

Pre-conference summary



Health System Responses to Migration: From crisis mode to diversity-sensitive inclusive systems

Overview

On November 9th, 2022, Bielefeld University, Heidelberg University Hospital, the Lancet Migration European Regional Hub and EUPHA Migrant and Ethnic Minority Health Section hosted a pre-conference in Berlin at the 15th European Public Health Conference. The open event, organised by the team of Kayvan Bozorgmehr, brought together more than 120 attendees, with 14 experts from six countries across Europe who presented their research based on experiences ranging from the summer of migration 2015, the COVID-19 pandemic, and most recently the war in Ukraine. Current challenges and opportunities were presented - including the availability and sharing of disaggregated data, research methods, governance, policy, and advocacy. The pre-conference provided an open space for researchers, civil society, and policy makers to advance collaboration and good practices across the European region, towards diversity-sensitive and inclusive health systems. Each session included audience engagement, and was summarised by a group of young professionals from the Lancet Migration European Regional Hub.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE KEY MESSAGES:

Keynote: The World Health Report on Migration: looking back moving forward

Speaker: Bernadette Kumar (Norwegian Institute of Public Health/ EUPHA Migrant Health Section / Co-Chair, Lancet Migration European Regional Hub)

The conference kicked-off with a keynote speech from Professor Kumar, who highlighted three topical global health challenges, all relating to migration and health: The 3C's: Climate Change, COVID-19 and Conflict. She emphasized the need for more research on these areas, as well as evidence-based, inclusive policies.



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Session I - Health information systems and migrant health data: strategies to overcome blind spots

Speakers: Louise Biddle (Bielefeld University / Heidelberg University Hospital), Kolitha Wickramage (IOM Migrant Health Division), Charles Agyemang (Amsterdam University / EUPHA Migrant Health Section)

Chaired by: Dominik Zenner (Queen Mary University) and Claudia Hövener (Robert Koch-Institute)

Current Challenges

Speakers highlighted that migrants are often marginalized and excluded from health studies and are sometimes mislabelled as "hard to reach" populations when in reality migrants are often systematically excluded from conventional research methods. There is a patchy and fragmented evidence base across the WHO European region with a geographic bias: Nordic countries have population registries and link these to migrant health, whereas Southern countries have focused primarily on infectious disease surveillance, and Eastern Europe has minimal disaggregated data. A challenge of working in administrative systems is the fragmentation of information systems and a lack of disaggregated data by migration status. Furthermore, data linkage to address the social determinants of health is often not possible. Data sources outside of the health sector can deliver important information, but often do not include substantial health information. Health monitoring surveys show large potential to answer important research question on migration and health but migrants are often under-represented in these surveys as ethical, diversity-sensitive approaches lack political backing and implementation.

Proposed Solutions

- Data linkage is key to studying migrant health from a wider perspective of the social determinants of health in public health research.
- Be open to novel and innovative methodologies.
- Implementing diversity-sensitive approaches for national health monitoring through innovative sampling methods, multilingual survey instruments and personal recruitment

Way Forward

The study of migrant health has traditionally focused on migrant typologies, whereas a shift to thinking about human mobility and health may offer a broader research space. Collaborating with the non-health disciplines will be of added value. One example is labour migration, echoing the importance of tapping into data sources beyond the health sector. Another fruitful avenue for research is the implementation of diversity-sensitive approaches for national health monitoring, as seen with the RESPOND project. Sharing such approaches and best practice examples across countries is crucial to gaining wider visibility for the possibility for migrant health research, such as through the IOM Migration Health Research Portal. At the level of national and global governance, the health community is seldom seated at the decision-making table for migration policies. Thus, migrant health researchers should advocate for the mainstreaming of health in the migration sector, as well as vice versa.

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Session II – Health system resilience and migration: understanding decision-making under uncertainties

Speakers: Rosa Jahn (Heidelberg University Hospital), Andreas Gold (Heidelberg University Hospital / Bielefeld University), Sandra Ziegler (Heidelberg University Hospital), Patricia Schwerdtle (Heidelberg University)

Chaired by: Daniela Fuhr (University of Bremen / LSHTM) and Kayvan Bozorgmehr (Bielefeld University)

Current Challenges

Speakers of this session noted how ad-hoc solutions made transformative resilience difficult, and that uncertainties led to securitization tendencies. Additionally, the delayed and fragmented responses are dependent on commitment of individuals and are not conducive to health systems strengthening. The "crisis" perception (ie large influxes of migrants to Europe in 2015 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020) have shown similarities without much progress in coordinated, strategic and sustainable responses. Furthermore, there continues to be an inadequate level of knowledge, awareness and sensitivity amongst stakeholders. Coping with uncertainties is further challenging, especially with limited financial and human resources. The speakers further highlighted that crisis response has been primarily responsive and adaptive, focusing on the short-term, ad-hoc response, which is due in part to a lack of long-term strategic planning.

