



## The role of nurses in improving the mental health of forced migrants

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### Abstract

Humanity has always been on the move. Migration is an integral part of humanity and has constantly shaped it. While awaiting the determination of their status, asylum seekers have specific civil rights. They face multiple restrictions, particularly occupational ones. These have a negative impact on individuals and communities, eroding skills, increasing vulnerabilities, worsening the impact of poverty and ill health, emphasizing isolation and undermining community harmony [1]. For this article, reliable databases available on the Internet such as Google Scholar were used, as well as descriptors such as "refugees", "mental health", "activities" and "nursing". The results show that people with a migration background need the support of professionals to stabilize their mental health. In fact, nurses allow them to acquire new social skills and a safe environment.

**Keywords:** Migrant, forced migration, asylum seeker, occupational activities, mental health, nursing care, nurse.

## Introduction

In 2020, international migrants represented 3.6% of the world population, or 281 million people. The migration phenomenon is constantly increasing for reasons such as war, climate change and the economy (International Organization for Migration program). The question of migration is central, particularly from a health point of view. In the literature, migrants are often considered to be in poorer health than the native population [2]. It is not only the migratory journey that makes migrants vulnerable, but also the different living conditions and their status. Migrants encounter multiple obstacles to daily life such as occupational injustice or occupational deprivation. These can have a significant impact on well-being and self-esteem, mental health [3]. The aim of this Article is to highlight the importance of occupation on mental health, particularly for the population from forced migration who are considerably exposed to the risk of occupational imbalance. Through the importance given to the occupation, the role of health promotion specific to the nurse is highlighted.

Humanity has always been on the move. Mobility is an integral part of humanity and has constantly shaped it. As the report of the International Organization for Migration points out: "Today, there have never been more people living in a country other than the one in which they were born. In 2020, the number of migrants worldwide was around 281 million people, 51 million more than in 2010, 128 million more than in 1990. Since the 1980s, the acceleration of globalization has gone hand in hand with the increase and complexity of forms of migration and societal dynamics, but also the implementation of policies and legal bases aimed at regulating these movements. Migration patterns have thus transformed considerably, both through the diversification of destinations and migration policies which define their logic, as well as through the broadening of the profiles of migrants, or even the appearance and interdependence of global political, economic, social and environmental issues [4].

According to the IOM, the term "migrant" means any person who, leaving their usual place of residence, crosses or has crossed an international border or moves or has moved within a State, regardless of: the legal status of the person, the voluntary or involuntary nature of the displacement, the causes of the displacement and the duration of the stay. However, the term migrant is not legally defined (United Nations, 2021). Comprising 30.9% of the international migrant population in 2020, Europe is currently the largest destination for international migrants (IOM, 2022). In Switzerland, in 2020, 38% of the population over 15 years old comes from migration, this represents 2,766,000 people (OFS, 2020).

People have several reasons for leaving their country of origin. In the literature, the most important migration reasons are work-related, for education, training and culture purposes, family reunification and forced reasons. Individuals, families and groups move to new geographic and social locations with the aim of improving their prospects for income, living conditions, employment, education, training or marriage, to gain access to new opportunities, or to escape situations of war or insecurity [5]; [6]. In this sense, the intention to migrate is a combination of a multitude of factors: sociocultural context, individual and psychological factors, family issues, quality of life, economic factors, political context, networks and connections transnational [7].

Certain factors such as war, violence and persecution push people to flee their country of origin. This type of migration is called forced migration and is distinguished from economic migration (IOM, 2022). We speak of forced migration when the migratory movement is non-voluntary, forced and suffered, caused by various factors. These push people to leave their countries and begin a migratory cycle. The IOM defines the migration cycle as: "stage of the migratory process including departure, sometimes transit through the territory of a State, immigration to the country of destination and return" (IOM, 2022). During the different stages of the migratory journey, these people are faced with difficult conditions with different stressors and must cope with a great capacity to adapt (IOM, 2019). Forced migration is necessarily accompanied by risk-taking. However, not all migrants are exposed to the same types of risks. The conditions linked to the migratory journey are often dangerous, compounded by the various economic, social and political risks that migrants may face (IOM, 2019).

