The Impact of Irregular Migration on Health Systems in Transit and Destination Countries: An Analysis of World Health Organization Reports



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Abstract:

This article examines the impact of irregular migration on health systems in transit and destination countries through an analysis of World Health Organization (WHO) reports and complementary international sources. Employing a descriptive and analytical approach, the study evaluates structural pressures on healthcare, including limited resources, overcrowding, communicable disease risks, and unmet mental health needs. The findings show that transit countries such as Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco struggle to provide equitable services due to fragile infrastructures, while destination countries like Italy, Spain, and France face economic burdens, cultural integration challenges, and heightened public health risks. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed migrants' vulnerabilities and tested institutional resilience. The study concludes that irregular migration constitutes both a health and security challenge, requiring strengthened international cooperation, inclusive health policies, and reforms aligned with WHO recommendations to ensure access to care and protect community health

Keywords: *Irregular migration; Health systems; WHO; Public health; Migration governance*

Introduction:

It Irregular migration is regarded as one of the most critical challenges confronting worldwide societies in contemporary times, owing to its diverse consequences, which include various economic, social, security, and health dimensions. Political and economic crises are getting worse in many parts of the world because of wars, climate change, and other things. This has led to more irregular migration, as people try to move from their home countries to other countries, either as stops on their way to other places or as final destinations. These journeys are very dangerous.

Migration is not a new phenomena; nonetheless, it has become increasingly complex in the context of globalization, violent conflicts, climate change, and economic inequities among nations. Destination countries view irregular migration as a security and economic issue, but the effect it has on the health systems of both transit and destination countries is a crucial aspect that needs more research. The health care systems in these nations are under more and more stress, which could cause structural difficulties including a lack of medical services, the spread of diseases, and the difficulty of taking in more and more migrants when resources are limited.

- **Research Problem**

In this context, several questions emerge concerning the nature of the health impacts of irregular migration and the preparedness of health systems in both transit countries (such as Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco) and destination countries (such as Italy, Spain, and France) to confront these challenges. What are the primary health consequences of irregular migration on the health systems of transit and destination countries, as analyzed through World Health Organization reports on these issues?

- **Significance of the Study**

This study is important because there are more and more people migrating illegally around the world, and this has a big impact on the health security of the countries that take them in. This issue necessitates comprehensive health policies grounded in international standards that enhance healthcare services for both migrants and indigenous communities. Furthermore, the examination of international publications, especially those released by the World Health Organization, elucidates the extent of the issue and the difficulties encountered by health systems in tackling this phenomena.

- **Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine the health effects of irregular migration on the healthcare systems of both transit and destination countries.

2. To look into how prepared and responsive these health systems are to the stress caused by a significant number of migrants coming in.

3. To read and think about World Health organization publications on migration and health so that you may grasp the suggestions and solutions that specialized groups have made.

4. To give useful suggestions and ideas that could help lessen the bad effects of irregular migration on health systems

- **Methodology of the Study**

This study employs a critical analytical methodology, examining the most significant reports from the World Health organization and other international entities, alongside academic research and reports from official institutions. The descriptive and analytical methodologies are utilized to examine the health implications of irregular migration by scrutinizing credible facts and statistics that illustrate the real issues confronting health systems in both transit and destination nations.

Irregular migration is one of the biggest problems in the world today. Studying it from a health point of view helps us understand it better and find more long-term solutions. By conducting a thorough examination of World Health organization reports, we can develop effective strategies to mitigate the health impacts of irregular migration and offer recommendations to policymakers for enhancing responses to this issue at both national and international levels.

1. Theoretical Framework of Irregular Migration and Health Systems

1- The Nature of Irregular Migration

a- Definition of Irregular Migration

Irregular migration is when people move without following the rules of the sending, transit, or receiving country. From the point of view of the country that is accepting the immigrants, it means entering, living, or working in the country without permission. From the point of view of the sending country, it means breaking norms and laws by doing things like crossing international borders without a valid passport or travel documentation, or not meeting the conditions for leaving the country. The term is more often used to talk about incidents of people smuggling migrants illegally, though. According to international organisations, it is defined as:

1.1 The International organization for Migration (IOM) says that irregular migration is "the movement of people across international borders without following the laws and procedures of the receiving countries, whether through illegal entry or staying after a visa or residence permit has expired." (IOM, 2021)

1.2 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines irregular migration as "the crossing of individuals across international borders in ways that contradict national and international laws, making them vulnerable to human rights violations and affecting their ability to obtain legal protection." (UNHCR, 2021)

