Action plan for refugee and migrant health in the WHO European Region 2023–2030
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Abstract

This action plan for refugee and migrant health in the WHO European Region 2023–2030 intends to support countries to make health for all, including refugees and migrants, a reality. The purpose of the action plan is to articulate a common vision for health and migration in the Region and outline the strategic actions needed to realize the potential of migration to contribute to resourceful and resilient populations, and an economy of well-being for all.
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In the spirit of leaving no one behind, the action plan aims to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, the WHO Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025, and the European Programme of Work, 2020–2025. It also aims to translate and operationalize global instruments on health and migration, including the WHO Global Action Plan on Promoting the Health of Refugees and Migrants, 2019–2030, in the regional context and in accordance with regional priorities.

This document was adopted at the WHO Regional Committee for Europe at its 73rd session.

BACKGROUND

In March 2022, ministers and policy-makers, refugees and migrants, academic and civil society representatives from the WHO African, European and Eastern Mediterranean Regions, and global stakeholders, gathered in Istanbul, Türkiye, for a High-level Meeting on Health and Migration. Participants unanimously endorsed the Meeting’s outcome statement, a remarkable demonstration of cooperation and an expression of leadership for a new regional action plan on health and migration.

The action plan sits within a broader policy framework on health and migration, fully in line with the WHO Global Action Plan on Promoting the Health of Refugees and Migrants, 2019–2030, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees, supporting Member States in translating these global commitments to the regional context, in accordance with regional priorities and evidence. It also aims to support the achievement of key regional and global agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals, WHO’s Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025, and the European Programme of Work, 2020–2025, by fulfilling the commitment to leave no one behind. The actions in the proposal aim to strengthen synergies across WHO and to coordinate the efforts of Member States and partners. The actions are connected with other thematic priorities considered at the 73rd session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, in particular emergencies and human resources for health.

The Action Plan for Refugee and Migrant Health in the WHO European Region 2023–2030 was adopted at the WHO Regional Committee for Europe at its Seventy-third session.1

LESSONS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Guided by five salient lessons and principles, the action plan identifies five strategic priorities (action pillars) in line with this vision: (i) ensure refugees and migrants benefit from universal health coverage; (ii) implement inclusive emergency and disaster risk reduction policies and actions; (iii) develop inclusive environments that promote public health, social inclusion and well-being; (iv) strengthen migration health governance and evidence- and data-driven policy-making; and (v) explore innovative ways of working and develop enabling partnerships.

Throughout the implementation of the previous Strategy and Action Plan for Refugee and Migrant Health in the WHO European Region, the Region has seen significant progress, such as improved accessibility and inclusivity of national health systems and greater consideration paid to health and migration in national and subnational policies and practices. However, further progress is needed. Five salient lessons stand out.

- **The processes of displacement and migration are cross-cutting, and health and well-being are greatly influenced by policies and conditions beyond the health sector.** It is necessary to work across sectors to foster shared responsibility and to amplify the voices of refugees and migrants.

- **It is essential to recognize the integral and lasting nature of migration and the many significant and multifaceted benefits of migration both for Member States and for refugees and migrants.** Inclusive approaches to health and migration must promote safe and dignified migration, as well as resilience and capacity-building, across countries of origin, transit and destination.

- **Health and migration can only be addressed in a robust and sustainable way by building international and interregional solidarity and cooperation through a whole-of-route approach.**

- **Enabling the full enjoyment of health for all people does not stop at granting formal entitlements to services but ensures inclusivity.** Health services and policies must be people-centred, responsive to the diversity of refugees and migrants, including with respect to gender equality and disability inclusion, and founded on the principles of the universality of human rights.

- **It is critical to recognize the interplay between human, animal and environmental health, particularly in the context of the current climate emergency, and pursue a One Health approach in relevant policy areas.**

With acknowledgement of these lessons, challenges and opportunities, five pillars of action are proposed. These pillars have emerged through evidence review, in consultation with Member States and with partners and stakeholders across the WHO African, European and Eastern Mediterranean Regions, including refugees and migrants, as endorsed in EUR/RC72/17(I).

Actions for both Member States and WHO have been identified. Country-level priorities should be determined in accordance with the context, competencies and available resources of Member States and in line with national sovereignty.

This action plan pertains to all refugees, defined as per the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and to all international migrants, defined as any person who is outside a State of which that person is a citizen or national, or, in the case of a Stateless person, that person’s State of birth or habitual residence, with the limitations that follow according to national law and the migratory status of the people concerned.

