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Global Health Research on Refugees and Other Forcibly Displaced Populations: A Scoping Review from 2000 to 2024

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

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Conflicts of interest - None declared.

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Amendments - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 19 May 2026 and was last updated on 19 May 2026.

INTRODUCTION

Review question / Objective This study provides an updated global assessment of health-related research on forcibly displaced persons (FDPs), extending prior bibliometric work through 2024, incorporating major recent displacement events, including the Syrian civil war, the Rohingya crisis, and the war in Ukraine.

Background Forced displacement is a major global public health challenge affecting more than 120 million people, with significant implications for their physical, mental, and social well-being. Understanding research trends on the health of forcibly displaced populations, like refugees and asylum seekers, is essential for addressing their complex needs.

Rationale Prior bibliometric work in this field has often been limited in scope to voluntary migration. The most recent global bibliometric study assessing health-related research on FDPs

covered only the period up to 2015, predating several major displacement events and global crises of the past decade. These include the Syrian Civil war, the Rohingya crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the mass displacement associated with the conflict in Ukraine; events that have undoubtedly reshaped scholarly output. Thus, given the limitations differences in scope of previous work, we sought to perform a scoping review and bibliometric analysis of literature regarding refugees and other FDPs published globally from 2000-2024, aiming to identify thematic concentrations, geographic trends, and gaps to inform future research.

METHODS

Strategy of data synthesis We reviewed articles on refugees, asylum seekers, and other forcibly displaced populations in the PubMed database using a title and abstract-based search strategy with key terms, as used by others. This search strategy was selected to prioritize studies that explicitly highlighted displaced populations as their

primary focus. While this approach increases precision, it excludes studies in which displaced populations are addressed secondarily or described only in the text, as discussed in the limitation section. (1) The words “refugee” OR “asylum seeker” OR “asylee” OR “forcibly displaced” were entered as the title main search into PubMed’s search engine. (2) The publication date range was limited to January 1, 2000, through December 31, 2024. (3) Finally, article types were restricted to the search was limited to documents articles categorized under the article types of “Classical Article, Clinical Study, Clinical Trial, Comparative Study, Meta-Analysis, Observational Study, Randomized Controlled Trial, Review, Scoping Review, Systematic Review”. The complete search string is as follows: ("refugees"[All Fields] OR "refugees"[MeSH Terms] OR "refugees"[All Fields] OR "refugee"[All Fields] OR ("refugees"[MeSH Terms] OR "refugees"[All Fields] OR ("asylum"[All Fields] AND "seeker"[All Fields]) OR "asylum seeker"[All Fields]) OR ("asylee"[All Fields] OR "asylees"[All Fields] OR ("forcibly"[All Fields] AND ("dis-place"[All Fields] OR "displaced"[All Fields] OR "displacement, psychological"[MeSH Terms] OR ("displacement"[All Fields] AND "psychological"[All Fields]) OR "psycho-logical displacement"[All Fields] OR "displacement"[All Fields] OR "displacements"[All Fields] OR "displaces"[All Fields] OR "displacing"[All Fields])) AND ((classicalarticle[Filter] OR clinicalstudy[Filter] OR clinicaltrial[Filter] OR comparativestudy[Filter] OR meta-analysis[Filter] OR observationalstudy[Filter] OR randomizedcontrolledtrial[Filter] OR review[Filter] OR scopingreview[Filter] OR systematicreview[Filter]) AND (2000:2024[pdat])). (4) The retrieved data were exported to Microsoft Excel for further analysis. The search was conducted on June 14, 2025, and all analyses were based on the results of this search to preclude changes in citation metrics.

Eligibility criteria The words “refugee” OR “asylum seeker” OR “asylee” OR “forcibly displaced” were entered as the title main search into PubMed’s search engine. The publication date range was limited to January 1, 2000, through December 31, 2024. Article types were restricted to the search was limited to documents articles categorized under the article types of as “Classical Article, Clinical Study, Clinical Trial, Comparative Study, Meta-Analysis, Observational Study, Randomized Controlled Trial, Review, Scoping Review, Systematic Review.” Each paper’s titles and abstracts abstract/title was were individually reviewed to exclude papers that were not relevant to FDPs, such as molecular studies.

Source of evidence screening and selection

Each paper’s titles and abstracts abstract/title was were individually reviewed to exclude papers that were not relevant to FDPs, such as molecular studies. Each included article was then assigned one or more thematic categories derived from prior bibliometric literature: (1) mental/psychosocial health; (2) health policy and systems; (3) children and youth; (4) infectious diseases; (5) maternal and reproductive health; (6) non communicable diseases; and (7) environmental or climate related health.

Thematic coding was conducted by two independent reviewers using a framework developed iteratively based on title, abstract, and keyword review. Articles were per-mitted to receive multiple thematic assignments when relevant, with a primary theme and additional secondary themes if applicable. There was a high level of agreement (over 98%), and for any articles for which there was uncertainty or disagreement, the re-viewers would re-review these articles, discuss amongst themselves, and come to an accord.

Data management Data were exported into an Excel sheet.

Reporting results / Analysis of the evidence

Measures studied in this analysis included journal of publication, publication year, authors’ country and of institutional affiliation and institutional affiliation, type of paper, number of citations, title, keywords, and thematic category as described above, and geographic focus if applicable. Geographic focus was determined using explicit country or regional references in article titles and abstract review when applicable.

For the trend of papers published between 2000-2024, the Joinpoint Regression Program (Version 5.4.0) from the National Cancer Institute was used to calculate the average annual percentage change (AAPC), with final model selection for the number of joinpoints determined using the weighted Bayesian information criterion . GraphPad Prism (version 10.6.1) was used to visualize the data. Due to the nature of this publicly available database, this research is considered nonhuman research under US regulation (45 CFR §46.102[d]) and IRB review was not required.

Presentation of the results Data will be shown in both a table of the relevant subthemes along with a bar graph of the number of papers over time, with superimposed Joinpoint analysis to look at trends in research output over time.

Language restriction No.

Country(ies) involved United States.

Keywords Refugees, Asylum seekers, Migrants, forcibly displaced persons, global health.

Dissemination plans Publication.

Contributions of each author

Author 1 - Zaid Shaik - Author 1 helped developed the methodology, curated the data, analyzed the data, and helped draft the manuscript.

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Author 2 - Noor Shaik - Author 2 helped conceptualize the objective, developed the methodology, analyzed the data, developed the figures, and helped draft the manuscript.

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