Beyond the barriers

Framing evidence on health system strengthening to improve the health of migrants experiencing poverty and social exclusion

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World Health Organization

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Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
GRADE	Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation
GDP	gross domestic product
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JUNIMA	Joint United Nations Initiative on Migration, Health and HIV in Asia
NHPSPs	national health policies, strategies and plans
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights
PAHO	Pan-American Health Organization
SEKN	Social Exclusion Knowledge Network
SDG(s)	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WHO	World Health Organization

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INTRODUCTION

Aims

Target 3.8 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focuses on achieving universal health coverage. Universal health coverage means that *all people* can use the health services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship (WHO, 2017a). While universal health coverage is the goal embodied in target 3.8, *health systems strengthening* is a means through which that goal can be achieved, acknowledging also the important role that intersectoral action plays (Kieny et al., 2017; De Paz et al., 2017). The term "all people" in the definition of universal health coverage means that health systems strengthening should be underpinned by the commitment to health as a fundamental human right. It also means that specific attention should be paid to populations experiencing marginalization, poverty and vulnerability in order for them to fulfil the right to health and other interrelated, interdependent and indivisible rights (IOM/WHO/OHCHR, 2013)

"Leaving no one behind" is a centrefold principle in the Sustainable Development Agenda. Those "left behind" are a vastly heterogeneous group. They face a wide range of barriers to health services that differ across countries, communities and individuals. As such, approaches to health system strengthening to leave no one behind need to account for this heterogeneity and the complexity of barriers. Some migrants,[1] in particular those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, face intersecting and compounding barriers (see examples in subsequent sections).

Against the backdrop of leaving no one behind on the path to universal health coverage, this paper aims to:

1. present information on barriers to health services faced by some migrants, in particular those experiencing poverty and social exclusion;

2. acknowledge that some barriers are faced by multiple subpopulations and others are unique to migrants, and that both types of barrier should be addressed to overcome inequities;

3. provide a framing for addressing these barriers in health systems strengthening for universal health coverage, and provide an non-exhaustive synthesis/scoping of existing evidence using this framing;

4. highlight areas where more research is needed, to further contribute to the evidence base for leaving no one behind in progress towards SDG target 3.8 on universal health coverage.

1 At the end of 2015, there were estimated to be over 244 million international migrants (about 3.5% of the world's population) (UNDESA, 2015). For more information, see: http://gmdac.iom.int/global-migration-trends-factsheet

Global context

This paper contributes to follow-up to *Equality and non-discrimination at the heart of sustainable development: a shared UN framework for action* (UN, 2016a). This emphasizes that leaving no one behind entails *full realization of human rights, without discrimination on the basis of sex, age, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status*. The World Health Organization (WHO), through its Constitutional[2] mandate and its work on equity, gender and human rights, is committed to its part in operationalizing this framework.

With its explicit focus on health systems strengthening for universal health coverage and equity, the paper contributes to follow-up to the:

- United Nations General Assembly resolution on universal health coverage (UN, 2012a);
- World Health Assembly resolution WHA69.11 on Health in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development;
- World Health Assembly resolution WHA65.8 on the Outcome of the World Conference on Social Determinants of Health;
- World Health Assembly resolution WHA62.14 on Reducing health inequities through action on the social determinants of health.

Specifically, resolution WHA69.11 stresses the importance of health system strengthening for universal health coverage while giving a special emphasis to segments of the population experiencing marginalization, poverty and

The paper also provides inputs to the synthesis of evidence on "migrant-friendly health systems". In conjunction with many other resources, it feeds into the situation analysis now underway by WHO and partners following up on World Health Assembly resolution WHA70.15 on Promoting the health of refugees and migrants (WHO, 2017b). In May 2017, resolution WHA70.15 was adopted by the Seventieth World Health Assembly. In this resolution, Member States took note with appreciation of the *Framework of priorities and guiding principles to promote the health of refugees and migrants* (WHO, 2017c).

Resolution WHA70.15 urges Member States, in accordance with their national context, priorities and legal frameworks, to consider promoting the framework of priorities and guiding principles, as appropriate, at global, regional and country levels including using it to inform discussions among Member States and partners engaged in the development of the global compact on refugees and the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration (WHO, 2017c; UN, 2017b). An element of the *Framework of priorities and guiding principles to promote the health of refugees and migrants* that is particularly pertinent to the focus of this paper is:

> […] *promoting equitable access to quality essential health services, financial risk protection and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all (SDG target 3.8), including*

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