The vulnerability and risk factors faced by migrants can weaken their health. As the World Health Organization (WHO) points out: The experience of migration is a key determinant of health and well-being. Refugees and migrants remain among the most vulnerable members of society and often face xenophobia; discrimination; poor living, housing and working conditions; and inadequate access to health services, despite the frequent physical and mental health problems they suffer (WHO, 2022).

Individual factors also influence the vulnerability of migrants to risks. Examples of intrinsic risk factors include gender, age and other characteristics such as marital status, country of origin, education and religion (IOM, 2019).

The concepts of migration and health encompass the idea that different factors and conditions, called social determinants of health, influence the health of migrants. Migration is considered a social determinant of health due to the impacts it can have on health. Different levels of social determinants of health influence the health status of migrants. Disease profiles and health risk factors may vary between migrant and host populations, and inequalities may exist in access to or use of preventive measures and treatment outcomes due to migration. (IOM, 2022).

Socially induced health inequalities, stress, social exclusion, unemployment and social support are among the health determinants defined by the WHO, and these negatively impact the health of migrants [8]. First, health

inequalities of social origin expose the fact that an unfavorable socioeconomic level negatively affects health status. Second, the stress that is manifested as a result of worry or anxiety prevents the person from facing the problems of life. Third, social exclusion favored by poverty, the lack of material goods essential to life and other factors lead to exclusion from civic life and to experiencing racism, discrimination, disrepute and hostility. Fourth, unemployment is a source of insecurity and dissatisfaction and finally, social support describes that a strong social network supports and improves health in the living environment. It also promotes healthier behavior [8].

### Forced migration

Migration is a universal phenomenon that has existed since the beginning of humanity [9]. According to the IOM, migration is defined as “any movement of people leaving their usual place of residence, either within the same country or across an international border” (IOM, 2022). Anyone who undertakes migration is called a migrant. People migrate for many reasons, however the main goal is to improve their living conditions. People migrate if the “place utility” value of one place is higher than another. The value of “place utility” encompasses social, economic, and other advantages and disadvantages that a person may have in a specific location [9]. Forced migration, more specifically, refers to the obligation to undertake a migratory movement following an event threatening the life or security of a person [10]. It can have multiple causes such as persecution, violation of human rights, repression, conflicts and disasters caused by nature or humans (UNHCR, 2000).

### Mental health

The WHO Constitution defines health as follows: “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” This definition has the important corollary that mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders or disabilities. Also mental health is the result of complex interactions between biological, psychological and social factors. Mental health is therefore not only a state resulting from the subject's personal dispositions and behaviors, but it is a dynamic process at several levels, in which both individual factors and socio-economic, cultural and social determinants come into play. In health psychology, there seems to be a consensus on a two-dimensional model of mental health. According to the model, mental health and illness represent two distinct but moderately correlated dimensions with each other. The first dimension represents the absence or presence of symptoms of suffering. This includes symptoms of depression, generalized anxiety, addiction, etc. [11]. The second dimension of the model represents the absence or presence of mental health symptoms. This includes “positive” symptoms and factors of emotional well-being (experience of positive emotions, satisfaction with life), psychological (self-acceptance, personal growth, autonomy) and social (acceptance, social contribution and integration). These factors are indicators of good mental health allowing you to lead a fulfilling life [11]. According to Pereira, Dubath and Trabichet (2021) there are three levels of determining factors:

- Individual factors; biological factors; psychological factors; life course factors
- Social and economic factors; Relatives and social circle; Economic situation
- Societal factors; Social and economic policy; Environment and infrastructure; Culture

As mentioned above, mental health results from complex interactions between biological, psychological and social factors. These different factors influence mental health and are called the social determinants of health [12]. These are:

- The social gradient (socioeconomic, psychosocial condition)
- Stress (source of worry and anxiety)
- Early childhood (development and education)
- Social exclusion
- Work
- Unemployment
- Social support
- Dependencies
- Food
- Transportation

### The role of the specialist (nurse)

In collaboration with the person anticipating, experiencing or completing a transition, significant others and members of the health care team, the nurse designs and implements educational and support interventions that are age appropriate, gender and culture to create optimal conditions for movement through the transition process [13]. The study by Moore et al. provides health professionals with methods to recognize the impact of structural inequalities in order to understand the needs and strengths of asylum seekers [14]. For McBride et al. The role of the nurse includes clinical support, advocacy and therapeutic education to develop health literacy. For these authors, it is therefore necessary to continue and extend work aimed at improving the cultural competence of health personnel and reducing

barriers to access to services, in particular by establishing defined access points, developing effective care pathways and ensuring the use of inter-prefectural services, where appropriate [15].

