

An Analysis of Papers on Migration Presented at National Public Health Congresses

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Geliş Tarihi/Received 02.04.2024
Revizyon Tarihi/ Revised 22.06.2024
Kabul Tarihi/Accepted 30.08.2024
Yayın Tarihi/Publication Date 27.12.2024

Abstract

Objective: Although the topic of migration in Turkey was brought back into focus following the Syrian civil war in 2011, it has long been an issue in our country, particularly regarding irregular migrants and seasonal agricultural workers. The impact of migration movements is felt across all aspects of public health. An examination of public health congresses highlights how global and national changes impact scientific advancements in public health. This study aims to investigate the migration-related papers presented at National Public Health Congresses, categorized by year.

Methods: The population of this descriptive-review study consisted of the papers presented in 24 Public Health Congresses held in Turkey between 1988 and 2022. The selected papers were evaluated by bibliometric method and content analysis.

Results: The 8,451 papers in the congress books were analyzed and 131 relevant papers were evaluated. While 58.8% of the papers are about external migration movements, 93.5% of them are about forced migration movements. Seasonal agricultural workers are the most studied group in internal migration studies. While the weight of the papers presented before 2012 was related to the internal migration movements, the focus of the papers presented in the congresses in 2012 and after was shifted to the forced-external migration studies, especially the studies related to the Syrians. Occupational health was the most frequently studied topic concerning internal migration movements. For external migration movements, the most commonly studied topic was women's and reproductive health. Less than 10% of the papers were sent from nursing faculties.

Conclusion: In recent years, it has been observed that internal migration research has lost its weight in migration health research and migration health research has not gone beyond some basic topics.

Keywords: Migrants, Immigrants, Migrant Workers, International Migration, Congresses

Öz

Ulusal Halk Sağlığı Kongrelerinde Sunulan Göç Konulu Bildirilerin İncelenmesi

Amaç: Ülkemizde göç konusu Suriye'de 2011 yılında meydana gelen savaş sonrasında yeniden gündeme gelmiş başta düzensiz göçmenler ve mevsimlik tarım işçileri olmak üzere topraklarımızda süregelen bir problemdir. Göç hareketleri halk sağlığının tüm ilgi alanlarını etkilemekte ve halk sağlığı profesyonellerinin ilgisini çekmektedir. Halk sağlığı kongrelerinin incelenmesi, küresel ve ulusal düzeydeki değişimlerin halk sağlığı alanındaki bilimsel üretimi nasıl etkilediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışmada yıllara göre ulusal Halk Sağlığı Kongrelerinde sunulan göç bildirilerinin incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır.

Yöntem: Bu tanımlayıcı-inceleme çalışmasının evrenini 1988-2022 yılları arasında Türkiye'de yapılan 24 Halk Sağlığı Kongresinde sunulan bildiriler oluşturmuştur. Seçilen bildiriler yöntem ve içerik analizi ile değerlendirilmiştir.

Bulgular: Kongre kitaplarında yer alan 8.451 bildiri analiz edilmiş ve ilgili 131 bildiri değerlendirilmiştir. Bildirilerin %60'a yakını dış göç hareketleri ile ilgilidir ve dış göç ile ilgili olan bu bildirilerin %93.5'i zorunlu göç hareketleridir. İç göç çalışmalarında en fazla incelenen grup mevsimlik tarım işçileri olmuştur. 2012 yılı öncesinde sunulan bildirilerin ağırlığı iç göç hareketleri ile ilgiliyken, 2012 ve sonrasındaki kongrelerde sunulan bildirilerde ise ilgi alanı başta Suriyeliler ile ilgili çalışmalar olmak üzere zorunlu-dış göç çalışmalarına kaymıştır. İç göç hareketlerinde en sık çalışılan konu iş sağlığı iken dış göç hareketlerinde en sık çalışılan konu kadın ve üreme sağlığı olmuştur. Bildirilerin %10'undan azı hemşirelik fakültelerinden yollanmıştır.

Sonuç: Son yıllarda yapılan göç sağlığı araştırmalarında iç göç araştırmalarının ağırlığını kaybettiği ve göç sağlığı araştırmalarında temel bazı konular dışına çıkılmadığı görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göçmenler, Dış Göçmenler, Göçmen İşçiler, Uluslararası Göç, Kongreler

Atf/Cite; Özgen, H., Bilgin, AC., Aksoy, Ö. (2024). An analysis of papers on migration presented at national public health congresses. *Halk Sağlığı Hemşireliği Dergisi*, 6(3), 117-122. <https://doi.org/10.54061/jphn.1462964>



INTRODUCTION

“Migration,” defined as the relocation of an individual or a group within a country or across an international border, regardless of duration, structure, or reason, is a phenomenon as old as human history (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). Migration, which takes place for many different reasons such as climatic events, economic reasons, and wars, causes many positive and negative consequences in both the migrating and receiving society. According to United Nations data, 281 million individuals, or more than 3.5% of the world’s population, live outside their country of birth (United Nations Population Division, 2021). Among these 281 million people are migrants and students who go to another country on a planned basis in order to have a better standard of living or to get a better education, as well as asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless people who feel that their lives are threatened in their own country because of their race, religion or thoughts (Ergüven & Özturanlı, 2013).

Although the topic of migration in Türkiye was brought back into focus following the Syrian civil war in 2011, it has long been an issue in our country, particularly regarding irregular migrants and seasonal agricultural workers. The term “temporary protection status,” which has entered into our lexicon due to the influx of Syrians into our country, is used to describe their situation as they do not fit within the legal definitions outlined in our legislation. This differs from the terms refugee, asylum seeker, stateless, or irregular migrant. When we look at the current data on migration movements towards our country, as of March 2024, the number of Syrians under temporary protection in our country is 3.1 million (Presidency of Migration Management, 2024a). By the end of the 2023, 254,008 irregular migrants from many countries, mainly Afghanistan, Syria, and Palestine, were apprehended in Turkey, and 19,017 international protection applications were received, with the highest number coming from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran, respectively (Presidency of Migration Management, 2024b and 2024c).

Seasonal agricultural labor, a type of internal migration that can cause devastating public health problems, is one of the most common examples of undeclared work. In the fourth quarter of 2022, agricultural employment in Türkiye amounted to 4.9 million people, representing 15.7% of the employed (TURKSTAT, 2022). It is estimated that approximately one out of every two people working in agricultural activities is a seasonal agricultural worker (Kalaycı et al., 2016). Based on this estimate, it can be estimated that there are approximately 2.5 million seasonal agricultural workers in Türkiye.

Irrespective of the cause, duration, or type of migration, individuals who migrate must adjust to a new society, culture and system. In the case of involuntary migration,

such as forced migration and refugee migration, the adaptation process can be challenging due to factors like low income, unemployment, lack of knowledge of the host country’s language, and legal status. On the other hand, voluntary migration, which is usually undertaken to improve one’s standard of living, may have a shorter adaptation period since the migration is planned. Nonetheless, international publications have documented that migrants, whether voluntary or forced, are among the most vulnerable groups in society, and over time, they may develop psychological issues, face discrimination, and encounter difficulties accessing education and health services (Martinez-Donate et al., 2014; Morawa & Erim, 2014; Pottie et al., 2015).

Migration has been a recurring phenomenon in the lands we inhabit for centuries, and the political conditions of the region and country influence its frequency. The impact of migration movements is felt across all aspects of public health, particularly in areas like inequalities, demography, health management, health policies, infectious diseases, maternal and child health, community mental health, environmental health, and occupational health, which are all concerns for public health professionals. An examination of public health congresses highlights how global and national changes impact scientific advancements in public health. The first Public Health Congress in Türkiye was held in 1988, and a total of 24 Public Health Congresses have been organized up to 2022, with six of them being international. Analyzing these congresses by year can offer valuable insights into society’s prevalent health challenges and conditions.

METHODS

Design: This descriptive-review study aims to investigate the migration-related papers presented at National Public Health Congresses, categorized by year.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are migration studies represented in public health congresses?
2. Does this representation change according to years?

Variables of the Study: This study’s descriptive variables include the number and rate of papers categorized by year, the province where the research was conducted, the sending institution type, presentation type, data collection method, location of the study, chapter in the congress book, and public health topics covered. As the migration movement resulting from the Syrian war that commenced in 2011 may have been reflected in the papers as early as 2012, some data were classified into two categories: pre-2012 and 2012 and later.

Study Sample: The population of this descriptive-review study consisted of the papers presented in 24 National

Public Health Congresses held between 1988 and 2022. 8.451 papers in the 24 congress books were analyzed, 131 relevant papers were selected, and the selected papers were evaluated by bibliometric method and content analysis.

Inclusion Criteria: All papers in the public health congress book that included at least one of the words migration, seasonal worker, asylum seeker, refugee, guest, temporary protection and Syria in the abstract, keyword and title were included. Papers that did not meet these criteria were excluded. Flowchart is presented in Figure 1.

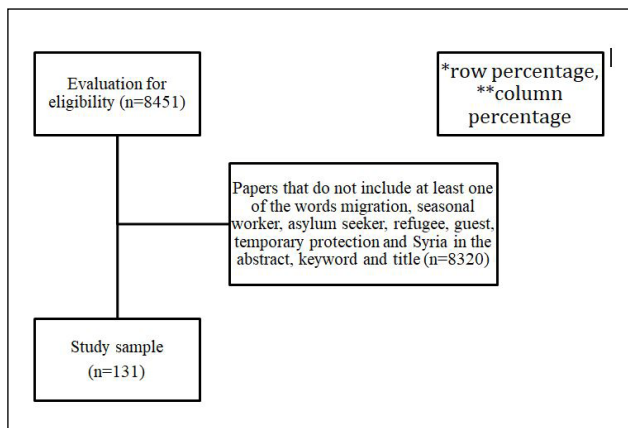


Figure 1. Flowchart showing the number of papers

Data Collection

All congress books were accessed from the website of the Association of Public Health Specialists (<https://www.hasuder.org/Anasayfa/Index>). The keywords migration, seasonal worker, asylum seeker, refugee, guest, temporary protection, and Syria were searched in all proceedings. In addition to the keywords, the titles of all papers were also evaluated in order to double-check and cover all relevant papers.

Ethical Consideration: Ethics committee approval was not required.

Statistical Analysis

The data were analyzed with the SPSS 22.0 package program (IBM Corp., 2013). For descriptive findings, variables specified by counting were expressed as numbers and percentages.

RESULTS

A total of 131 papers on migration were presented in 24 National Public Health Congresses held between 1988 and 2022, and these papers constitute 1.55% of all papers. Numerically, most papers on migration were presented in the congresses held in 2015, 2017, and 2019, respectively (respectively; 20, 18 and 13 papers). In percentage

terms, most papers on migration were presented at the congresses held in 1998, 2017, and 2015, respectively (9.26%; 4.65%; 4.01% respectively). No papers on the subject were presented in the third and eighth congresses held in 1992 and 2002. Figure 2 illustrates the number of papers on migration in the years of the Congress.

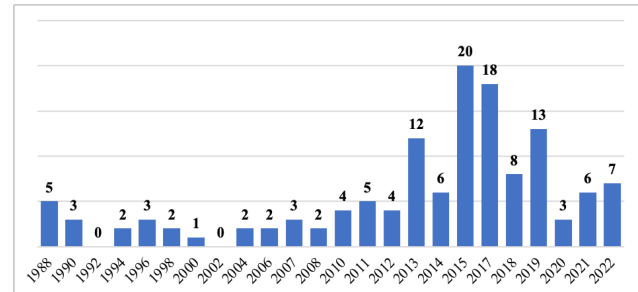


Figure 2. The number of papers on migration in the years of the congress

In 111 of the 131 studies, the province or region where the study was conducted was specified. Of the 111 studies in which the province or region was specified, 0.9% (n=1) were conducted nationwide, 7.2% (n=8) were conducted in more than one province, and 6.3% (n=7) were conducted abroad. The first three provinces where the studies were conducted most frequently in a single province were Şanlıurfa (n=11), Istanbul (n=10), and Izmir (n=10), respectively.

In only 65 papers, the submitting institution was identified, and 63.1% (n=41) of the papers in which the institution was identified were sent from the disciplines of medical faculties of universities, while 9.2% (n=6) were sent from nursing faculties.

Of the 112 studies in which the presentation type was specified, 41.1% (n=46) were presented as oral presentations. Questionnaire was used as a data collection method in 69.5% (n=91) of the studies. Data were collected by examination in only 7.6% (n=10) of the studies and by laboratory examinations in 2.3% (n=3) of the studies. 4.6% (n=6) of the papers were sent in English. Of the 100 reports in which the place of study was specified, 48.0% (n=48) were conducted in households, 23.0% (n=23) in health institutions, and 12.0% (n=12) in camps.

While 58.8% (n=77) of the papers are about external migration movements, 93.5% (n=72) of them are about forced migration movements such as civil war, war, and climate. Of these 72 studies on international forced migration, 63.9% (n=46) were conducted with Syrians. Seasonal agricultural workers are the most studied group in internal migration studies. Internal migration movements other than seasonal workers accounted for 24.1% (n=13) of all internal migration studies (Table 1).

