

Editorial: The WHO Public Health Aspects of Migration in Europe (PHAME) project launches its newsletter

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The overall health of the population across the WHO European Region has improved during recent years. However, these improvements and the conditions that foster them have not been equally shared within and among the different European countries. Substantial differences persist, and health inequalities and their determinants continue to widen in many parts of the Region.

Migration is a key factor influencing these avoidable and unfair inequalities in Europe. The main contributing causes of migration are natural and man-made disasters, as well as social, economic and political disruptions. An estimated 8% of the total population are migrants, with women accounting for 52% of the overall migrant population. This influx to the WHO European Region represents an increase in population of 5 million since 2005 and accounts for nearly 70% of the population growth between 2005 and 2010.

Migration has also become one of the most frequently discussed and sensitive issues in the daily press. Since 2011, the crises in North Africa are posing significant challenges, not only to the countries of origin but also to those receiving massive influxes of immigrants on a regular basis. This dramatic situation has already caused many tragedies in the Mediterranean countries. In October 2013, over 350 migrants died when a ship sank off Lampedusa. More recently, in March 2014, 15 African migrants drowned trying to cross the Ceuta border. Against the background of this complex scenario, the WHO PHAME project launches its newsletter with the aim

of contributing to a productive debate on migration at all levels within and outside government, as well as sharing knowledge and increasing awareness throughout the WHO European Region.

Although the dramatic episodes described above took place in different countries and years, they both form part of the same phenomenon: migration. For this reason, they need to be understood and addressed in a systematic way. Due to the complexity of the topic, the health challenges posed by migration sometimes lie outside the health sector, and are therefore also part of other ministerial remits and responsibilities. In this scenario, an intersectoral approach from both within and outside of government is needed. Migration must be addressed through whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches, which should guarantee access to adequate capacity and know-how, allow for implementation of cohesive and coordinated policies and programmes, and consequently bring about the required systematic changes.

The WHO PHAME project was created as a response to the growing awareness that the health challenges that migration poses at national, subnational and local levels cannot be solved by traditional approaches in medicine. Despite the fact that universal health is recognized as a fundamental human right, it is often subject to heterogeneous regulations that change throughout Europe and over time, impacting negatively on migrants, who are emerging as one of the most vulnerable groups in society.

By promoting an intersectoral and intergovernmental approach to migration, the PHAME project contributes to the 2 main strategic objectives of the new European health policy framework, Health 2020: (1) the reduction of health inequalities and (2) the improvement of governance for health. In this regard, special priority must be given to creating resilient communities, as migrants constitute one of the most vulnerable groups across the entire WHO European Region.

This priority has been recognized and included not only in Health 2020, but also in (among others) the resolution on the “Health of Migrants” endorsed in the World Health Assembly in 2008 (WHA61.17), and the Global Consultation on Migrant Health held in Madrid in March 2010.

The newsletter

The objective of this newsletter is to further contribute to the sharing of knowledge and best practices among the various stakeholders, thus increasing awareness of migration as one of the most important challenges faced by the WHO European Region today. The newsletter is produced by the WHO European Office for Investment for Health and Development, located in Venice, Italy (forming part of the Division of Policy and Governance of Health and Well-being of the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe)), in collaboration with the University of Pécs in Hungary.

As part of the PHAME project, the newsletter will be published quarterly and will be available on the website (will be archived on the Migration and health site under the WHO/Europe website). This is the first issue of the newsletter, and we would like to emphasize that it is an important initiative for sharing news, know-how and best practices, and engaging in a cross-national political dialogue on migration. A vital feature of this initiative is the project’s partnership with Hungary’s University of Pécs, which is providing key staff to ensure its realization. 20 leading European

experts on health and migration and related subjects are now members of the Editorial Board of this electronic periodical. The newsletter will include editorials, news, upcoming events, training possibilities, research calls/grants, reviews of recent scientific publications, a database of relevant scientific literature with search engine functionality, original articles, reports, migration health policy and position papers – even those intending to provoke response, comment or criticism. Sharing the latest know-how (“breaking news”) and disseminating results will also be a distinctive feature of the electronic quarterly newsletter.