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2 Progress on the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan for Refugee and Migrant Health in the WHO European Region at country level has been captured and reported to the Regional Committee at its 68th, 70th and 72nd sessions. See EUR/RC68/8(F), EUR/RC70/8(K) and EUR/RC72/17(I).


Objective
Inclusive and non-discriminatory provision of health services is central to a comprehensive health response to displacement and migration. Action pillar 1 aims to ensure refugees and migrants benefit from universal health coverage (UHC), grounded in the right of every individual to the highest attainable standard of physical, mental and social health, and to strengthen public health systems to respond to the immediate and longer-term health needs of refugees and migrants while taking into consideration national legal frameworks and policies.

Actions for Member States
- Advance legislative and other frameworks promoting access to essential and high-quality health services for refugees and migrants.
- Promote inclusion of refugees and migrants in the provision of integrated primary health services and support appropriate referral processes for secondary and tertiary health services as required.
- Support the co-design and co-delivery of health services with refugees, migrants, diaspora communities and representative organizations.
- Facilitate needs-based access to health services, including mental health and psychosocial support, for people in immigration detention and reception centres, and safeguard the clinical independence of service providers in these settings.
- Strengthen the competencies of service providers to deliver person-centred, gender-sensitive and culturally sensitive services with full attention to patient safety. This includes providing non-discriminatory and trauma-informed health services for refugees and migrants, and identifying and responding to the needs of survivors of human trafficking and gender-based violence. The specific needs of children and adolescents, including unaccompanied children, must also be considered.
- Promote organizational and individual health literacy, and invest in the development of interpreters and cultural mediators, as well as health care providers, to encourage the utilization of these resources.

Actions for WHO
- Monitor UHC for refugees and migrants as well as for host populations; identify and promote enablers for health service utilization; and remove legal, administrative, physical, psychological, financial, communication, attitudinal and other discriminatory barriers to the extent possible.
- Support Member States to include refugees and migrants within national UHC policies, including by providing guidance on the governance and management of health services – including primary health services and communicable and noncommunicable disease prevention and management – and the strengthening of health system performance monitoring.
- Promote educational frameworks to strengthen the competency standards of health and non-health providers engaging with refugees and migrants, including by supporting migration health training in medical curricula.
- Support international and interregional collaboration between countries of origin, transit, destination and return to strengthen continuity of care along displacement and migration pathways into and within the WHO European Region.
- Promote innovative financing mechanisms for health and migration to enable more predictable and sustainable programming at the country and regional levels, and support international cooperation.
Action pillar 2.  
**Implement inclusive emergency and disaster risk reduction policies and actions**

**Objective**
Refugees and migrants are often in more vulnerable situations during emergencies, as many are denied access to the resources and services needed to safeguard their health and well-being. Action pillar 2 aims to ensure that the health of refugees and migrants is fully accounted for in mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery processes, including in protracted situations.

**Actions for Member States**
- Implement comprehensive disaster risk reduction (DRR) policies and promote inclusion of refugees and migrants within mitigation, preparedness and response plans and operating procedures, in line with humanitarian principles and relevant standards.
- Emphasize the obligations of States to uphold the fundamental right of all people to seek asylum and safe refuge, and their right to health, in line with international law instruments, declarations and frameworks.
- Promote the knowledge and capacities of refugees, migrants and diaspora communities in the design and implementation of DRR and resilience-building activities.
- Promote refugee- and migrant-sensitive, multilingual risk communication and health services, including trauma care, during emergencies, and ensure these services are provided on an equitable basis. Innovative options should be explored, as required, including through digital platforms.

**Actions for WHO**
- Support multilateral and interagency dialogue for safe, orderly and regular migration and cross-border mobility in compliance with national legal frameworks, including during emergencies. Promote shared responsibility and international cooperation.
- Support Member States in assessing the readiness of health systems to respond to sudden and large arrivals of refugees and migrants and in ensuring DRR policies are migrant and refugee responsive and promote local capacity building.
- Promote the humanitarian–development–peace nexus at regional level through close collaboration and joint programming with the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) Health Emergencies Programme and support Member States to institutionalize this approach within health sector responses to displacement and migration.
- Support development of a joint platform for cross-country capacity building for future preparedness and promote sharing of lessons learned.
- Advocate for sustainable financing mechanisms, including for protracted humanitarian crises.
Objective
Promoting health requires not only providing formal access to health services but also addressing the social, economic and environmental determinants of health risks and outcomes. Action pillar 3 aims to facilitate integration and social cohesion and to create inclusive and healthy environments that enable refugee, migrant and host populations to thrive while taking into consideration national legal frameworks and policies.

Actions for Member States
- Promote inclusion of the needs of refugees and migrants in public health policies and programmes, and incorporation of health impact assessments in migration and other relevant policies and programmes. Ensure interventions promote co-design and co-delivery.
- Advocate for relevant social protection policies for refugees and migrants.
- Ensure universal birth registration without discrimination to protect the right of all people to recognition before the law.
- Assess health risks and opportunities faced by refugees and migrants in the country context, including for mental health, and address determinants across the life course by improving the quality of the social, cultural and physical environments in which refugees and migrants live and work. Community dialogue and collaboration should be emphasized, including promotion of cross-cultural communication.
- Ensure that actions to advance gender equality are inclusive of refugee and migrant populations and, similarly, that social interventions to promote the well-being of these populations are gender sensitive. Advance mechanisms to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.
- Advocate to minimize barriers to meaningful workforce participation in accordance with national legal frameworks, including timely skill recognition and access to training, and ensure occupational health and safety measures apply for all refugees and migrants in the same way as they do for nationals.
- Promote education as a key entry point for inclusion and integration and ensure refugees and migrants, including unaccompanied minors, have access to appropriate educational and social opportunities.
- Engage across government sectors, across civil society and with community representatives, and disseminate evidence to counter discrimination, stigma and xenophobia, including towards those affected by intersectional discrimination.

Actions for WHO
- Support Member States in assessing the social determinants of health in national and subnational contexts and support the development of responsive policy options, fully leveraging the programmatic capacities of WHO/Europe.
- Develop training and other resources for health and non-health workers to promote health equity and human rights-based approaches to health and social inclusion.
- Sensitize Member States to the importance of mental health and psychosocial support provision throughout the different phases of migration.
- Support Member States to strengthen mutual and multilateral skill recognition and advance dialogue and cooperation on health worker mobility.
Action pillar 4.

Strengthen migration health governance and evidence- and data-driven policy-making

**Objective**
Facilitating safe, responsible and dignified migration requires strong commitment to good migration governance and data. Action pillar 4 aims to promote humane and evidence-informed policies and processes to meet the opportunities and challenges presented by displacement and migration in ways that are respectful of human rights and are mutually beneficial.

**Actions for Member States**
- Review legislative and regulatory frameworks and ensure full compliance with international human rights standards and instruments to protect and promote the health of refugees and migrants in law and in practice.
- Advocate to optimize administrative procedures, including asylum processes, to ensure such procedures do not become a barrier to achieving the basic right to health for refugees and migrants.
- Explore exhaustively alternatives to immigration detention before considering its use and ensure detention is used only as a last resort and after individual assessments.
- Ensure health assessment and screening practices, where used in accordance with national legal frameworks, are evidence based and risk specific, meet ethical recommendations and standards, including with respect to informed consent, and are followed up with necessary care, preferably through the national health service.
- Ensure health workforce recruitment complies with and promotes the ethical principles embedded in relevant global instruments and codes of practice.
- Strengthen capacity to increase the availability, usability and comparability of migration health data within national health information systems, ensuring the data collected are for health purposes and protected against unauthorized use, in compliance with data protection regulations.
- Strengthen mechanisms to promote the translation and dissemination of migration health data into evidence for refugee- and migrant-sensitive policy and practice, in compliance with data protection regulations.

**Actions for WHO**
- Support Member States in embedding relevant international laws and standards into national contexts.
- Provide capacity-building support to Member States on evidence-based and ethical health assessment, screening practices and data collection, including data on behavioural and cultural insights.
- Provide guidance and resources to strengthen the collection and integration of migration health data into national health systems and support the translation of evidence into policy and practice.
- Promote health diplomacy tools to facilitate international and interregional action on health and migration within current systems of governance and negotiation.
Action pillar 5.
Explore innovative ways of working and develop enabling partnerships

Objective
Addressing the public health aspects of displacement and migration requires a whole-of-society and whole-of-government perspective across migration routes. Action pillar 5 aims to strengthen collaboration among the constellation of actors with roles and mandates for health and migration and to ensure responses are underpinned by mutual solidarity, responsibility and partnership.

Actions for Member States
- Strengthen health sector capacity to promote intergovernmental and intersectoral engagement on migration and support all levels and sectors of government to better respond to the health needs of refugees and migrants through the lens of their right to health and well-being.
- Foster and strengthen engagement with non-State actors, including nongovernmental organizations, civil society and private sector actors, professional networks, academic partners, faith-based organizations, humanitarian and development actors, youth representatives, and refugees and migrants, to build productive partnerships and coordinate actions.
- Promote collaboration with educational and research institutions on health and migration to foster knowledge generation and sharing. Support participatory health research capacities and enhance the representativeness of refugee and migrant health research.

Actions for WHO
- Support existing or, where necessary, new mechanisms for coordination and dialogue to facilitate greater multisectoral, interagency, international and interregional engagement on health and migration, including timely information exchange, identification and implementation of joint actions, and support for policy and public engagement.
- Support thematic working group coordination based on emerging country needs and agreed thematic priorities, as appropriate.
- Foster academic and research partnerships on health and migration, including in low- and middle-income countries in the WHO European Region and neighbouring regions, considering the whole-of-route approach and continue engagement with WHO collaborating centres.
MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Progress against each of the pillars will be reported by WHO/Europe at sessions of the Regional Committee at regular intervals (2025, 2027 and 2030) against the objectives in Table 1, recognizing that reporting is a shared responsibility between Member States and WHO/Europe. Actions will be reviewed and updated as necessary.

Table 1. Overview of measures of success and means of verification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Measure of success</th>
<th>Means of verification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Inclusion of refugees and migrants in national UHC or health policies, strategies and/or plans</td>
<td>Number of countries with reference to refugees and migrants in national UHC or health policies, strategies and/or plans</td>
<td>Biennial questionnaire to Member States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Inclusion of refugees and migrants in national emergency and DRR policies and plans</td>
<td>Number of countries with reference to refugees and migrants in national emergency and DRR policies and plans</td>
<td>Biennial questionnaire to Member States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Inclusion of refugees and migrants in national policies, strategies and/or plans that address social determinants of health</td>
<td>Number of countries with reference to refugees and migrants in national policies, strategies and/or plans that address social determinants of health</td>
<td>Biennial questionnaire to Member States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Strengthened migration health governance and improved data for decision-making</td>
<td>Number of countries with improved migration health data collection and/or improved policy frameworks for migration health governance</td>
<td>Biennial questionnaire to Member States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Multisectoral coordination to promote dialogue and collaboration on refugee and migrant health, including with refugees and migrants</td>
<td>Number of countries with established coordination mechanism(s) to promote dialogue and collaboration on refugee and migrant health</td>
<td>Biennial questionnaire to Member States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Evaluation of the provision of guidance, tools and technical support on health and migration by WHO, as required by Member States</td>
<td>Number of requests for technical support executed</td>
<td>Biennial questionnaire to Member States and internal WHO reporting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Annex 1. Decision EUR/RC73(8): action plan for refugee and migrant health in the WHO European Region 2023–2030

The action plan was approved at the 73rd Regional Committee for Europe, Astana, 24–26 October 2023.

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**Decision**

The Regional Committee,

In line with existing global instruments and frameworks, including the WHO Global Action Plan on Promoting the Health of Refugees and Migrants, 2019–2030;

Recognizing that migration is not an isolated phenomenon but an enduring part of our societies, core to the sociocultural, civic–political and economic vitality of the WHO European Region, and that the health of refugees and migrants is an indivisible part of population health;

Having considered the action plan for refugee and migrant health in the WHO European Region 2023–2030,¹ which was developed through consultation with Member States in the Region;

1. **ADOPTS** the action plan for refugee and migrant health in the WHO European Region 2023–2030;

2. **REQUESTS** the Regional Director:

   (a) to provide technical support and guidance to Member States in the implementation of the action plan; and

   (b) to report to the Regional Committee at its 75th session in 2025 and its 77th session in 2027 on progress made, and to submit a final report to the Regional Committee at its 80th session in 2030.

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The WHO Regional Office for Europe

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations created in 1948 with the primary responsibility for international health matters and public health. The WHO Regional Office for Europe is one of six regional offices throughout the world, each with its own programme geared to the particular health conditions of the countries it serves.

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