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Understanding the Impact of Context on Migrant Health

What we know from natural
experiments

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Use of AI or AI-assisted technologies

AI technology based on language models (ChatGPT) was used to create the text for this Policy Brief based on the text of the original publication (see References). The technology was used to simplify the original review report for better accessibility for a non-expert readership. The technology was applied with human oversight and control, and authors carefully reviewed, checked and edited the AI-generated text for accuracy, originality and integrity. The AI technology was *not* used to replace researcher tasks such as producing scientific insights, analysing and interpreting data, or drawing scientific conclusions. Authors take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

The **Rapid Review Response Unit (RRRUn)** is based at the Dept. of Population Medicine and Health Services Research of the School of Public Health at Bielefeld University.

With the goal of supporting societal action and policy decisions related to population health, researchers and practice partners conduct Rapid Systematic Reviews of available qualitative as well as quantitative evidence on current topics of relevance to health policy and systems.

The methodology is based on a rigorous, transparent and reproducible systematic review process. Rapid reviews represent a form of knowledge synthesis in which components of the conventional review process are simplified or omitted to produce timely knowledge from available scientific sources¹. The results are published in the **Evidence Synthesis Series** (ISSN 2747-5999) as a Policy Brief, Review Report, or Technical Report.

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1 Executive Summary:

In recent years, research on migration and health has expanded our understanding of the challenges faced by migrant populations in the resettlement phase. However, one aspect that has received limited attention is the influence of the places migrants move to, and the broader context in which they live, on their health and well-being. Natural experiments are situations in which individuals cannot freely choose where to move or where key factors of the environment vary in a quasi-random fashion (e.g. due to political decisions, natural disasters, or temporal influences). These unique, but rare situations, help us understand the impact of factors of the environment in which people live by minimising selection bias. This policy brief summarizes key insights from a comprehensive and systematic literature review of natural experiments on health effects among migrant populations that stem from factors of the places in which they live.

2 Introduction

Migrant health research has primarily focused on individual health, service delivery, and access barriers, often neglecting the significance of the environments into which people migrate. This narrow focus overlooks the social determinants of health, which play a pivotal role in shaping health outcomes.

3 Key Findings:

1. **Neighborhood Disadvantage:** The study provides robust evidence that neighborhood disadvantage has negative effects on physical health and mortality among migrant populations.
2. **Complex Effects on Mental Health:** The effects of neighborhood disadvantage on mental health were mixed and the study underscores the complex relationship between contextual factors and diverse mental health outcomes.
3. **Comparing Migrants and Non-Migrants:** Comparing migrants with those who stayed behind, the review reveals the detrimental effects of migration and adverse post-migratory contexts on physical health and mortality. However, moving to new social and economic contexts has favorable effects on mental and child health.
4. **Policy Environments:** Natural experiments of policy environments indicate the negative impacts of restrictive migration and social policies on healthcare utilization, mental health, and mortality. The review shows that health outcomes improved when restrictions were lifted.

4 Policy Implications

1. **Inclusive Welfare Policies:** These findings emphasize the importance of inclusive migration, health, and social policies and the detrimental health effects of welfare restrictions. Measures should be taken to promote equitable access to healthcare and social protection.
2. **Neighborhood Improvement Programs:** The study provides policymakers and public health practitioners sound evidence for the promotion of health through neighborhood improvement and poverty alleviation programs.
3. **Future Research:** Natural experiments are an under-utilized tool in migrant health research and provide rich opportunities for studying how environmental factors affect health.

5 Conclusion

Understanding the impact of context on migrant health is essential for creating policies that promote the well-being of migrant populations. This policy brief highlights the need for inclusive policies, neighborhood improvement programs, and a comprehensive approach to address the complex relationship between context and health. By doing so, policymakers can work towards reducing health inequities and fostering healthier post-migratory environments.

6 References

For further information, please refer to the full review report:

Biddle L, Hintermeier M, Costa D, Wasko Z, Bozorgmehr K. Context, health and migration: a systematic review of natural experiments. *eClinicalMedicine* 2023: 102206.

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