

Migrants need better access to health care in Europe: WHO

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Europe must guarantee migrants better access to health care, the World Health Organization urged Monday in its first report on the health of new arrivals to the old continent, where accessibility varies broadly.

"The most important is the access to health services. To improve their health, it is important to fill the gap for access to basic care," Santino Severoni, the head of the WHO's Migration and Health Programme, told AFP.

In WHO's Europe region, which covers 53 countries, migrants represent almost 10 percent of the population, or 90.7 million of 920 million inhabitants.

But the proportion of migrants varies widely from country to country, accounting for 45 percent of Malta's population to just two percent in Albania.

Depending on the country and migrant status, they may enjoy full access to the [health care](#) system or none at all.

In 15 European countries, such as Austria, Turkey and Britain, [asylum seekers](#) have access to the same care as the local population, whereas in Germany and Hungary they are only entitled to emergency care.

"People, and some governments, have been reacting emotionally when it comes to newcomers because of the lack of information and data," Severoni said.

Contrary to what some may believe, "there is a very low risk ... of transmitting communicable disease from the refugee and migrant population to the host population," he said.

For example, a large share of HIV-positive migrants contract the disease after arriving in Europe.

In addition, new arrivals are more likely to develop [chronic illnesses](#) as a result of their new lifestyle—such as less physical activity and too much

fast food—and the poverty conditions some encounter.

While they are at lower risk of developing cancer than local populations—with the exception of cervical cancer—cancer tends to be diagnosed at a later stage, which makes the prognosis less certain.

Migrants' children are meanwhile at greater risk of being overweight and having [psychological problems](#) than children in their host country, the report noted.

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