

Study estimates cost of cancer care for Syrian refugees in wake of COVID-19

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A new study shows the cost of cancer care for Syrian refugees in host nations for the first time, as researchers urge resources to be provided in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study published today in the *Lancet Oncology*, led by researchers at King's College London and a collaboration between the cancer and [palliative care](#) working group within UKRI Global Challenge Research Fund R4HC-MENA programme (r4hc-mena.org), shows the increasing cost of cancer care for refugees on host nations such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

The findings come as humanitarian organisations and host countries are reallocating funding away from cancer in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Professor Richard Sullivan from King's College London said: "The consequences of regional lockdowns and the re-allocation of funding away from non-communicable diseases to COVID-19 will lead to serious loss of life and suffering in [refugee](#) populations from cancer in the next three years. There is a critical need for UN and bilateral funders such as the UK to ensure balance in support that recognises the growing impact of cancer in these refugee populations."

Although host countries can apply for funding to meet healthcare costs for their refugee communities, it had not been known how much is needed to meet the costs.

The study, which is the first of its kind to examine the economic burden of cancer in Syrian [refugee populations](#), a major health problem, estimates that it would cost only around 3,000 to 7,000 euros per cancer case to provide good quality care.

This amounts to 11% of the current annual budget of \$345 million requested for healthcare costs of Syrian refugees in 2017 for Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. The findings should give governments and international agencies a better understanding of resources for the Syrian refugees with cancer to continue providing funding for cancer care even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prof. Dr. Tezer Kutluk UICC Past-president and Chair, Department of Pediatrics, Cancer Institute and Faculty of Medicine, Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey, said:

"How to use the limited resources is a major challenge on managing the refugee crisis. Better understanding the economic burden of cancer care will help governments, international agencies and all stakeholders to better use of available resources for the cancer care of refugee population. This population based modeling study is a good example of estimating the financial burden and hope it will stimulate other researches on [health economics](#) for refugee population"

Dr. Deborah Mukherji, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Division of Hematology Oncology, American University of Beirut, said: "The COVID-19 pandemic has focussed attention on the fact that health inequalities impact society as a whole. As humanitarian response to crisis becomes prolonged, this article highlights the need for accurate data to inform policy and manage limited resources while protecting vulnerable populations. With multiple stakeholders and competing priorities, cancer care in refugees has not been the focus of sufficient data collection or funding. Strengthening regional capacity for cancer registration, cancer

control and context-specific management guidelines will be essential to mitigate the growing burden of cancer in conflict-affected populations of the Middle East."

Dr. Julie Torode, Director, Special Projects, Union of International Cancer Control, said: "The pressing need for integrated models of care for refugees with cancer is heavily underscored as health systems struggle to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences of lockdown and closed borders. Sustainable, inclusive and comprehensive financing mechanisms will support steps towards universal health coverage in host countries, like Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey and speed the recovery phase for cancer services and ensure that no one is left behind."

HRH Princess Dina Mired, Princess of Jordan, and current President of the Union of International Cancer Control a major partner of R4HC-MENA programme, said: "The pressing need for integrated models of care for refugees with cancer is heavily underscored as health systems struggle to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences of lockdown and closed borders. Sustainable, inclusive and comprehensive financing mechanisms will support steps towards universal health coverage in host countries, like Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey and speed the recovery phase for [cancer](#) services and ensure that no one is left behind."

Provided by King's College London

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