

HEALTH EVIDENCE NETWORK SYNTHESIS REPORT 46

How do variations in definitions of “migrant” and their application influence the access of migrants to health care services?

Ailish Hannigan | Patrick O'Donnell | Mary O'Keeffe | Anne MacFarlane



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This HEN – the Health Evidence Network – synthesis report is the result of a cross-divisional effort in the Regional Office between the Public Health Aspects of Migration in Europe (PHAME) project of the Migration and Health programme in the Division of Policy and Governance for Health and Well-being and the Evidence and Information for Policy-making Unit in the Division of Information, Evidence, Research and Innovation.

The Health Evidence Network

HEN is an information service for public health decision-makers in the WHO European Region, in action since 2003 and initiated and coordinated by the WHO Regional Office for Europe under the umbrella of the European Health Information Initiative (a multipartner network coordinating all health information activities in the European Region).

HEN supports public health decision-makers to use the best available evidence in their own decision-making and aims to ensure links between evidence, health policies and improvements in public health. The HEN synthesis report series provides summaries of what is known about the policy issue, the gaps in the evidence and the areas of debate. Based on the synthesized evidence, HEN proposes policy options, not recommendations, for further consideration of policy-makers to formulate their own recommendations and policies within their national context.

The Health Evidence Network and the Migration and Health programme of the WHO Regional Office for Europe

At the fifth meeting of the WHO European Advisory Committee on Health Research (EACHR), which took place in July 2004, EACHR agreed to form a subcommittee on migration and health to review the strategic framework of the work of WHO Regional Office for Europe on migration and health, and to commission a series of HEN synthesis reports targeting policy-makers. In 2015, three HEN reports were published, tackling the challenges of three distinct migrant groups: irregular migrants, labour migrants, and refugees and asylum seekers. In 2016, three new HEN reports are being published, aimed at synthesizing the available evidence in order to improve policy-makers' understanding of the following specific issues related to migration: maternal health, mental health and the public health implications of the different definitions available for migrants.

The various HEN reports on migration and health have been used as the evidence base for the development of the Strategy and Action Plan for Refugee and Migrant Health in the WHO European Region.

Health Evidence Network synthesis report 46

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Abstract

Variations in definitions used for “migrant” and for different groups of migrants in different areas can affect health system policies and migrant access to health care. This systematic review explored this issue using evidence from academic peer-reviewed and grey literature in 169 publications in English or Russian from 2010 to 2015 that focused on primary care or both primary and secondary care (including screening services and emergency departments). There is currently no universally accepted definition for migrant at an international level and the heterogeneity of definitions used limits comparability of routinely collected data. Legal status was one of the most significant factors determining access to affordable and adequate health services for migrants in a country. Identifying preferred terms for migrants, seeking consensus on important migration-related variables for collection across health information systems and progressing towards universal access to health care across the WHO European Region are recommended as policy options.

Keywords

EMIGRANTS AND IMMIGRANTS, HEALTH SERVICES ACCESSIBILITY, HEALTH SERVICES NEEDS AND DEMAND, HEALTH CARE DISPARITIES, TRANSIENTS AND MIGRANTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

EMN	European Migration Network
EU	European Union
HEN	Health Evidence Network
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MIPEX	Migrant Integration Policy Index
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SOPHIE	Evaluating the Impact of Structural Policies on Health Inequalities and their Social Determinants, and Fostering Change (project)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



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