

Project Protocol

Health Navigators for Vulnerable Persons

Project Lead: Claudia Wild

Authors: Claudia Wild, Romy Schöneegger

Quality Assurance: Aline Dragosits

Duration: Q1 2026 to Q2 2026

Resources: 1.2 PM (subcontracting + in-house co-author)

Language: English (with German summary)

Background:

Health navigators (patient navigators [1, 2]) are trained individuals who support people in accessing the healthcare system and act as low-threshold points of contact. The aim is to increase equal opportunities, i.e., to lower barriers to access and promote prevention.

Specifically, the main tasks of health navigators are:

- Providing guidance in the healthcare system,
- Strengthening health literacy,
- Bridging language and cultural barriers, and
- Providing information on local health promotion, prevention, and counselling services.

Health navigators often work on a voluntary basis, in projects or in community initiatives. The initiatives are sponsored by municipalities and/or charitable institutions. They provide information in various languages and act as contact persons in their communities.

There is only one such health project in Austria: the “Gesundheitslots:innen” (health guides) of “Volkshilfe Wien” [3]. It has existed since 2012. In comparison, there are numerous projects (approx. 15) in Germany, both in large cities (Leipzig, Bremen, Essen, etc.) and in regional associations (Wümme-Wieste-Niederung, Rhein-Erft-Kreis, etc.). Health navigators are seen as important bridge builders in disseminating health information in an accessible way and improving equal opportunities in healthcare [4].

Project aims:

The aim is to systematically summarise the experiences and results (scope, areas of responsibility, activities initiated) from health navigator projects aimed at migrants.

The project **does not aim** to evaluate the Austrian “Volkshilfe” project.

Nor does it aim to evaluate health navigator projects for other target groups (such as the management and coordination of people with complex and chronic illnesses such as cancer, as well as impairments or socially disadvantaged groups in general).

Research question:

RQ 1: What reports on experiences (scope, areas of responsibility, activities initiated, etc.) can be identified from publicly available documents on international projects involving health navigators?

RQ 2: What are the objectives, and how can the achievement of these objectives be measured/determined?

RQ 3: What are the similarities and differences (in the areas of responsibility and the activities initiated) that may influence the impact?

Methods:

RQ 1 and RQ 2:

- Systematic literature search in several databases for published articles and systematic synthesis of the identified documents.
- Supplementary web search for health navigator projects in German-speaking countries; letters to initiatives to identify evaluation and annual reports. Targeted inquiries by email if necessary.

RQ 3:

- Analysis of the materials with regard to similarities, differences, effects, and survey instruments.

Inclusion criteria (PICO):

Population	Migrants (immigrants, regardless of residence status)
Intervention	Trained (migrant) health navigators as mediators
Kontrolle	No Intervention
Outcomes	Primary endpoints ■ Implementation aspects: Scope, outreach, activities, etc. Secondary endpoints ■ Individual outcomes: orientation in the healthcare system, health literacy, knowledge of services
Studydesign	any
Countries	European Social Security Systems: for experience, Any: for measuring results
Languages	German, English
Exclusion	P: Chronically ill, disabled, socially disadvantaged non-migrant groups (cancer, disabilities, homeless people, etc.) I: Case management, social work, written information (brochures) for guidance only

Kommentiert [IZ1]: Table can have another column (inclusion/exclusion criteria)

Timetable:

Period	Tasks
Q1 2026	Scoping and finalisation of the project protocol
Q1 2026	■ Systematic literature search and manual searches ■ Literature selection and acquisition ■ Identification of projects in German-speaking countries, contacting
Q2 2026	Data extraction and quality assessment, survey (if necessary)
Q2 2026	Reporting
Q2 2026	Internal and external Review
Q3 2026	Layout and Publication

References:

- [1] Budde H, Williams GA, Scarpetti G, et al. What are patient navigators and how can they improve integration of care? [Internet] Copenhagen (Denmark): European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies; 2022. (Policy Brief, No. 44.)
- [2] Budde H, Williams GA, Winkelmann J, Pfirter L, Maier CB. The role of patient navigators in ambulatory care: overview of systematic reviews. BMC Health Services Research (2021) 21:1166 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-021-07140-6>
- [3] Volkshilfe Wien: <https://www.volkshilfe-wien.at/angebote-services/asyl-migration-integration/saneas-gesundheitslotsinnen/>.
- [4] Schade M, Lang SA, Stenzel S. Strengthening Health Literacy of Vulnerable Groups – Introduction of Two New Modules Within the Communal Health Guides Intercultural in Frankfurt am Main Project. Health Literacy Research and Practice (HLRP), 2022;6(3):e239–e246