1.3 The International Labour organization (ILO) says that irregular migration is "the movement of people from one country to another in search of economic or social opportunities without meeting the legal requirements for entry or stay, which may lead to their exploitation in the labour market." (International Labour Organization, 2020)

1.4 The World Health organization (WHO) says that irregular migration is "the movement of people across

1.5 international borders without following national immigration laws, which puts them at risk for many health problems because they can't get basic medical care." (World Health Organization, 2019)

2. Causes of Irregular Migration

Irregular migration is a complicated issue that involves a lot of different economic, social, political, and security issues. These factors significantly influence individuals to choose for irregular migration, notwithstanding the associated hazards. Here is a thorough look at the key reasons why people migrate illegally, along with the right academic sources:

B-Things that have to do with money

- Unemployment and a lack of chances to make money: Unemployment is one of the main reasons people go to other nations without permission. Young people want to find work in countries with stronger economies. Reports say that countries with high unemployment rates are a big reason why people move illegally. (Sunduq al-Naqd al-Dawli, 2020)
- Low pay levels: Many workers look for better-paying jobs abroad, even if it means breaking the law, because wages are different between developing and industrialized countries. (al-Dawliyya., (2021)(Munazzamat al-Hijra al-Dawliyya, 2021)
- Poverty and the high cost of living: In some countries, poverty makes it harder to live a good life, which leads people to make the choice to move illegally in pursuit of a better life. (al-Bank al- Dawli, 2022)

i. Social Factors

- Low levels of development and public services: People are thought to move to nations with better services since fundamental services like

education and healthcare are not very good. (Barnamaj al-Umam al-Muttahida al-Inma'i, 2021)

- Demographic considerations (rapid population growth): In some nations, there is a lot of population pressure and not many job prospects, which makes people more likely to migrate illegally in quest of new resources and chances. (Munazzamat al-Hijra al-Dawliyya., 2020)
- Family and community ties: Family ties are a big reason why people decide to move, since some people want to join family members who have already moved without permission. (al-Mufawwadiyya al-Samiyya li-Umam al-Muttahida li-Shu'un al-Laji'in, 2019)

ii. Political and Security Factors

- Wars and armed conflicts: Armed conflict and internal disagreements compel millions of people to escape their nations out of fear for their lives, and often irregular migration is the only accessible choice for them. (Munazzamat al-'Afw al-Dawliyya, 2021)
- Political repression and human rights violations: Authoritarian regimes and political repression force people to leave their home nations in search of freedom and safety, even if it means breaking the law. (Human Rights Watch, 2020)
- High crime rates and instability within the country: People leave their homes and look for a safer place to live when security is poor, with high crime and violence rates. (al-Umam al-Muttahida, 2021)

iii. Environmental Factors

- Natural disasters and climate change: Many places are becoming less livable because of rising sea levels, desertification, and drought. People are moving to find places where they can live more sustainably. (al-Bank al-Dawli, 2022)
- Lack of natural resources and damage to farmland: Damage to farmland and a lack of fresh water in some areas have caused people in rural areas to move to cities or even other countries illegally. (al-Umam al-Muttahida, 2021)

B. The Concept of Health Systems and Their Readiness to Receive Irregular Migrants

1) Definition of Health Systems

Health systems are the institutional infrastructure that includes hospitals, clinics, healthcare professionals, and government regulations that strive to give people access to healthcare services. The World Health organization says that an effective

health system is one that makes sure everyone has equal access to healthcare services, delivers them quickly, and lasts. (World Health Organization, 2018, Building Better Health Systems for Migration)

2)Readiness of Health Systems to Receive Irregular Migrants

Systems for health: The most important problems that countries that take in migrants face are:

- Lack of money: Many nations that take in migrants don't have enough healthcare resources, which makes it hard to give them care without hurting the people who live there. (World Bank, 2020)
- Legal problems: In some countries, irregular migrants can't get healthcare because of legal constraints, therefore they have to rely on relief groups. (Amnesty International, 2019)
- Stress on hospitals and other healthcare services: Because there are so many migrants, hospitals are becoming too crowded, which could mean that both citizens and migrants don't get enough medical care. (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2021)