In collaboration with the person, the nurse designs and implements interventions aimed at people who have not yet mastered the behaviors, feelings, sensations and objectives required for carrying out the activities associated with the performance of new roles required by the transition. Interventions may include modeling, physical and psychological support, and teaching new skills [13].

To reduce the mental health burden, it would be helpful to identify strengths among refugees and the community. This step helps them in the process of adapting to their new environment and actively engaging in the community and employment [16].

The nurse draws on the available resources of the person, family members, and community to meet the needs of the person and create a physical, social, political, and cultural environment conducive to well-being [13]. The study by McBride et al. helps to emphasize the importance of recognizing the context of patients' lives. It is essential to respond to surrounding problems to take care of their health and well-being. Surrounding issues often affect the social determinants of health such as; lack of food or access to a telephone to contact friends or family, problems with housing or using public transport, isolation, loneliness, visa problems. Case studies demonstrate the importance of holistic care [15].

Establishing a relationship with the patient appeared to be an essential function of the nurse. It is about being a central point of reference for patients and health services, in order to improve access and coordination of care when a patient is transferred from one service to another. In addition, the nurse demonstrates on the one hand an attitude of advocacy by supporting effective communication through simplified language, by hiring interpreters and on the other hand an attitude of respect by taking into account cultural and cultural beliefs and values, previous experiences [15].

It is therefore necessary to continue the development of innovative models to promote the development of health culture within communities in order to improve their understanding of the services available, their rights and their ability to access the necessary care. A more focused evaluation that explores and captures increased awareness of the culture of care and patient outcomes, perceptions of key agencies and staff working with Refugee Health Liaison Nurses, and program effectiveness [15].

Nurses play a crucial role in improving the psychological well-being of forced immigrants. Here's a breakdown of their key functions:

Assessment and Diagnosis:

- Comprehensive Evaluations: Nurses conduct thorough assessments to identify and understand the specific psychological needs of forced immigrants. This includes:
  - Trauma Screening: Assessing for PTSD, anxiety, depression, and other trauma-related disorders.
  - Cultural Considerations: Understanding the cultural context of their experiences, including cultural expressions of distress.
  - Social Determinants of Health: Evaluating factors like poverty, discrimination, language barriers, and lack of social support that impact mental health.

Direct Care:

- Therapeutic Interventions:
  - Psychoeducation: Providing information about mental health conditions and coping mechanisms.
  - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Techniques: Guiding individuals in identifying and modifying negative thought patterns and behaviors.
  - Stress Management Techniques: Teaching relaxation techniques, mindfulness, and other coping strategies.
  - Trauma-Informed Care: Providing care that is sensitive to the impact of trauma on individuals' lives and their responses to treatment.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to investigate the role of nurses in improving the mental health of forced immigrants. Although this issue is quite clear and obvious, it should be given more attention and the role of nursing care should be further explored. In fact, the nurse's role in dealing with forced immigrants and through transcultural skills is basically to conduct assessments that include biological-psychological-social-spiritual, educational and therapeutic aspects in order to prevent the risks of job deprivation and adopt a multifaceted support role. Nurses play a very important role in improving the mental health of forced migrants. These people often suffer from mental disorders such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder due to experiencing traumatic events such as war, violence, persecution. Nurses can help improve the quality of life of these people by providing comprehensive care and psychological support. Furthermore, nurses act as crucial advocates, connecting migrants to essential resources and advocating for systemic changes that address the root causes of their mental health challenges. By

fostering a supportive and compassionate environment, nurses contribute to the overall well-being and successful integration of forced migrants into their new communities.

Notable points are:

- Nurses are integral to the mental health support system for forced migrants.
- Culturally sensitive and trauma-informed care are paramount.
- Advocacy and resource connection are essential components of nursing care.
- Addressing systemic issues is crucial for long-term positive impact.

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## List of abbreviations

IOM	International Organization for Migration program
OFS	Office Federal Statistical
WHO	World Health Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees