

Vitality Interventions for Migrants

Summary of Research Activities

Introduction

VIM stands for Vitality Interventions for Migrants and is a 24-month project that aims to promote information on a healthy lifestyle among migrants and increase their confidence in using the health system of the receiving country. By this, the project aims to increase the European integration of migrants. Staying in good health, adopting healthy life styles and being informed about the health system of the host country as well as having confidence to make use of it are pre-requisites for successful integration of refugees and newly arrived migrants into their European host societies.

In the first project months VIM partners carried out comprehensive research activities. These were based on national desk research to identify examples of good practice in terms of promoting health among migrants in the partner countries and expert interviews.

In the following paragraphs the results are summarised. The main findings result from the qualitative interviews – the VIM partners carried out 61 interviews with educational and social professionals in the six partner countries. The aim was to identify barriers that prevent migrants from accessing the available health service and define the learning needs of migrant adults in terms of most relevant health education topics.

Results from the research activities

Barriers to access health care services

Even though partner countries have national specificities (e.g. health system, administrative regulations, climate, concept of health etc.) there are a number of similarities. It seems that in all partner countries the main barriers for migrants to access national healthcare services are:

- ♥ Language and communication barriers
- ♥ Administrative and legal barriers
- ♥ Cultural background
- ♥ Lack of information on healthcare services
- ♥ Legal status and access regulations for national healthcare
- ♥ Literacy and levels of schooling
- ♥ Lack of trust in the health system and medical staff
- ♥ Economic situation
- ♥ Geographic situation: Generally, the provision with medical services is better in urban areas than in remote rural regions

The interviewees also mentioned other challenges related to different perceptions on what is healthy and what not, the use of drugs, medical privacy, diseases, sexual health and family planning, socialization and the adaptability to the new healthcare system. These issues varied greatly and depended on the country of origin of the migrants.

Training methods

When working with migrants, several specific methodologies are generally implemented and the following ones have proven to be the most common and effective ones:

- ♥ Cooperation with multipliers and parallel agents that speak the mother tongue of migrants
- ♥ The implementation of interactive activities based on group dynamics
- ♥ The development of intersectional trainings for professionals working with migrants
- ♥ The use of online resources
- ♥ Face to face personal sessions

Health care and training needs

In the work with migrants, it should be taken into account that migrants' knowledge on health and health services varies from one individual to another and can be influenced by several factors, such as:

- ♥ The socio-economic situation
- ♥ Traditional or religious practices related to healthcare habits, remedies and beliefs
- ♥ Their status and social habits
- ♥ Women's responsibility for the family's health status
- ♥ General disregard of mental health issues
- ♥ Cultural differences regarding sexual health and family planning
- ♥ Different body conceptions and
- ♥ Their sense of community

Also, it is necessary to take into account the gender perspective, since men and women do not have the same general health care needs.

The most relevant training topics for migrants that were mentioned in the interviews are:

- ♥ Healthcare system, functioning of institutions and healthcare rights
- ♥ Implementation of general healthy life-styles and physical habits
- ♥ Family planning and sexual health and rights.
- ♥ Gender-based violence and other topics regarding social and legal equality and rights of women.
- ♥ Other: vaccination, drug consumption and mental health

Improvement measures

To improve the access to health care for migrant groups, there are different strategies that can be implemented in the interaction between migrants and national healthcare services:

- ♥ Providing professional interpreters
- ♥ Providing mediators
- ♥ Including "cultural ambassadors" or long-term migrants already skillful in the European language and very much aware of the local healthcare facilities.
- ♥ Increasing awareness and knowledge of healthcare professionals that deal with migrants.
- ♥ Launching integral health campaigns that are not only translated into migrants' languages but also level the degree of medical knowledge attached.