The refugee crisis and the role of the International Primary Care Respiratory Group (IPCRG)

Since the formation in 1951 of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), almost 55 million persons of concern have been registered as displaced worldwide up to the end of 2014. The numbers have doubled in the last 10 years. Large numbers of people have been displaced from countries in Africa, South America, Asia and the Middle East. In 2015, an estimated 850,000 Syrian refugees sought to relocate to Europe.

Faced by the refugee crisis in Europe, Wonca Europe released a statement at its conference in Istanbul in October 2015. The IPCRG, as a collaborating organisation with Wonca Europe, lent its support to that statement.

The IPCRG understands the risks to the health of people who are displaced from their homes and their work and often separated from their families. While the risk to public health from refugees moving into new countries is low, the impact on the physical and mental health of refugees is substantial.

Communicable diseases are the major cause of morbidity among refugees … the majority of these [being] respiratory tract infections, malaria and diarrhoea. The UNHCR however, warns that non-communicable diseases … have increasingly become a public health burden for refugee communities. The UNHCR recognises the role of primary care in the delivery of cost effective care to people with non-communicable and mental health diseases.

As the global organisation of primary care health professionals with an interest and expertise in respiratory medicine, the IPCRG calls on governments to acknowledge the differing health needs of refugees and to provide adequate support to primary care doctors and nurses to address these needs.

As a proven provider of Teach the Teacher programmes which deliver health education tailored to the needs of individual countries, the International Primary Care Respiratory Group is able and willing to support training for primary care doctors in the management of people with respiratory diseases to alleviate the health impact on displaced persons.

6 Refugee public health, including HIV/AIDS. Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme. Standing Committee 63rd meeting 3 June 2015