Table 1. Types of migration examined in studies

| Internal migration movements 41.2% (n=54)* | | External migration movements 58.8% (n=77)* | |
|---|----------------|---|----------------|
| Seasonal agricultural workers | 75.9% (n=41)** | Syrians | 59.7% (n=46)** |
| Other internal migration movements | 24.1% (n=13)** | Other international forced migrants | 33.8% (n=26)** |
| | | International voluntary migrants | 6.5% (n=5)** |

*row percentage, **column percentage

Among the papers on migration, 74.0% (n=97) were presented in congresses in 2012 and after. While 64.7% (n=22) of the 34 papers on migration presented before 2012 were related to internal migration movements, especially seasonal agricultural workers, 67.0% (n=65) of the papers presented in the congresses in 2012 and after constituted forced-external migration studies, especially studies on Syrians.

Table 2. Distribution of studies by public health topics

| Topic | % (n) |
|---|--------------|
| Women’s and reproductive health | 30.5% (n=40) |
| Inequalities | 28.2% (n=37) |
| Occupational health | 22.1% (n=29) |
| Governance, policy and health systems | 21.4% (n=28) |
| Child and adolescent health | 16.0% (n=21) |
| Healthcare research | 12.2% (n=16) |
| Communicable diseases and vaccinations | 10.0% (n=13) |
| Mental health | 8.4% (n=11) |
| Demography | 7.6% (n=10) |
| Nutrition | 7.6% (n=10) |
| Health promotion | 7.6% (n=10) |
| Noncommunicable diseases and disability | 6.1% (n=8) |
| Health education | 3.8% (n=5) |
| Anthropology/sociology | 3.1% (n=4) |
| Environmental health | 3.1% (n=4) |
| School health | 3.1% (n=4) |
| Accident and injuries | 1.5% (n=2) |
| Training for health workers | 1.5% (n=2) |
| Substance abuse | 0.8% (n=1) |
| Elderly health | 0.8% (n=1) |
| Tourism health | 0.8% (n=1) |
| Violence | 0.8% (n=1) |

When the proceedings were examined based on the section in which they were titled in the congress book by the book editors and the scientific committee of the Congress, it was seen that 26 papers presented before 2012 and whose topics were specified were most frequently included in the occupational health section (23.1%), while 40 papers presented in 2012 and later and whose topics were specified were most frequently included in the women’s and reproductive health section (27.5%). Table 2 presents the topics covered in the papers by the researchers. It is seen that the most frequently covered topic in the studies is reproductive and women’s health. The second most common topic, inequalities, was emphasized in 28.2% of

the studies, and a general comparison was made with the local community (Table 2).

Occupational health (48.1%), inequalities (35.2%), and women’s and reproductive health (31.5%) were the three most frequently studied topics concerning internal migration movements. For external migration movements, the most commonly studied topics were women’s and reproductive health (29.9%), governance, policy, and health systems (24.7%), as well as inequalities (23.4%). Before 2012, the most frequently studied topic was inequalities, whereas in 2012 and beyond, the most frequently studied topic was women’s and reproductive health (Table 3).

Table 3. The most frequently studied topics by period

| Before 2012 (n=34) | | 2012 and later (n=97) | |
|---------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| Inequalities | 38.2% (n=13) | Women’s and reproductive health | 29.9% (n=29) |
| Occupational health | 32.4% (n=11) | Inequalities | 24.7% (n=24) |
| Women’s and reproductive health | 32.4% (n=11) | Governance, policy and health systems | 21.6% (n=21) |

DISCUSSION

Migration, which affects individuals’ access to education, health, and other social rights, is one of the vital study topics of public health (Wickramage, 2018). Although the number of papers on the subject constitutes a low percentage of all papers, it is observed that the number of papers has changed over the years with the effect of all dynamics affecting society, particularly political or climatic events. Especially after 2011, with the effect of Syrians who took refuge in our country after the civil war in their country, it is observed that there is an upward trend in the number of papers with occasional decreases. The Covid-19 pandemic, which originated in China at the end of 2019 and spread globally in early 2020, undoubtedly had a significant impact on public health congresses. The congresses in 2020 and 2021 were held online due to the pandemic. In the 2020 Congress, papers on Covid-19 and its consequences dominated the proceedings, and all topics, including migration studies, except infectious diseases, were poorly represented. At the beginning of 2023, it is anticipated that the earthquake that affected ten provinces at the beginning of the year will have an impact on the papers presented in public health congresses.