2. Challenges Facing Health Systems in Transit Countries

Countries that migrants pass through on their way to other places are called transit countries. These countries sometimes find themselves in a difficult, and even critical, position since the rapid and unexpected rise in the number of temporary immigrants puts a lot of stress on their health systems. This burden is not only on hospitals and health centers, but it also includes problems with fairly distributing health resources. Many of the countries that pass through are impoverished or in the middle of big economic problems, which makes it hard for them to provide good healthcare. This situation may necessitate healthcare professionals to attend to irregular migrants without enough knowledge of their health status, so complicating diagnosis and treatment, as well as safeguarding healthcare personnel from infection hazards.

a- The primary problems that health systems in transit nations face are listed below:

1) Diseases that spread from person to person

Irregular migrants have a hard time staying healthy while they are on their journey, which makes it more likely that they may spread infectious and viral diseases. People who move to a new country are often held in places that aren't safe for their health, which helps spread infectious diseases and epidemics like fever and flu. This also leads to the proliferation of mental health problems. Some migrants may have long-term illnesses that are not known or treated, which makes it harder to provide healthcare. Additionally, some communicable diseases that

may not be identified in transit locations could spread, putting both migrants and the local community at risk. (World Health Organization, Migration and Health: Addressing Global Challenges, 2019)

2)A crisis in the mind and society

People often choose to migrate irregularly because of bad social or economic conditions. Many irregular migrants experience psychological crises stemming from the social and economic pressures in their home countries, compounded by the risk of various forms of violence, exploitation, and discrimination. This can cause serious mental health problems including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can make it hard for people to deal with everyday life and put a lot of stress on health systems that may not be ready to offer the mental health care they need. (World Health Organization, Building Better Health Systems for Migration, 2018)

Third Axis: Repercussions of Irregular Migration on Health Systems in Receiving Countries

Countries that receive migrants are those that continuously or semi-permanently host them and have serious health problems because of the big and constant flow of irregular migrants. Refugees have very bad health since they are malnourished, physically and mentally exhausted, and don't get the mental health care they need. This is because health systems in receiving nations are under a lot of stress as they try to care for migrants while also giving natives the treatment they need. To fix this, we need to improve health infrastructure and provide people the tools they need. The biggest problems that host countries face are:

a. Different cultures and health

Migrants from various health cultures may have a hard time adjusting to the healthcare system in the country they move to, especially if they don't understand how healthcare works or the cultural values that go along with it. For instance, some migrants might not want to get particular kinds of treatment because of their religious or cultural beliefs. Because of this, health systems in nations that take in migrants need to be adaptable and meet the cultural and health demands of these people. Healthcare staff may need specific training to treat these groups with care and respect. (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017)

b. Economic Problems

Taking care of irregular migrants' health care costs a lot of money for the countries that take them in. These countries often have to spend more money to give migrants the care they need. On the other hand, the nations that take in these people may have trouble paying for these health treatments because of economic pressures. Also, irregular migrants may not have health insurance or money to pay for care, which makes the healthcare system's costs even higher. These problems

need new ways to make sure that everyone, including migrants, can get health care. (World Health Organization, Building Better Health Systems for Migration, 2018)

c. Effects of Irregular Migration on Public Health

Irregular migration can impact public health in host nations, as migrants may introduce diseases that are rare in these regions. In addition, the rates of infectious diseases may go up since the health conditions in refugee camps or migrant detention centers are not good. This could cause diseases to spread in local areas, which would be bad for public health. Countries that take in refugees need to be ready for these problems by taking steps to stop them from happening, like giving immunizations and regular health checks. (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2021)

4. International Legal Mechanisms to Combat Illegal Migration

Illegal migration is a worldwide problem that needs a coordinated legal response that goes beyond national borders. This is because it affects the safety, social, and economic stability of countries. To address this issue, a framework of international legal instruments has been established to mitigate irregular migration, combat migrant smuggling and human trafficking networks, while considering the humanitarian aspects of migrants' rights. The United Nations and regional organizations have set up international treaties, protocols, and UN resolutions as some of the most important legal weapons to fight this problem.

a. International treaties and agreements to stop illegal immigration

1) The 2000 United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime

This convention is the main set of laws that people use to fight organized crime, such as smuggling migrants. The Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air strengthens this by giving a clear definition of migrant smuggling and listing the duties of states to stop it. The agreement says that migrant smuggling should be a crime, that countries should work together more to fight smuggling networks, and that migrants who are victims of these operations should have extra protection. (United Nations, 2000).

