

CS 2

Mimi in Bavaria, Germany

Training and Supporting People
with a History of Migration to Become
Health Mediators and Advocates
in their Communities

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Index Theme: Health inclusivity among society's vulnerable

- Building appropriate and culturally-sensitive systems of care
 - Individual agency is required when systems fail vulnerable populations
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Summary

The majority of people with a history of migration living in Germany face language as well as social and cultural barriers to accessing the care health system. Undocumented migrants, EU citizens without (formal) employment, and asylum seekers are particularly vulnerable to being excluded from preventive and essential medical services that they have a right to access.

The MiMi project aims at making the health system more accessible for immigrants, increasing their health literacy, and empowering them through participative processes. The project is the largest of its kind in Europe and has reached and supported tens of thousands of individuals in Germany over the past two decades.

1 Background

In 2022, Germany was home to 20.2 million people with a history of immigration; constituting nearly a quarter of the country's total population¹. Research indicates that individuals with a migration background use available healthcare services in Germany at lower rates than those without a migration background².

Such disparities vary in terms of the healthcare sector and specific populations. However, according to available healthcare use data, first-generation migrants, dual-migrant background individuals, children, adolescents, and women are less likely to utilize healthcare services compared to native Germans³. This underuse spans various healthcare sectors and is particularly notable in preventive care, regardless of socio-demographic factors.

Various projects aim to address inequalities in access to health system services affecting populations of individuals with migration backgrounds, mostly at the local city and state levels.

2 Project Description

The MiMi⁴ (With migrants for migrants/ Mit Migranten für Migranten) project aims to enhance healthcare access for immigrants, increasing their health literacy and empowering them through participatory processes. Recognizing migrants as experts in their own care, with valuable coping strategies and resources, MiMi trains interested and motivated migrants as *intercultural mediators*. This training aims to reduce both practical and socio-cultural obstacles that frequently have been shown to restrict migrants from using the German health system and to support them in attending regular preventive and routine medical check-ups. The project also fosters collaborations between migrants and municipal health services, aiming for a more inclusive healthcare system.

The MiMi programme enrolls two distinct groups of participants:

- “Socially integrated” migrants between the ages of 20-60 who have been living in Germany for a while, to become intercultural mediators;
- More recent migrants and individuals who are struggling to navigate the system, to participate in community group sessions led by the intercultural mediators.

For people with a migrant background who have not lived in Germany for long, it can be challenging to understand the structure of the German healthcare system and the services available. The area of prevention, in particular, is unknown to many. By educating and informing migrants who are already well integrated and thus have some level of experience in navigating the healthcare system, knowledge is passed on to those who need guidance and support, such as recently arrived migrants, socially disadvantaged people with a migrant background, or refugees. By delivering crucial information in a culturally sensitive manner and in individuals' native languages, barriers are bridged, and people are reached in their lived environments.

Local project partner institutions provide management staff and infrastructure for project realisation and, depending on possibilities, their own funds—the Ethno-Medical Centre e. V. uses project funds to cover project coordination and the training and deployment of intercultural health mediators (including training and information material in various languages).

Local professionals are involved in the training and further education of new mediators, which benefits both sides equally: the mediators by networking with local professionals and also getting to know local contact points for health promotion/care and nursing better, and the professionals by learning how to break down barriers to access to migrants. The project partners and site coordinators are advised and supported by their local MiMi Centres for Integration. At regular network meetings, a state-wide exchange and cooperation occurs to identify and utilize successful strategies.

The MiMi programme offers knowledge and information about many health topics, which are selected based on several criteria: Relevance to the target group (needs assessment in the community by the mediators; use of multilingual questionnaires in the information events), alignment with current priority topics of public health promotion and regional, specific needs.

Complete training courses last around 50 hours, with the mediators covering topics such as the services and benefits of the German healthcare system, nutrition and exercise, immunisation, diabetes and children's health. In addition to the content training, they also receive methodological training on the successful planning, organisation, implementation, and evaluation of an intercultural information event. Following the complete training, the mediators conduct the information events alone or with health and social services professionals. Local site coordinators organise the work on site and ensure the support and networking of MiMi mediators, specialists, and health services. They also organise regular training courses on other health topics where health mediators can receive further training.

The Ethno-Medical Centre e. V. provides tested campaign and teaching materials, such as guides, handouts, training folders, slide sets, PowerPoint presentations, evaluation tools, updates, and translations.

