence that even in more normal times their access to health and health services is often severely compromised, both by the organization of the health system and by the social setting in which they live. Women and children may be particularly severely affected. Ultimately, the survey reported in this publication is an inquiry into the right to health for refugees and migrants.

Understanding how refugees and migrants themselves experience and cope with the pandemic is crucial to shape inclusive and holistic policy responses. We wanted to give refugees and migrants a voice and to understand their specific challenges, such as when experiencing limited access to health care as well as their living and working conditions.

WHO is committed to the right to health for all, including refugees and migrants. The Thirteenth General Programme of Work concentrates on working towards universal health coverage and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, which include inclusive health systems that put people at the centre. Ensuring the health and well-being of refugees and migrants is a key priority within this endeavour. The WHO Global Action Plan, Promoting the Health of Refugees and Migrants, aims to both protect refugee and migrant health and leave no one behind.

To move ahead and make a difference, WHO has now established the WHO Global Programme for Health and Migration. The Programme aims to provide and coordinate global leadership, policy, advocacy and research around health and migration; set norms and standards; promote tools and strategies; and generate evidence-based information to support decision-making. It will support Member States as well as other parts of WHO in addressing the public health challenges that are associated with human mobility, as well as promote global multilateral action and collaboration.

This ApartTogether survey report serves as a first inquiry into the social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugees and migrants globally. It shows that, even though refugees and migrants face similar health threats as their host populations, the pandemic may have exacerbated their often precarious living and working conditions. The results underline the need and importance of including them in inclusive policy responses to COVID-19.

We hope that this report will inform political leaders and health managers and professionals about the possible heightened vulnerabilities of refugees and migrants during the pandemic and focus attention on this issue. We hope that this will lead to further research at global, regional, country and local levels on how address refugee and migrant health. National health policies, and supporting legislative and financial frameworks, should promote the right to health of refugees and migrants, see health as an integrating force in society and be gender sensitive.

We must recognize that the pandemic is bringing to the fore and exacerbating existing inequities in health system capacities and responses. We must commit to working with countries to build health system capacities and resilience in the face of the pandemic. We must take measures to identify and counter stigmatizing and discriminatory practices towards refugees and migrants in our COVID-19 responses. We must achieve equitable access to essential health services for refugees and migrants, remove financial and other barriers to COVID-19 testing and treatment services and introduce safety nets to mitigate the adverse social and economic impacts of the pandemic.

Above all we must leave none behind in our public health responses to the pandemic, using an inclusive approach that respects human rights.



Dr Zsuzsanna Jakab
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