2) The 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families

This convention's goal is to defend the rights of migrants, no matter what their legal status is, by making sure they aren't exploited or abused in either the country they are passing through or the country they are going to. It also requires signatory states to treat irregular migrants fairly and not violate their basic rights, like the access to health care and legal protection. (United Nations, 1990)

3) The Forced Labour Convention (International Labour organization – 1930 & 2014)

The International Labour organization has made rules that require countries to protect migrant workers and make sure their rights are respected. This is because many irregular migrants are at risk of being compelled to work and being taken advantage of. (International Labour Organization, 1930/2014)

b. The United Nations and Regional Organizations' Part in Stopping Illegal Migration

1)The UN and Its Specialized Agencies

The International organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are very important for helping countries deal with irregular migration by providing protection programs, humanitarian aid, and working with governments to create long-term migration policies. The World Health organization (WHO) also strives to make sure that migrants can get basic medical care, especially in emergencies. (UNHCR, 2021)

2)The EU

The European Union has put in place a number of laws and policies to stop illegal immigration. These include the "Dublin Agreement", which sets out the responsibilities of member states for asylum applications; the "Valletta Process", which aims to improve cooperation between Europe and Africa on migration issues; and the "Frontex Agency", which is in charge of keeping an eye on European borders and stopping the flow of irregular migrants. (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2017)

3) The African Union and Other Groups in the Area

The African Union has launched various programs to boost economic growth in Africa, which is a major source and transit point for irregular migrants. These measures are meant to minimise migration. The African Union is also working with Europe to fight networks that smuggle migrants. The League of Arab States and groups like ECOWAS also want to make policies that will help reduce the reasons people leave their homes. (UNHCR)

5. A Review of World Health Organization Reports

Countries that are having trouble with public health because of illegal immigration might get technical help and guidance from the World Health organization (WHO). This is done by giving these countries regular reports and ongoing advice to help them improve how their systems respond to health problems caused by migration. WHO also gives advice on how to handle infectious diseases that migrants may bring with them and helps train healthcare staff on how to safely and efficiently care for migrants. Reports from the World Health organization (WHO) talk about

the health problems that come with illegal migration and look at how it affects the health of migrants and the healthcare systems of the countries they pass through and the ones they settle in. Here is a full list of the most important of these reports and what they say:

a. The 2022 World Report on the Health of Refugees and Migrants

This is the first report of its kind that puts together evidence about the health problems that refugees and migrants encounter. It is based on a review of over 82,000 documents and shows where more research is needed in this area. The survey says that refugees and migrants often have bad health because they don't have good places to live and work, which hurts their health and well-being. It also shows how the COVID-19 pandemic affected these groups by making them more vulnerable and putting their health at danger. (World Health Organization, 2022)

b. Fact Sheet: Health of Refugees and Migrants

This paper gives a general idea of the health problems that refugees and migrants have. It shows that over a billion people move around the world, which is around one in seven individuals. There are 281 million worldwide migrants and 84 million people who have been forcibly displaced among these. The research says that irregular migrants often have trouble getting healthcare because of language and cultural differences, prejudice by institutions, and limited access to health services. (World Health Organization, n.d.)

c. The International organization for Migration's World Migration Report 2024

This study talks about the most recent problems and trends in human mobility. It shows that worldwide migration is still a major factor in human development and economic growth, with foreign remittances rising by more than 650% from 2000 to 2022. The report, on the other hand, says that the number of people who have been forced to leave their homes because of wars, violence, and natural disasters is at its greatest level in recent times. This shows how important it is to deal with displacement issues right away. (IOM, 2021)

d. Report on the State of International Migration in 2021 (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia - ESCWA)

This research looks at how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected migrants and refugees. It points out that these populations are more affected by the pandemic than others because they are more vulnerable and encounter institutional impediments to getting health care. The research says that the pandemic has made the problems these populations confront even worse, so specific policies are needed to deal with these issues. (ESCWA, 2021)

5. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration

This compact is a global agreement that aims to improve collaboration between countries on migration issues, with a focus on protecting migrants' rights, such as their right to basic health care. The compact sets goals to lessen the negative factors that cause people to move, such as poverty and prejudice, deal with people who have to leave their homes because of climate change or disasters, and make sure that migrants can get information and legal identity. (United Nations General Assembly, 2018)

e. Fighting human trafficking and illegal immigration (Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

This research looks at what Egypt has done to stop human trafficking and illegal migration. It says that Egypt is home to more than 9 million migrants and refugees from 133 different countries. It also talks about Egyptian policies that protect the rights of migrants and refugees, such as giving them the same health and education services as Egyptian citizens. (Wizarat al-Kharijiyya al-Misriyya, bila tarikh)

f. Migration (UN)

This article gives an overview of global migration difficulties. It says that since 2014, 72,932 migrant deaths have been registered around the world, and more than half of these were due to drowning.

