Apps help integration and health of migrants

January 29 2021

Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

A new study has found that mobile apps can play a vital role in helping immigrants integrate into new cultures, as well as provide physical and mental health benefits.

Researchers at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) surveyed new migrants

and refugees undertaking free beginners' language classes in Greece, often the first destination for people arriving into Europe from Africa and Asia, over a 10-month period.

The findings, published in the journal *Computers in Human Behavior*, show that those using mobile apps aided by artificial intelligence (AI), such as language assistants, customized information sites, or health symptom trackers, experienced 5.3% better health status, and increased social integration by 2.7%.

Other, non-AI applications, such as those to signpost public services, improved general health status by a much smaller amount, under 1%.

Professor Nick Drydakis, Director of the Centre for Pluralist Economics at ARU, said: "AI apps work by providing services like customized search results, peer-reviewed e-learning, professional coaching on pronunciation, real-time translations, and virtual communication for finding possible explanations for health conditions. Our study found these to be of significant benefit for migrants in relation to integration, health and mental health.

"The World Health Organization recommends the use of health apps in improving services, particularly for vulnerable populations. Mobile applications and AI, if used correctly, can clearly benefit the lives of people arriving in an unfamiliar new country—however around a third of people we surveyed did not possess a smartphone, potentially providing a barrier to these benefits.

"Our study is the first that we know of that examines the use of mobile applications to support migrants' needs in relation to societal integration and quantify associations between mobile applications, health, mental health and integration for migrants, and assess the role of AI in enhancing these outcomes."

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University