Health services for migrants, refugees and displaced persons

ICN Position:

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) and national nurses’ associations (NNAs) have particular concern for the immediate and long-term health and nursing care needs of migrants, refugees and displaced persons (MRDPs), and have a special responsibility to assist nurse refugees.

Programmes that address the needs of MRDPs must be coordinated with the involvement and cooperation of governmental and non-governmental agencies on international and national levels.

ICN will work in all appropriate ways to promote the development of timely health and social programmes for MRDPs, e.g. emergency treatment, care and maintenance, repatriation/integration/resettlement, bank of nursing experts.


ICN encourages NNAs to examine the extent of the problem in their countries and to undertake cooperative action to provide adequate health services for MRDPs by their participation in:

- Raising public awareness on the existing problems of MRDPs;
- Identifying the specific health and nursing needs of MRDPs;
- Lobbying governments to provide adequate health services;
- Assisting in efforts to mobilise the necessary resources;
- Helping with emergency assistance and resettlement programmes for refugees, giving special attention to vulnerable groups;
- Urging adoption of appropriate policies and legislation;
- Planning for the provision and the evaluation of the health services provided;
- Implementing appropriate and on-going educational initiatives, including culture specific orientation programmes for nursing personnel working with MRDPs;

1 Link to UNHCR Convention and Protocol: http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/protect/opendoc.pdf?tbl=PROTECTION&id=3b66c2aa10
• Providing access to counselling and support services to nursing personnel working with MRDPs;
• Facilitating the rapid contact and cooperation of nurses with agencies addressing the needs of MRDPs in the field; and
• Addressing the major causes of forced migration, e.g. poverty, human rights violations.

Background:

Unprecedented numbers of people have become migrants, refugees or displaced persons in recent decades. Global estimates by the end of 2004 place the number of registered refugees at 9.2 million, with another 5.4 million registered as internally displaced persons (IDP). These numbers underestimate the full extent of the problem. Since the majority of MRDPs do not register, they are not captured by statistics. More inclusive estimates set the number of IDPs alone at approximately 25 million.

These populations’ often poor health status may be aggravated by deprivation, physical hardship and stress. The lack of resources in the country of first asylum/resettlement may compound the problem.

The human rights of MRDP are often violated which adds to a precarious and unhealthy living environment/conditions, e.g. sexual violence, long-term detention, babies born with no citizenship, limited access to education, child prostitution, malnutrition.

Nurses, as citizens of their countries, patient advocates and care providers, can make a great contribution to resolve the health problems of MRDP and help them adjust to a new way of life.

Adopted in 1983
Reviewed and revised in 1992, 2000 and 2006

Related ICN Positions:
• Nurses and Primary Health Care

The International Council of Nurses is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality nursing care for all and sound health policies globally.
