

Myth of HIV health tourism

Migration has been one of the most seriously debated issues in UK politics recently. As such, it is vitally important to separate out the facts and evidence around migration from the fears and misinformation.

In recent years, allegations have been made about health tourism to the UK both in general and in relation to HIV specifically. 'Health tourism' generally describes the practice of choosing to travel abroad in search of medical treatment that is either unavailable or too expensive to access at home. 'HIV health tourism' refers in particular to the claim that foreign nationals are leaving their home country with the main and sole purpose of receiving free HIV care in the UK.

These claims were first made in a series of newspaper articles that portrayed HIV positive migrants – including asylum applicants – as 'HIV health tourists'. Although unsubstantiated, these allegations gained widespread currency in media commentary and politics, affecting both popular perception and Government policy.

HIV health tourism to the UK is a myth.

Isolated cases may occur but there is no evidence to demonstrate that HIV health tourism to the UK exists as a significant phenomenon. In fact, there is much evidence to the contrary. Recent data from the Health Protection Agency show that the average time between a migrant infected with HIV arriving in the UK and their diagnosis was almost five years. Levels of HIV amongst migrants to the UK are significantly below HIV levels in their countries of origin. Home Office reports state there is no evidence to suggest asylum applicants have detailed knowledge of the UK's asylum policies, welfare benefits or entitlement to treatment prior to arriving in the UK.

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Journalists should ensure accuracy in their reporting on migration to the UK and not suggest that HIV health tourism is taking or has taken place without evidence to support their claims.

Further information

NAT – The Myth of HIV Health Tourism

www.nat.org.uk/Our-thinking/People-in-great-est-need/Asylum%20and%20migration.aspx