

Corona Virus Disease 2019 Pandemic: Addressing the Needs of Refugees and Migrants in the European Region

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Abstract

The Corona Virus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has influenced the lives of millions of people across the world and forced all the public health authorities to divert their attention towards the disease. The refugees and migrants have been recognized as vulnerable population groups and it is a must that in general, we should try to meet the needs of these population groups in this ongoing pandemic. Considering the practical concerns pertaining to the difficulty in accessing health care or residing in overcrowded settings or poor water supply, it makes them extremely vulnerable to COVID-19 infection, as all these factors play an important role in enhancing the transmission of the disease. The need of the hour is to prevent the possibility of stigma and discrimination and ensure that reliable and timely information is passed to them through trustworthy resources. Further, all steps should be taken to inform them about the need to maintain social distancing, use of personal protective equipment and strict adherence to the infection prevention and control recommendations. In conclusion, in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic, the refugees and migrants deserve equal priority and attention like that of the general population. However, considering their vulnerability to acquire the infection due to varying environmental and social attributes, it becomes crucial to facilitate early detection and isolation of the cases and thereby interrupt the chain of transmission and thus reduce the overall caseload.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, refugee, migrants, World Health Organization

INTRODUCTION

The Corona Virus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has influenced the lives of millions of people worldwide and forced all the public health authorities to divert their attention toward the disease. This is primarily because of the high caseload, geographical distribution, highly contagious nature, the ability of the disease to overwhelm the health systems, and the disease-specific mortality rate. Till today, a total of 823,626 cases and 40,598 deaths have been reported worldwide, amounting to a case fatality rate of 4.9%.^[1] It is worth noting that within a single day, a total of 72,736 cases has been reported, and these numbers continue to rise with each day.^[1] Among all, the European region is the most affected, accounting for 464,212 cases (56.4% of the global caseload) and 30,089 deaths (74% of the global deaths). Till date, Italy, Spain, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom together account for 74.2% of the overall caseload in the European region.^[1]

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN EUROPEAN REGION

It will not be wrong to say that due to the shortcomings in the preparedness, the European region has paid a heavy price in terms of high caseload, death rates, impairment in the quality of life of all the residents, despite being the developed nations, and having the best quality of health systems.^[1] The refugees and migrants have been recognized as vulnerable population groups and it is a must that, in general, we should try to meet the needs of these population groups in this ongoing pandemic.^[2] It

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is important to note that 10% of the population in the European region comprises of international migrants, and thus, their specific needs should be acknowledged while preparing for the outbreak readiness and emergency response action plan.^[2,3]

COVID-19 SUSCEPTIBILITY AMONG REFUGEES

From the public health perspective as well as the fact that COVID-19 spreads by close contact, it is imperative that we do not ignore these populations, as they might act as anytime as a source of the reintroduction of the virus in the general population.^[3,4] Before we move on to the COVID-19 preparedness, it becomes crucial that the national leaders and health authorities meet the other basic fundamental needs of these people by providing them access to all the essential services in a culturally and linguistically sensitive way and ensuring that none of their basic rights are violated.^[3,4] In that regard, it is important to respond to their needs of displacement, poor nutritional status, impaired physical and mental health, poor access to health services, and constraints pertaining to housing standards and supply of food and clean water.^[2-4]

OUTBREAK READINESS AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Moreover, considering the practical concerns pertaining to the difficulty in accessing health care or residing in overcrowded settings or poor water supply, it makes them extremely vulnerable to COVID-19 infection, as all these factors play an important role in enhancing the transmission of the disease.^[2] The need of the hour is to prevent the possibility of stigma and discrimination and ensure that reliable and timely information is passed to them through trustworthy resources to keep them informed about the do's and don'ts pertaining to the prevention of the disease acquisition and its transmission.^[2,4] In addition, all the planned strategies (such as health initiatives, diagnostic tests, personal protective equipment, and treatment options.) for the containment of the infection should be made affordable to them, and they should be given a chance to involve themselves in the planned strategies so that they can give their opinion about the specific problems experienced by them.^[2-4]

Further, all steps should be taken to inform them about the need to maintain social distancing, the use of personal protective equipment and strict adherence to the infection

prevention and control recommendations (namely, hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, the method to use, remove and dispose of face mask, and to avoid contact with contaminated surfaces, etc.).^[3-5] In addition, they should be explained about the signs-symptoms of the disease using risk communication mechanisms, and they should be guided about what to do once they become symptomatic.^[4,5] Finally, the infection prevention and surveillance activities for the active search of the cases or contact tracing need to be strengthened in their residential locations and the various points of entries.^[6]

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic, the refugees and migrants deserve equal priority and attention like that of the general population. However, considering their vulnerability to acquire the infection due to varying environmental and social attributes, it becomes crucial to facilitate the early detection and isolation of the cases and thereby interrupt the chain of transmission and thus reduce the overall caseload.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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ملخص المقال باللغة العربية

جائحة مرض فيروس كورونا 2019: تلبية احتياجات اللاجئين والمهاجرين في المنطقة الأوروبية

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أثر جائحة فيروس كورونا 2019 (COVID-19) على حياة الملايين من الناس في جميع أنحاء العالم وأجبر جميع سلطات الصحة العامة على تحويل انتباههم نحو المرض. لقد تم الاعتراف باللاجئين والمهاجرين كمجموعات سكانية ضعيفة، ويجب علينا بشكل عام أن نحاول تلبية احتياجات هذه الفئات السكانية في هذا الوباء المستمر. وبالنظر إلى المخاوف العملية المتعلقة بصعوبة الوصول إلى الرعاية الصحية أو الإقامة في بيئات مكتظة أو سوء إمدادات المياه، فإنها تجعلهم عرضة للغاية لعدوى فيروس كورونا 2019، حيث تلعب جميع هذه العوامل دوراً مهماً في تعزيز انتقال المرض. الحاجة للساعة هي منع إمكانية الوصم والتمييز وضمان نقل معلومات موثوقة وفي الوقت المناسب لهم من خلال موارد جديرة بالثقة. علاوة على ذلك، يجب اتخاذ جميع الخطوات لإبلاغهم بالحاجة إلى الحفاظ على التباعد الاجتماعي واستخدام معدات الحماية الشخصية والالتزام الصارم بتوصيات الوقاية من العدوى ومكافحتها. في الختام، في المعركة ضد جائحة فيروس كورونا 2019، يستحق اللاجئون والمهاجرون أولوية واهتماماً متساويين مثل اهتمام عامة السكان. زيادة على ذلك، يجب النظر في قابلية تعرضهم للإصابة بالعدوى بسبب اختلاف السمات البيئية والاجتماعية، بحيث يصبح من الأهمية بمكان تسهيل الكشف المبكر وعزل الحالات وبالتالي مقاطعة سلسلة انتقال العدوى وبالتالي تقليل العدد الإجمالي للحالات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: جائحة COVID-19 ، اللاجئين، المهاجرون، منظمة الصحة العالمية.