



## POLICY BRIEF

### Developing a Public Health Workforce to Address Migrant Health Needs in Europe

**Co-funded by the European Commission, the Office of the Portuguese High Commissioner for Health and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the “Assisting Migrants and Communities (AMAC): Analysis of Social Determinants of Health and Health Inequalities” IOM-managed project provides a platform for dialogue on migration health priorities and fosters engagement from policy-makers at all levels to tackle health inequalities in Europe.**



**Further information is available at:**  
[www.migrant-health-europe.org](http://www.migrant-health-europe.org)

This policy brief is based on the background paper ‘Developing a Public Health Workforce to Address Migrant Health Needs in Europe’ elaborated within the framework of the AMAC project:  
[www.migrant-health-europe.org/background-papers](http://www.migrant-health-europe.org/background-papers)

Opinions expressed in this brief are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission or the Office of the Portuguese High Commissioner.

An urgent task in many European countries is to adapt health systems to the needs of today’s multi cultural and multi ethnic societies. Such a transformation cannot take place without a migrant sensitive health workforce that supports the required changes and delivers accessible, culturally appropriate, equitable and competent care.

#### Why this topic?

Migration movements in Europe have increased in size and complexity. They respond to demographic changes and labour demands in Europe, political upheavals, and social and health-related inequalities between European countries and their neighbours.

The consequent increased diversity in health determinants, vulnerability levels and needs among members of society is challenging the capacity of health care delivery systems and calls for a more migrant-sensitive workforce.

Training policies often fail to adequately consider the specific competencies necessary to adapt health care to the increasing diversity. A migrant sensitive workforce should have the necessary epidemiological, clinical and healthcare administration competences to care for a diverse patient population, as well as the knowledge and attitudes to do so in a culturally appropriate and competent manner.

Existing training programmes in migrant health are too few, scattered and poorly evaluated, and those developing them lack avenues of information exchange.

#### Topic in context

The number of migrants in Europe is large and growing. In 2005, over 64 million (or about one third of all international migrants) resided in Europe (UNPD, 2006).

The percentage of migrants in Europe was estimated at 8.9% of the total population in 2005 as compared to 3.4% in 1960. Thirty percent of the migrants in the EU originate from other EU countries (IOM, 2008).

It is now widely accepted that conditions surrounding the migration process can increase the vulnerability to ill health, particularly for those who migrate involuntarily, fleeing disasters or conflict, or clandestinely.

Risk factors are often related to the legal status of migrants which determines the level of access to health and social services, while other negative factors include poverty, discrimination, social exclusion, language and cultural differences, separation from family and known sociocultural norms and health paradigm.





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### Policy Background

Governments increasingly recognize the need for a shift in the way we think about health of migrants. Various policies guide health professional training in the European context and are relevant for a migrant sensitive workforce:

- The Bologna Declaration (1999) established the competencies required for performance of professional duties and responded to the work challenges of a globalised society;
- The Common Integration Programme (2005) established the framework for the integration of third country nationals in the EU;
- The European Parliament and Council Directive 2005/36/EC established an automatic recognition of qualifications in health professions and the EC Green Book on Health Staff (2008) further promoted mobility of health professionals;
- The EU Health Care Strategy “Together for Health” (2008–2013) intends to simplify procedures, increase quality and accessibility of cross-border health care and improve circulation of patients and professionals;
- The World Health Assembly Resolution on Migrant Health (WHO, 2008) called upon member states to promote the health of migrants and train health professionals to adequately address migrant health issues;
- The Report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Public Health (WHO, 2008) determined that social and health-related inequalities particularly affect migrants coming from poorer countries and marginalized migrant groups.

### Recommendations for the European institutions

- Promote and harmonise the inclusion of migrant health topics in the training of public health professionals, in all graduate, postgraduate and continuous medical curricula;
- Support the creation of avenues for exchange of training approaches and content between relevant actors and institutions of the different Member States;
- Ensure that education of health professionals supports the fight against social exclusion, discrimination and barriers to migrants' access to health care;
- Promote, fund and increase research into the effectiveness of training programmes at the European level. Include common objectives and indicators in the curricula of health professionals.

### Recommendations for EU Member States

- Promote health professional training that strengthens the recognition of diversity and includes migration related competences and skills. Use incentives, such as accreditation, to encourage participation of training institutions and professionals;
- Take advantage of country-level actions towards a common compulsory curricular design following the Bologna Declaration to ensure that the required competencies for a migrant-sensitive public health workforce are incorporated;
- Adapt training to the different local social and health determinants, needs and expectations in migrant health care.

### Recommendations for national stakeholders - Education centres, health providers, professional associations

- Include curricular content on intercultural competency and health issues associated with migration and population mobility in health professional training programmes at undergraduate, postgraduate and continuous education levels;
- Design training programmes to be interdisciplinary, use participatory methodologies and facilitate theoretical-practical learning;
- Establish online training libraries including available multimedia tools and courses for (self-) training;
- Involve professional associations and other concerned actors in the design, implementation and evaluation of training programmes and promote dialogue and the exchange of good practices with the aim to create national and international networks;
- Involve migrants, in particular migrant health workers, in the design, implementation and evaluation of training programmes;
- Carry out research and evaluation of impact and effectiveness of training programmes on migrant health.