3 Impact and Reach

The MiMi health project has already been implemented at over 75 locations across Germany. The 15 Bavarian locations include the regions of Allgäu-Bodensee, Augsburg, Bamberg, Bayreuth, Coburg, Hof, Ingolstadt, Landsberg am Lech, Landshut, Munich, Nuremberg/Fürth, Regensburg, Schweinfurt, Straubing and Würzburg. There are also five twin towns (Dillingen on the Danube, Kaufbeuren, Kitzingen, Memmingen and Passau). Around 700 MiMi health mediators have been trained in Bavaria since 2008. Since then, they have organised over 3,900 multilingual information events on topics relating to health and prevention. Around 45,000 participants in Bavaria have been reached directly through the information events.

In Bavaria, an accompanying evaluation was carried out in 2019/2020 by the Institute of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine at the University of Regensburg. The results of data analyses show that it had been possible to recruit a large number of educated, well-integrated mediators to carry out information events. The training programme was rated positively by the mediators and they said they felt confident to conduct events independently. The programme was also considered to be successful in reaching the target group of socially disadvantaged migrants who are not yet well integrated. The evaluation of the approach to the target group showed that by far the most frequently named access channel was the personal approach, which emphasises the importance of the peer-to-peer approach for this target group.

The project was recognised by the WHO as a sustainable concept of health promotion for migrants with an international case study and awarded the European Health Award (EHA) in 2015:

“The project Health with Migrants for Migrants in Europe (MiMi) is improving migrants’ and refugees’ access to health services by increasing their health literacy and capacity building. MiMi’s key technology for social inclusion includes executive education for intercultural mediators, health campaigns in migrant communities, multilingual health guides to explain health systems, related health topics or healthy lifestyles, networking and evaluation.

The training of mediators and pilots and the native language information transfer in the life worlds of migrants (‘intercultural setting approach’) is a promising way to reach migrants for health promotion and prevention, to inform them and raise their awareness of a health-conscious life. The largest and most successful project of this is the MiMi Health Project “With immigrants for immigrants - MiMi program International” of the Ethno-Medical Centre. MiMi has been implemented in Germany since 2003 in 61 locations and in Austria since 2013 in the regions of Vienna and Upper Austria (Linz etc.). With regards to the MiMi program, the Ethno-Medical Centre has set itself the target to counteract the health disadvantage of immigrants and integrate them into a process both of prevention and of capacity building, health promotion and health literacy.

Based on the experience of numerous individual projects, for example on addiction prevention or oral prophylaxis with special health topics, the plan to expand “Health and Integration with Migrants for Migrants” (MiMi) to other fields of action and regions matured. Mediators should not only master one topic, but “learn health care” and motivate people to adopt preventive behaviour as well as to use appropriate offers. Thus, a health promotion programme was created in which federal and state governments in Germany and Austria, foundations, health insurance funds, associations and companies cooperate and provide funding.⁵⁹

4 Key Insights

- Acknowledging the skills, capabilities, and competencies of individuals who have migrated to Germany or who have a migration history is a small but crucial first step in promoting an inclusive society.
- By encouraging and empowering individuals to become active participants in their own care, a sense of belonging and wellbeing is fostered - alongside a demonstrable improvement in health outcomes.
- The German health care system tends to be difficult to navigate for all citizens, regardless of migration background, and thus the programme serves a crucial practical purpose to promote the health and wellbeing of a large segment of the population.
- People with a history of migration were, and remain, frequently marginalised. MiMi supports existing skills, weaves community, and can help individuals feel more integrated and invested in their wellbeing.
- The programme has been successfully implemented all over Germany and remains the largest project of its kind in Europe - an encouragement for other countries to pick up similar projects.
- The focus on targeting “well-integrated” individuals, though understandable from a pragmatic point of view, risks excluding many who might very well benefit from and be of benefit to the programme.
- The means provided for the program depend on the number of cities or regions in which the project is conducted. Since it is funded by the statutory health insurance, the government does not fund the programme directly. Such a funding framework might make it less attractive for areas that are already historically underserved.

Sources

^{1,2,3}In Germany, scientific and public discourse frequently differentiates between migrants (a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently), people with a history of immigration (those who themselves have immigrated to Germany since 1950 (first generation) or who are direct descendants (second generation) and people with migration background (persons who were either not born with German citizenship themselves or who have at least one parent who was not born with German citizenship). We use the collective terms referenced above with the understanding that migration is dynamic, includes voluntary and involuntary migration, and that individuals who migrate are a heterogeneous group of people with diverse biographies, motivations, living situations, and so forth.

⁴ admin-mimi0511. "Start." MiMi - Die Gesundheitsinitiative Deutschland (blog). Accessed November 14, 2023. <http://mimi-gesundheit.de/>

⁵ "EHFG – EHA." Accessed November 1, 2023. https://www.ehfg.org/archive/2015/eha_/archive/2015/eha

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