

Press release

Refugees' and Migrants' Needs and Challenges in terms of Sexual Health issues

Cyprus Family Planning Association presented the results of the research “Sexual and Reproductive Rights of Migrants and Refugees: Exploring the Needs and Challenges in the Cypriot Reality”, which demonstrated a range of language and socio-economic barriers that impede access to services and information on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) issues. There is lack of information concerning a variety of issues, such as methods of contraception, Sexually Transmitted Infections, termination of pregnancy and sexual violence.

Access to health services differs, depending on the migration status. More specifically, refugees have a personal doctor and an electronic health record; this is not the case for asylum seekers, which makes it difficult to systematically monitor patients and keep health records. In addition, health and psychological support issues are not considered as high priority, as a result of socio-economic difficulties such as financial hardship, long distance of residence from health services and transport difficulties. Access to methods of contraception is limited, as they are not covered by the national health system. There are also difficulties in accessing abortion services within the legal timeframe, due to health professionals' unavailability or refusal.

For women with migrant backgrounds, cultural pressure creates additional barriers, often making it difficult to communicate about sexual and gynaecological issues, particularly with male health professionals, due to shame or stigma. In addition, sexual and gender-based violence creates a need for specialized medical and psychological services; however, women who have experienced or are experiencing violence seem to be unaware of where to seek help and support. Migrant and refugee women usually first turn to Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) for help and information, as they seem to distrust the authorities. As far as health professionals are concerned, there are not many training courses on the issue of migrants' sexual health, taking into account their specific living conditions and cultural differences, while NGO professionals often lack the necessary specialised knowledge to provide guidance to migrants and refugees.

The aim of the research was to assess and map the needs of migrants and refugees, as well as health professionals and civil society on SRHR issues. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The research was conducted under the “M - Power Migrants and Refugees on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights” project, which is coordinated by Cyprus Family Planning Association in cooperation with Sex Og Politikk. The project benefits from a grant under the Active Citizens Fund Cyprus programme, funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, through the EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021.