

Health Problems for Migrants

From the health service point of view, there is the danger that migrants are seen simply as bringing a set of new problems: pressure on beds, translation needs and communicable diseases (such as HIV/AIDs and TB). All these can lead to negative stereotyping at a time when the health service would grind to a halt without the many doctors, nurses and ancillary staff who were born in other countries.

The situation looks very different from the point of view of a newcomer. A recent report found that their difficulties include:

Accessing Healthcare

- Finding a family doctor (the term 'GP' is probably unfamiliar)
- Registering is difficult and some people are unfairly denied
- Language barriers

The Health Service NI Regional Interpreting Service had 42,516 requests in 2009–2010, more than 50% for Polish, with Lithuanian, Cantonese Mandarin and Portuguese also heavily requested.

- Failure to have their basic cultural needs met e.g. dietary needs
- Some migrants are only entitled to free emergency treatment and not long-term care (e.g. migrants with no recourse to public funds, including Roma from Romania)
- For some of these people rough sleeping, in addition to poverty will compromise their health
- Destitute people may also succumb to substance abuse

Specific Health Problems

- Some migrants might have had less access to preventive medical care in their home countries
- Accurate records of childhood immunisation may not be available
- Some health conditions are more prevalent among some people groups e.g. Vitamin D deficiency and bone density problems among people who cover up due to their dress code
- Mental illness is a taboo subject in some cultures

The above findings are drawn from the report *Barriers to Health; Migrant Health and Wellbeing in Belfast* <http://www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/pdf/Migrant-Health-Strategy.pdf>

Suicide

- Racism, harassment and exploitation can all lead to depression
- Unemployment, poverty and destitution can lead to despair
- Honorary consuls are reporting suicide as an area of concern and the Trades Unions have drawn attention to the particular vulnerability of migrants.