Proposed Solutions

- Cooperation and collaboration are key aspects of health system resilience, including private and voluntary sectors
- There is a need for more participatory research methods, to represent the interests of the people who are the focus of the research
- Training of law enforcement practitioners, social workers, and healthcare professionals can be delivered to reduce prejudice and encourage evidence-based practice
- The term 'Othering' was presented - it is a social practice of constructing designation/distinction between social categories under power asymmetries
- Important to critically analyse the underlying causes of inequities (i.e., political/legal, institutional, scientific, historic, cultural, and social factors)

Way Forward

The speakers also provided insight into climate change, migration and health. This included the acknowledgement that climate change was a risk but also an opportunity to increase health system resilience. Furthermore, climate change will re-shape migration, which could be adaptive or maladaptive. Climate-resistant health systems will anticipate, prepare for and respond to climate health related risks. To address the needs of climate change and migration and health, solutions require a focus on sustainable and migrant-inclusive health systems.

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Session III – Border Policies, Conflicts and Health (Care) of Displaced Populations

Speakers: Panagiotis Chondros (Médecins du Monde, Germany), Sally Hargreaves (St. George's University), Apostolos Veizis (INTERSOS Greece)

Chaired by: Johanna Offe (Médecins du Monde, Germany) and Marie von Manteuffel (Médecins sans Frontières, Germany)

Current Challenges:

Throughout this session, the speakers highlighted the plethora of extensive evidence on the poor living conditions of detention centres and at the borders across Europe, with its detrimental effects to physical and mental health. The speakers highlighted the increased and growing need to determine the health systems dependence on civil society organizations (CSOs) within Europe with regard to disease screening and provision of care to undocumented migrants. Furthermore, this dependence on CSOs can further weaken public health rather than ensure the sustainability of strengthening the health systems. This is, however, context specific, where in many cases, CSOs are filling in crucial gaps where political will is still absent and/or resources are not available. A major area with a lack of coordination has continuously been mental health, with different agencies and actors implementing and approaching mental health in fragmented ways.

Proposed Solutions

- Greater need for advocacy and for researchers to advocate their research in migrant health.
- Greater need and focus should also be dedicated to undocumented migrants, who are often left out of healthcare systems.



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Way Forward

Speakers concluded their sessions with strong messages on the need for advocacy within research. They highlighted the unique platform saved for academics, which should be used to advocate and engage in greater advocacy around migrant health research. Another strong message: Mental health is Public Health. It must be a priority to protect and manage the mental health of not only migrant populations within detention centres and institutions, but also for those undergoing the migration journey. Healthcare systems must be more inclusive and accessible for all types of migrants as well. This session concluded with speakers highlighting the need for greater research in pragmatic terms, highlighting the gaps and the limitations of health systems and the evident need to address migrant health through all actors involved including academia, NGOs, UN agencies, policy makers and migrants as well in the formation and development of feasible solutions.

Session IV: Diversity-sensitive and inclusive health systems: what role for economic arguments?

Speakers: Nora Gottlieb (Bielefeld University), Maren Hintermeier (Heidelberg University Hospital / Bielefeld University), Nadav Davidovitch (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev)

Chaired by: Ursula Trummer (Center for Health and Migration, Vienna) and Allan Krasnik (MESU Copenhagen)

Current Challenges

Economic arguments in migrant health have been heavily contested and remain few. However, this results in a juncture between research and policy, as policymakers care about the best way to allocate scarce resources, and thus about money. The current absence of economic evidence creates a space for false claims about the economic value of migrants and the resources they consume which are not factual. Instead, existing economic evidence points to the value of inclusive health systems, and could be valuable in convincing policymakers and the public about the benefits of easing benefit restrictions. Economic arguments are particularly powerful, and this may mean that evidence is misused in the political discourse, making effective research communication crucial. They also require a strong and detailed data base, which is often not present in migration health research.

Proposed Solutions

- Increase collaboration across disciplines including economics and finance.
- Need for greater novel method utilization in migrant health financing.

Way Forward

More economic analyses are needed to address evidence gaps in the policy-making process. This evidence allows researchers and the public to hold policy-makers accountable and demand truthful and transparent decision-making. Evidence gaps could be identified by including migrants and policy-makers at all stages of the research process. A large proportion of current migrant health research focuses on problems and barriers, participatory research and other novel methods could be used by the research community to uncover solutions and opportunities for change. Methodologically, migration health research could benefit from increased interdisciplinary collaboration with economists, identifying novel approaches such as cost-utility analyses or natural experiments to enrich the evidence base. Collaboration with communication experts is also valuable, to avoid - as far as possible - the misuse of evidence or the framing migrants as purely economic value.