As mentioned in many studies, one of the main issues that stood out in the analysis of the papers on migration was the terms used (Ineli-Ciner, 2017; Yilmaz-Eren, 2019). Syrians living in Turkey were first named guests and then taken under temporary protection status. However, it is

observed that in most of the studies, concepts such as refugee and asylum seeker are used for Syrians, which are far from the legal situation of the event. It is observed that this situation continues not only in papers but also in high quality studies published. When our current legislation is examined, according to Temporary Protection Regulation No. 6883, which entered into force in 2014, the legal status of Syrians in our country is temporary protection (Geçici Koruma Yönetmeliği, 2014). In the Regulation, temporary protection refers to 'the protection provided to foreigners who have been forced to leave their country, who are unable to return to the country from which they left, who arrive at or cross our borders in mass or individually during this period of a mass influx in search of emergency and temporary protection, and whose international protection request cannot be evaluated individually.' The concept of temporary protection and refugee status differ in their definition and legal implications. Temporary protection is granted collectively and is limited to a specific cause or event, with the expectation that individuals will eventually return to their home countries. On the other hand, refugee status is an individual definition outlined in the 1951 Geneva Convention, which prohibits the return of refugees to their countries of origin where their life or freedom would be threatened (Mültecilerin Hukuki Durumuna Dair Sözleşme, 1961). It is crucial for academic studies, which contribute to public memory, to consider this distinction and accurately reflect the legal implications and definitions of each status.

When the study topics are analyzed, it is observed that women's health, inequalities, and health policies stand out in studies on external migration. In internal migration studies, on the other hand, occupational health studies come to the fore. This is similar to the results of studies conducted in other countries (Taylor, 2001). Since internal migration studies are generally conducted on seasonal agricultural workers, the issue of occupational health is expected to come to the fore. It is emphasized that internal migration is an important social determinant in terms of access to occupational health services (West et al., 2021). Studies on inequalities are prominent in internal and external migration movements and temporally in all periods, and comparisons with the local community remain popular (Kulshreshtha, 2023). It is notable that survey questionnaires are the most commonly used data collection method in studies related to migration, while studies utilizing examination and laboratory data are quite scarce. This may be due to potential permission issues or budgetary limitations in research with migrant populations. Additionally, studies employing examination and laboratory data generally require a more extended period to collect and analyze data, while survey studies can reach a larger number of participants in a shorter period (Aksakoğlu, 2013). These factors may contribute to the differences in data collection methods observed in studies related to migration.

The study reveals an important finding that despite the majority of the analyzed papers being conducted with Syrians, only slightly over 10% of the studies were conducted in camp regions. It is noteworthy that although the camp regions were established in border provinces and have hosted a significant number of Syrians for an extended period, researchers may have faced bureaucratic obstacles or other factors that prevented them from conducting scientific research in these regions.

Nurses and physicians are among the primary health care workers involved in migration health. Migration movements should be reflected in all fields of public health and studies should be increased in order to propose solutions to problems with a public health perspective. The main limitation of our study was to evaluate the relationship between migration and public health only through public health specialist' congresses. Again, not all studies on the subject may have been submitted as papers to these congresses. This may have reduced our sample size.

CONCLUSION

In migration health research in recent years, it has been observed that internal migration research has lost its weight and migration health research has not gone beyond some basic issues. Regardless of the reason for migration, migrants are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. The fact that they have problems in accessing all services and opportunities, especially health and education, makes them one of the most disadvantaged groups in society. Therefore, all public health professionals should deal with the phenomenon of migration, which has a significant percentage in the society and has health consequences and policies that also affect the local population, with more diversity of topics. In order to understand the interest of nurses in the subject more clearly, the weight of the issue of migration health in the congress proceedings organized by the Public Health Nursing Association can be investigated. Also, since migration affects the entire health system, it maintains its importance within nursing associations.

Acknowledgements: This study was presented as a poster presentation at the 2nd International 20th National Public Health Congress in Antalya in 2018.

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Author Contributions:

Research idea: HÖ, ACB, ÖA

Design of the study: HÖ, ACB, ÖA

Acquisition of data for the study: HÖ, ACB, ÖA

Analysis of data for the study: HÖ, ACB, ÖA

Interpretation of data for the study: HÖ, ACB, ÖA

Drafting the manuscript: HÖ, ACB, ÖA

Revising it critically for important intellectual content: HÖ, ACB, ÖA

Final approval of the version to be published: HÖ, ACB, ÖA

Data Availability Statement: *The datasets used and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon request.*

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