

Barriers to healthcare for refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants in the UK

What is this study about?

Access to healthcare is a basic right that all people should enjoy, as restricted access can have a significant impact on a person's health and well-being. This is particularly true for refugees, people seeking asylum, and undocumented migrants who have experienced great challenges on their way to seeking safety in the UK, and who also depend on access to healthcare to rebuild their lives. Unfortunately, too often they face barriers to accessing even basic health services.



Read this summary and you can find out:

- What are these barriers and how can we address them?
- What role policies play in making it difficult for refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants to access appropriate care

How did we do the study?

The study was conducted between June and August 2017 using interviews conducted with Doctors of the World UK caseworkers and analysis of Freedom of Information documents from NHS trusts. These documents provided insights into the protocols being followed by NHS England (NHSE) trusts with respect to charging regulations on accessing basic healthcare.

What did we find?

The study's analysis revealed key barriers to healthcare faced by refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants related to:

- The need to provide proof of identification and address, which discouraged many from accessing care in the NHS or registering with a GP for fear of being deported
- Essential services being chargeable if the patient is not a UK citizen or from Europe, such as antenatal care, operations, and services from specialist clinics
- Lack of understanding of how the UK healthcare system operates
- Language barriers

Why is this important?

It is crucial to challenge the UK's Hostile Environment and its inherent discriminatory policies and exclusion in healthcare access to ensure the right to health for asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants. There is a need to provide free, timely, meaningful and culturally sensitive healthcare and social support to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants to prevent the creation and worsening of existing health problems. Ensuring a fair and inclusive healthcare system will not only benefit refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, but everyone in society as it has the potential to address inequalities that affect people's health and wellbeing.

What can I do with this?

I am a person with experience of the issue: You can use this summary to better understand rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants to basic healthcare in the UK.

I work with refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants: You can use this summary to better understand and support those affected to overcome barriers to getting basic healthcare.

I work in healthcare: You can use this study to ensure that you and your colleagues are aware of these barriers and show empathy towards refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants who seek healthcare from the NHS.

I am a researcher: You can use this study as a reference to produce new research that includes direct views of refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants and reflect stories of people with lived experience.

I am a policy-maker: You can use this study to call for the UK government to recognize health as a fundamental human right and develop inclusive social policies that would allow refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants equitable access to health and social services.

I want to know more!

You can reach out to zara.asif@kcl.ac.uk or hanna.kienzler@kcl.ac.uk for further information. Read the primary paper [here](#) or look up the citation below.

Asif, Z., & Kienzler, H. (2022). Structural barriers to refugee, asylum seeker and undocumented migrant healthcare access. Perceptions of doctors of the world caseworkers in the UK. *SSM-Mental Health*, 100088.