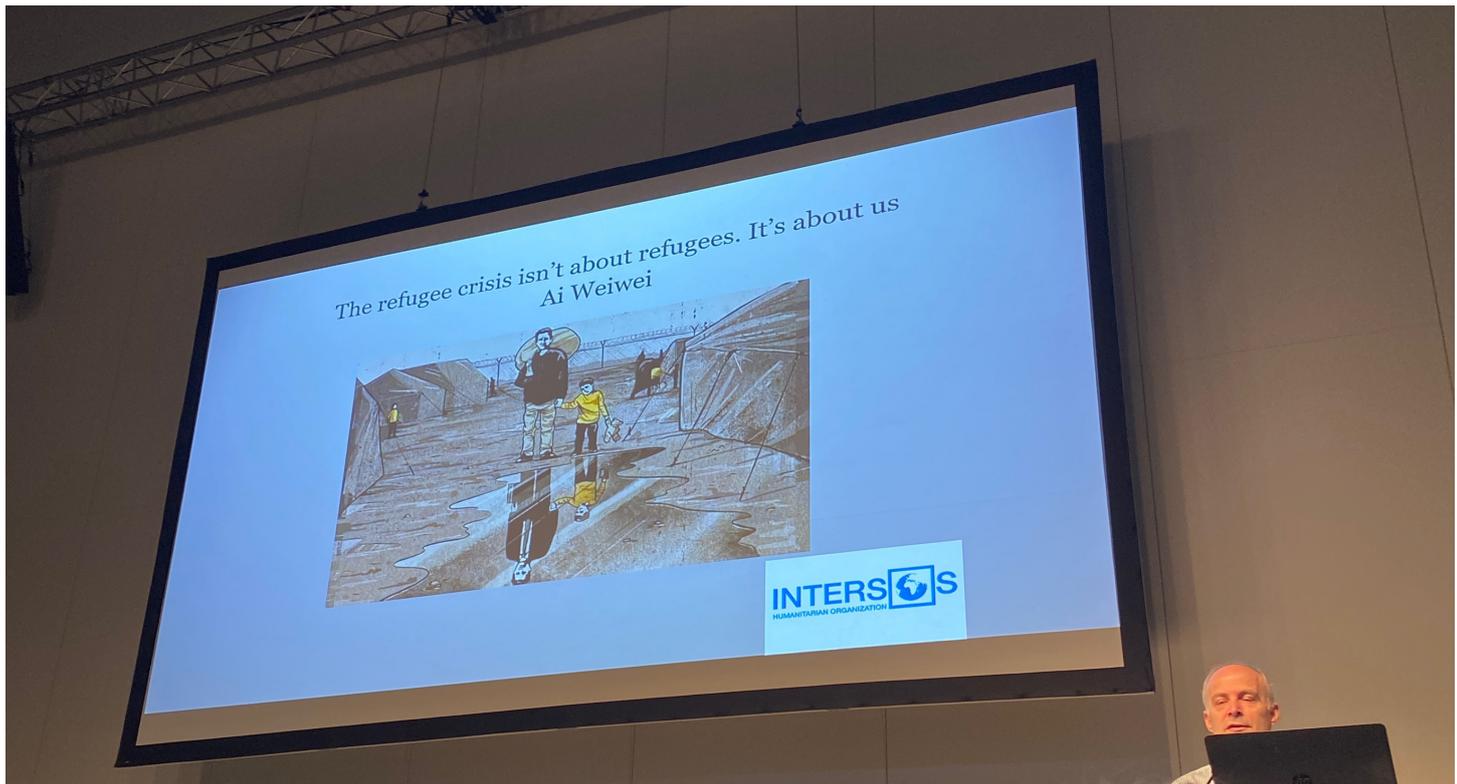


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Overarching Key Messages

- Migrant populations are not "hard to reach" populations, rather they are often systematically excluded from convenient and traditional approaches.
- There is a clear need for intradisciplinary collaborative and coordinated approaches/ mechanisms to strengthen health systems to meet the current unprecedented needs.
- Detention and border security measures are detrimental to health. There is a need for greater attention to the health and specifically mental health needs there.
- Increasingly, health service gaps are being filled and are left to civil society, and though, this is on a situation-specific basis, civil society organizations should be complimentary to health systems, not reliant upon.
- Health economic studies are an important tool for health system strengthening.
- Greater need for collaboration across various organizations, academia and policy makers for solutions.

Acknowledgements

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This summary was written by the following young professionals of the Lancet Migration European Regional Hub: Mathura Kugan, Chrysanthi Tatsi, Karen Lau, Rosie James, Louise Biddle and Saleh Aljadeeah. The summary was reviewed by Andreas Gold, Bernadette Kumar, and Kayvan Bozorgmehr.



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