German Institute for Economic Research study finds difficulties for refugees to access the healthcare system in first years after arrival

A recent study by the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin) found that refugees in Germany face significant barriers to accessing healthcare, particularly in the first years after their arrival which only diminishes over time.

The study reports on long waiting times, long distances and financial burdens, which make it difficult to receive timely treatment. At the same time, many refugees find it difficult to navigate the German healthcare system and find suitable medical help. More than 25% of refugees report delays in treatment due to long waiting times, with a higher figure up to 40% reported among displaced persons from Ukraine. Medical costs represent also a significant barrier, with around 20% of recently-arrived refugees not undergoing medical treatment for financial reasons. Furthermore, one in ten refugees say they are affected by long distances affecting their access to medical care.

In addition to structural barriers, there are significant difficulties in navigating the healthcare system and understanding information:

- One third of refugees say they often find it difficult to understand general medical information, such as information on medical emergencies or treatments.
- 37% report finding it difficult to understand information on screening tests.
- 39% have difficulties when dealing with mental health issues.

Problems are significantly less common in the area of awareness-raising, for example information on healthy lifestyles or dealing with health advice within one’s personal circle.

The study was based on the IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey of refugees from the Research Centre of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF-FZ), in cooperation with the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) and the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) at DIW Berlin.

Source(s)

- German Institute for Economic Research DIW Berlin | Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung e.V. (28 May, 2026), Gesundheitssystem ist für

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