



World Health Organization



IOM International Organization for Migration
OIM Organisation internationale pour les migrations
OIM Organización Internacional para las Migraciones

The Health of Migrants The Way Forward



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In a world defined by profound disparities, migration is a fact of life and governments face the challenge of integrating the health needs of migrants into national plans, policies and strategies, taking into account the human rights of these individuals, including their right to health¹. Addressing the health needs of migrants protects global public health, facilitates integration and ultimately contributes to social and economic development while protecting their right to health.

Migrants' right to health – the fundamental issues

Migrants' rights to health are inscribed in WHO definition of health articulated in the 1946 Constitution of the WHO. The enjoyment of the right to health of migrants is limited due to discrimination, language and cultural barriers, and legal status making undocumented or irregular migrants particularly at risk.

Most countries define health obligations towards non-citizens in terms of essential or emergency health care which undermines the importance of primary healthcare (outlined in the Alma Ata declaration) with implications on out of pocket payments, migrants' financial security and long term health and wellbeing².

Ensuring access to health services and financial protection can be effective tools to promote health equity in today's diverse societies. Improving the health of migrants cannot be achieved by the health sector alone hence, the need to strengthen collaboration and coordination between multiple

Paradigm shift

Policies and strategies to manage the health consequences of migration have not kept pace with growing challenges related to modern migration, and do not sufficiently address the existing health inequities, and determining factors of migrant health, including social determinants of health, migrants' specific health profiles and barriers to accessing health services.

Governments increasingly recognize the need to move to an inclusive approach that focuses on reduction of inequalities and social protection in health based on multi-country and multi-cultural collaboration.

PARADIGM SHIFT : FROM EXCLUSION TO INCLUSION



Traditional approach



Modern multi-dimensional approach

Public health approach to migrants' health

Basic principles for a public health approach to address the health of migrants and host communities are:

- Avoid disparities in health status and access to health services between migrants and the host population.
- Ensure migrants' health rights. This entails limiting discrimination or stigmatization, and removing impediments to migrants' access to available preventive and curative interventions.
- Put in place life-saving interventions to reduce excess mortality and morbidity among migrant populations. This is of particular relevance in situations of forced migration resulting from disasters or conflict.
- Minimize the negative impact of the migration process on migrants' health outcomes. Migrants can be exposed to hazards/stressors arising from displacement, insertion into new environments and return to home communities.

Key global mandates on the health of migrants

During the Sixty-first World Health Assembly (2008), WHO Member States endorsed a Resolution on the health of migrants³, asking Member States and WHO to promote migrant sensitive health policies and practices, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and to encourage multi-lateral cooperation and inter-sectoral action.

Following the approval of the resolution, WHO, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Ministry of Health and Social Policy of Spain, organized a Global Consultation on Migrant Health in Madrid in March 2010. The consultation reached consensus on priority areas and strategies to improve the health of migrants as reflected in the below operational framework:

Operational Framework, Global Consultation March 2010

Monitoring migrants' health, priorities

- Ensure the standardization and comparability of data on migrant health, and support the disaggregation and assembling of migrant health information.
- Identify and map: 1) good practices in monitoring migrant health; 2) policy models that facilitate equitable access to health for migrants; and 3) migrant-inclusive health systems models and practices.
- Develop useful data that can be linked to decision-making and the monitoring of the impact of policies and programmes.

Policies and legal frameworks affecting migrant health, priorities

- Adopt national laws and practices that respect migrants' right to health based on international laws and standards.
- Develop and implement national health policies that incorporate a public health approach to the health of migrants and promote equal access to health services for migrants, regardless of status.
- Monitor the implementation of relevant national policies, regulations and legislation responding to the health needs of migrants.
- Promote coherence among policies of different sectors that may affect migrants' access to health services.

Migrant sensitive health systems, priorities

- Ensure that health services are delivered to migrants in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way, and enforce laws and regulations that prohibit discrimination.
- Enhance the capacity of the health and non-health workforce to address health issues associated with migration.
- Improve the ability of the health systems to deliver migrant-inclusive services in a comprehensive, coordinated and financially sustainable fashion.

Partnerships, networks and multi-country frameworks, priorities

- Ensure intersectoral cooperation and collaboration on migrant health across sectors and among countries of origin, transit and destination.
- Address migrant health matters in global and regional consultative migration, economic and development processes.
- Harness the capacity of existing networks to promote the migrant health agenda.

The Way Forward on Migrants' Health after the HLD

The 2013 High Level Dialogue called for the protection and realization of human and labour rights, including the right to health, of all migrants, regardless of their status, and acknowledged the crucial importance of migrants' health and wellbeing for the attainment of sustainable development.

Improving the health of migrants cannot be achieved by the health sector alone, and must be carried out through an inclusive, accountable and transparent cooperation between origin, transit and destination countries, by multiple stakeholders, and through enhanced partnerships. The health of migrants needs to be anchored in the migration and development debate and be integrated in the follow-up activities of the HLD and in the post-2015 development agenda framework which is currently under-

To this end we need to:

- 1) **Develop and implement migrant sensitive health policies that incorporate a public health approach and equitable access to health services for migrants, regardless of their status and without discrimination or stigmatization.**
- 2) **Ensure that migrant health services are culturally, linguistically and epidemiologically appropriate. This requires the development of the capacity of the health workforce to better understand and address the health issues associated with migration and the involvement of migrants in policy and program planning and implementation.**
- 3) **Promote coherence among the policies of different sectors that may affect migrants' ability to access health services, as well as among countries involved in the migration process, to guarantee continuation and effective surveillance.**
- 4) **Mitigate the burden of out-of-pocket health spending and move towards prepayment systems.**
- 5) **Develop and strengthen bilateral and multilateral social protection agreements between source and destination countries that include healthcare benefits and the portability thereof.**

1. Migration today involves migrants in regular and irregular situations, as well as asylum seekers, victims of trafficking, refugees, displaced persons, returnees, and internal migrants. For ease of reference only, they are all referred to as "migrants" in this document.
2. Health of migrants – The way forward. Report of a global consultation. World Health Organization. Madrid, Spain, 2010.
3. Resolution WHA61.17. Health of Migrants. In: Sixty-first World Health Assembly, Geneva, 19–24 May 2008 ([http://www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/A61_R17-en.pdf](http://www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/A61/R17-en.pdf)).