The Thirteenth General Programme of Work (2019–2023) puts a lot of emphasis on the commitments made in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which says that no one should be left behind, including refugees and migrants. This is because the program's main goals are to improve health, keep the world safe, and help the most vulnerable people. The General Programme of Work also wants to make a difference in people's health that can be measured at the country level.

The World Health Organization's Member States adopted the Global Action Plan to Promote the Health of Refugees and Migrants during the Seventy-second World Health Assembly in 2019. This plan was based on the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which the United Nations adopted in 2016. The declaration recognized specific national commitments made by member states and set priorities and guidelines for improving the health of refugees and migrants.

6.Challenges and Recommendations to Combat Irregular Migration

a. Problems with the Fight Against Irregular Migration

- **Poor Cooperation Between Countries:** There are international accords to stop irregular migration, but countries still have trouble working together because of things like conflicting interests and different national policies.

- **Not enough money and technical know-how:** Countries, especially those that are transit or receiving states, have a hard time getting the money they need to put

laws in place to stop illegal immigration, protect their borders, and give migrants basic services.

• **Problems with the law and administration:** It is hard to enforce laws against human trafficking and migrant smuggling, especially in nations with poor legal systems or no good laws.

• **Health services that are unfair and discriminatory:** Irregular migrants have trouble getting healthcare because of legal barriers or discrimination in some countries. This makes their health worse and spreads infectious diseases.

• **The effects of irregular migration on the economy and society:** Irregular migration puts a strain on healthcare, education, and social service systems, which makes things worse between host communities and migrants.

• **The Effect of Irregular Migration on National Security :**Some countries see irregular migration as a security risk since criminal gangs and terrorist groups could use it to their advantage, which makes the need for tougher security laws even greater.

b. Suggestions for how to deal with the health problems that irregular migration causes for national health systems:

• **Strengthening international and regional collaboration:** Countries must cooperate together to develop standard rules for lawful migration, share information about networks that help people move illegally, and improve security and legal cooperation.

• **Making things better for the economy and development in countries of origin:** To stop irregular migration, we need to fix the problems that create it by making things better for the economy, generating jobs, and supporting development in the countries that send migrants.

• **Changing the laws:** Updating laws about migration, making sure that migrants' rights are protected, and making it easier to get legal migration in order to cut down on the need for illegal migration.

• **Making border control better:** Improving border monitoring security technologies while preserving human rights, and giving coast guards more tools to stop migrant smuggling and save lives.

• **Making sure that migrants can get basic services:** Giving healthcare and education to undocumented immigrants, no matter what their legal status is, to stop the spread of diseases and make their living conditions better.

• **Stopping networks that let people move illegally and sell them into slavery:** Putting more effort into fighting criminal groups that take advantage of migrants

and making the consequences for people who are participating in smuggling operations stronger.

• **Making people in the community more aware:** Running campaigns in countries of origin to raise awareness of the dangers of irregular migration and provide legal and safe ways to migrate.

• **Helping people return home and reintegrate into society:** Creating programs to help migrants who are going back to their home countries, such as job possibilities and training programs to help them fit back into society.

7.Conclusion

In conclusion, irregular migration is a complicated and multifaceted issue that has a direct impact on the health, safety, and economies of both the countries of transit and the nations of reception. The World Health organization has said that irregular migrants have major health problems because they live in bad conditions, have trouble getting medical attention, and spread infectious diseases among themselves. Additionally, irregular migration puts more strain on health resources in host nations, which means that urgent action is needed to strengthen the response to this problem.

The analysis provided addresses the research topic on the effects of irregular migration on health systems in transit and receiving nations. It is clear that irregular migration leads to a greater need for health services, the spread of infectious diseases, problems with health planning, and higher death rates among migrants because of poor living conditions. On the other hand, current policies often don't give them full care because of legal and financial problems.

Proposed Solution:

To deal with this problem, we need to use a whole and integrated approach that is based on:

- Offering migrants complete and fair healthcare, while also making sure they are included in emergency health plans.
- Improving international collaboration to make sure that countries of origin, transit, and destination work together.
- Fighting networks that smuggle migrants and put their lives in jeopardy.
- Making the economy and society better in the countries of origin so that fewer people have to migrate illegally.
- Changing national laws and policies to make sure that migratory flows are managed in a more humane and effective way.

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