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Tackling health needs of migrant populations: the experience of the urban area of Milan

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Introduction:
Over 200,000 refugees and migrants reach Italy every year, with increasing trends reported over the years. Large urban areas – including the metropolitan area of Milan - welcome a big share of these populations and face the need to provide them with adequate healthcare in the context of the Italian National Health Service.

Methods:
We comprehensively analysed four years of data (2014-2017) on migrant and refugee health service delivery in Milan, reporting on Milan-based migrant and refugee socio-demographic profiles, health needs and access to care. Data were collected by the Local Health Authority and Municipality of Milan.

Results:
During the study period, over 150,000 subjects were hosted in Milan migrant and refugee centres, including 8% minors and 4% unaccompanied children. The distribution of country of origin varied over time, with the majority of individuals coming from the Syrian Arab Republic, Eritrea and Afghanistan. One third of registered migrants and refugees accessed healthcare. Overall, two thirds of recorded accesses to care were for dermatological diseases, including scabies and migration journey-related health problems (sun burns, ulcers, dermatitis). Respiratory tract diseases were the second most common reason to access care, followed by psychological and psychiatric disorders whose trends increased over the study period. We report varying disease burden distribution by country of origin.

Conclusions:
We describe an advanced model for migrant and refugee health services management in urban areas and we report on the health status patterns of these populations over time in Milan,
one of the largest migrants’ and refugees’ hub in Italy. Our data might be useful to plan, implement and evaluate effective models of care for refugees, to be possibly adapted to other settings and different target populations.