



Union Official Statement

Recommendations to ensure the diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis in undocumented migrants*

A statement of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease

Undocumented migrants represent a considerable proportion of the population and of the tuberculosis patients in many countries. They have limited access to diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis, which may lead to increased transmission and development of drug-resistant tuberculosis. A variety of interventions to ensure access to diagnosis and to ensure completion of treatment have successfully been implemented in different countries, as described in a recent report and recommendations from the Working Group on Trans-border Migration and Tuberculosis of the Tuberculosis Section of The Union.¹

The interventions include ways to ensure payment for patients who are not members of the social security system, ways to avoid providing personal identification, and ensuring better information to the migrants. In the Netherlands and Norway,² the authorities have introduced regulations to ensure that tuberculosis patients are not deported until treatment has been completed, giving the right of temporary stay for the period of treatment, as a way of ensuring rapid diagnosis and an early start and completion of treatment.

Based on current experience, existing recommendations on tuberculosis control³⁻⁵ and several international statements on human rights and access to health care,⁶⁻¹¹ there is a strong public health rationale for ensuring early detection and effective treatment of tuberculosis until completion in undocumented immigrants. The recommendations have been developed to assist other countries in making similar interventions. Although the Working group report refers to settings with low and intermediate incidence of tuberculosis, the following recommendations should have global relevance.¹

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) Health authorities and/or health staff should:
 - a) ensure easy access to low-threshold facilities where undocumented migrants who are tuberculosis suspects can be diagnosed and treated without giving their names and without fear of being reported to the police or migration officials,
 - b) remind health staff that they have an obligation to respect confidentiality,
- 2) Each country should ensure that undocumented migrants with tuberculosis are not deported until completion of treatment, and
- 3) Authorities and the non-governmental sectors should raise awareness among undocumented migrants about tuberculosis, emphasising that diagnosis and treatment should be free of charge and wholly independent of migratory status.

* [As approved by the Coordinating Committee on Scientific Activities and the Board of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, Paris, November 2008.]

References

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