Reviewer's report

Title: Assessing refugee healthcare needs in Europe and implementing educational interventions in primary care: a focus on methods

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Reviewer: Esperanza Díaz

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for letting me review the manuscript "Refugee crisis in Europe: do we need more involved primary care?". Although the theme of this manuscript is highly relevant, I am struggling with the structure and even definition of the paper. I had to read the manuscript several times to try to understand the concept. To the best of my understanding, I have tried to write some comments and suggestions. If I have misunderstood parts or the whole thing, I apologise… butt as a frequent reader and writer of this theme, other readers might find the same challenges. I think this is a nice study, but, in my opinion, it would need a major review before being published.

To begin with, the authors write that this is a debate article. However, I cannot see that this is the case. To me this manuscript seems to be a methodological one, explaining the different parts of the EUR-HUMAN Project. I would therefore suggest that the aims in the abstract change to: "This methodological article describes a structured, cross border effort embarked upon to select, develop and assess approaches and methods within PHC deployed for refugee health care in the context of a capacity-building funded European project" (or similar)

If this indeed is a methodological paper, however, it is not well enough structured to be completely understandable, and lacks details at several levels. Please see some examples below among other comments appearing in the order the subjects appear in the text.

From a theoretical point of view, the authors include several times the term compassion (for example line 139), which is not often included in the description of the core elements of PHC. I suggest that the authors explain this better; give appropriate references for the model they ground their theoretical understanding upon.

The English in the manuscript should be revised. Although some parts are well written, sentences are often too long and complex. In the introduction, for example, lines 97 to 114 could be reorganised and shortened. The same applies for lines 124-135 and other places in the text.
Following lines 97 to 114, where the authors explain the many barriers that contribute to poor services for refugees, the sentences beginning with "Due to this fact,…" point only to training to health personnel and capacity as solutions. What about organization of care, policy and, not the least, economic priority? In this line, a healthy-economic package including the cost of inactivity, degradation of health and many other factors beyond the health services would be really valuable in this project. Its absence should be noted as a limitation (a section which otherwise is not clearly depicted).

After reading the introduction (and most of the text), I believe that lines 147-149 "This debate article aims to to raise key issues in regards the role of evidence-based and integrated PHC that Europe needs to discuss in responding effectively to the refugees crisis" do not describe the aims of the article. As stated above, a more descriptive aims could sound something like: "This methodological article aims to describe the EUR HUMAN project in its effort to i) describe the health needs of refugees in Europe using a refugee-centered approach, ii) describe, develop and test tools and interventions to give appropriate health care to this group within the frame of European PHC and iii) evaluate the created material" Would this be correctly understood? If not, please correct and make more clear.

The head "Main text" is not usual, not very clearly written and takes a lot for granted: Line 151: "In developing this project" Which project? EUR HUMAN? Why should a refugee-centred approach become a "motivational factor for the health care professionals"?

A detailed and well structured methodological section for each of the three main aims is needed: number of participants, from which countries? questions asked in the groups, terms used for literature review, types of literature, basic flow charts, etc. I understand there might be several articles coming with the results for each part, but as it is now, the reader remains in the dark as for the work really conducted and how the parts are put together, which should be clarified in a methodological paper.

Headings for the four parts thereafter (lines 171, 244-245, 254, 304) do not clearly describe the content of the study. I suggest the authors reorganize these. For instance, the heading "The need to retrieve available information about the healthcare needs of refugees" should also include "and adequate provision of health", since this also seems to be studied through the different methods. If I understand this part correctly, the methods to get this information were PLA and systematic review:

1. Dialogues (PLA) with
Stakeholders
Health professionals
Refugees

For the PLA the authors used comparative-case studies?? (if so, explain); in hotspots, transit centers, etc (please describe numbers, size, etc at least generally)

2. Systematic research of literature studying

   Barriers for care

   Facilitators for care

   Tools for use at PHC for this group?

Which databases? Which terms?

Then the authors write: "how to combine and deploy them in a pilot to assess acceptability and feasibility of the overall intervention." I do not understand if this is part of the systematic review or if they are talking about conducting a pilot, is this the one later conducted in Greece???

One summarizing table with the main elements and methods might be useful to make sure that the reader is not lost in this complex study.

Otherwise, a statement on ethics is needed, and a description of the transferability of data among partners. How was information flow secured?

3. The third part of the study seems to be an Expert Consensus Panel (line 247). Here also, the reader lacks information about this panel: type of experts, numbers, sex, representation of refugees, etc.

It is not clear for me either if the "development of protocol for the rapid assessment (RA) of mental health and psychosocial needs of refugees on the basis of an appropriate support model identified through the data collection and review activities" was done before or after the Expert Consensus Panel and by whom. In fact, it seems to be not only a protocol for assessment of needs, but a protocol for assessment and decision making/provision of care, as it is described that it consists in 1) triage, 2) screening, 3) immediate assistance and 4) referral.

4. The main products of the study seem to be the electronic and face-to face courses.
Related to the point above, I wonder to which degree the local context was taken into account in the work of the expert panel and if they achieved consensus, as the authors later write that this protocol was greatly modified for the different context (lines 268-273). Regarding the content of the training material described, the main components were: "The training material focuses on eight different areas (modules), namely triage; mental health; communicable diseases; non-communicable diseases; vaccination; mother and child care; cultural and legal issues and health promotion." Given the holistic approach of this project I wonder if themes as cultural humility, cultural awareness, cultural competence or the impact of socioeconomic factors on health were included in the material.

5. A pilot in Greece is named in line 301, but it is unclear if this was a pilot for the courses or for a further intervention. In the meantime, lines 274 and further, the implementation of the courses is shortly named. Was this after piloting? With how many health professionals? Was the same content given to GPs and other professionals? How where these courses evaluated? Is this the "intervention phase" that is mentioned in line 287? …Here again, the reader remains unable to make a picture of the broadness of the project.

6. Last, the authors explained that "The six intervention countries will evaluate selected interventions in order to provide answers to questions with regards to process, outcomes and learning of the project." Again, a list with what is going to be evaluated where should be useful.

In accordance with what I have understood and written above, the conclusions should be re-written.

All in all, I think this could be a useful paper to understand a complex and interesting study, but this is, unfortunately, not possible in the current form.
Are the methods appropriate and well described?  
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?  
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

No

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?  
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?  
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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Needs some language corrections before being published

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