

WHO Regional Committee for Europe: 66th session September 2016

**Statement in response to EUR/RC66/8:
Strategy and action plan for refugee and migrant health in the WHO European Region
Provisional Agenda item 5(f)**

The World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) and its regional group the Council of Occupational Therapists for the European Countries (COTEC), representing occupational therapists internationally and within Europe, welcome the Strategy and Action Plan for Refugee and Migrant health in the WHO European Region.

The values, concepts and language employed throughout the document are congruent with those embraced by the occupational therapy profession. The WFOT strongly agrees that by being human rights based and equity-driven, the Strategy and Action Plan will help recognise the interrelated influences of economic, social and environmental determinants that influence the health of refugees and migrants.

The WFOT strongly supports the development of tools and guidelines, which are gender-sensitive and also tailored health service approaches for persons in vulnerable situations, such as children, disabled persons and the elderly. The complexity of migration is not only an issue for the health sector but for all government sectors and as such the occupational therapy profession can participate in multi-sectoral initiatives contributing to a broad view of health care, social services and environmental priorities.

Addressing the social determinants of health that generate inequalities especially in the longer-term provision of health care, for those who remain in host countries, will also protect, without discrimination, the public health of the host population. Occupational therapists make a significant contribution by enabling refugees and migrants to participate in valued occupations that help bridge a former life to the current situation. This participation helps meet human needs, and helps people experience human rights. When occupational therapists enable successful participation in everyday occupation, life roles, and the fabric of the community, people can move beyond the negative effects of displacement. This participation also strengthens inclusion and health and well-being within the community (WFOT, 2014).

In closing, the WFOT and its European member organisations are deeply committed to working with governments at all levels, non-governmental organisations and persons effected to promote societal change. The Strategy and Action Plan is a powerful document, which should be implemented as matter of urgency with strong participation of refugees and migrants.

This statement is delivered on behalf of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists by Samantha Shann, Vice President Finance WFOT.

Reference: World Federation of Occupational Therapists (revised 2014). *Position Statement: Human Displacement*. Perth, WFOT.

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