



POLICY BRIEF

European Research on Migration and Health

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

This policy brief is based on the background paper ‘European Research on Migration and Health’ elaborated within the framework of the AMAC project:
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.

This policy brief highlights the need for research on migrant health in Europe. Good research is essential to identify problems and propose effective solutions. In the last 15 years researchers have devoted increasing attention to migrant health, but much work remains to be done. This brief pinpoints the areas of greatest need, which concern migrants’ state of health and their access to good quality health care.

Why this topic?

International migration is on the increase and ill-health threatens the well-being of migrants and their successful integration into host societies. Though migrants in general are not healthier than the rest of the population, they are exposed to specific health risks. Moreover, they often confront barriers in accessing health care, and services may be poorly matched to their needs.

Topic in context

To plan good health services, adequate background information about migrant populations and their living situation in the host country is essential.

Particular areas in need of research:

- Migrants’ state of health, the special risks they may be exposed to and their specific health needs should be monitored. To this end, data on migrant status and countries of origin should be registered in health care databases. This monitoring should include contagious diseases including TB, hepatitis and HIV/Aids, but also chronic and non-communicable illnesses which may also affect particular migrant groups to an undue extent (e.g. diabetes, mental illness).
- Comparative research is needed to locate restrictive policies on entitlement which may be preventing migrants including asylum seekers and undocumented migrants from getting the care they need.

- Research on the accessibility of health care deals with language barriers, cultural differences in ideas and attitudes concerning health and health care, the adequacy of migrants’ knowledge of the health system and the effective implementation of prevention and health promotion programmes.
- Research on the quality of health care focuses on problems in the interactions between migrant users and care providers and the need to assess the effectiveness of treatments. There is an urgent need to evaluate the effectiveness of so called ‘good practices’ and research on the quality of health care should also include attention to migrant patients.
- Research is also needed on levers for change: the best ways to promote better health care for migrants, both at the policy level and in the education of health professionals.

Best Practices

Surveys on migrant health published by national government agencies :

Migration and health : Challenges and trends (2009)

<http://tinyurl.com/yzv347k>

The Norwegian Directorate of Health published this report covering all aspects of migrant health in Norway, including the global context and recommendations for improvement.

Diversity and different experiences in the UK National Statistician’s Annual Article on Society, Karen Dunnell (2008).

www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/nojournal/NSA_article.pdf

Report showing increased rates of long term illness or disability and worse reported health in several ethnic groups.

Nationaal Kompas Volksgezondheid (National Public Health Compass)

<http://www.rivm.nl/vtv/root/o6.html>

Website maintained by the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment, offering up-to-date statistics on health, illness, health care and prevention relating to migrants and ethnic minorities.



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Best Practices

Collaborative european research projects subsidised by the EC :

1. MIGHEALTH.NET

<http://mighealth.net>

This project aims to improve the accessibility of research and information on migrant health by providing on-line 'clearing houses' in 16 countries.

2. MEHO (MIGRANT AND ETHNIC HEALTH OBSERVATORY)

<http://www.meho.eu.com/>

This European network of epidemiological observatories on migrants' health aims to generate a European overview of comparable and exchangeable data.

3. HEALTH CARE IN NOWHERELAND

<http://www.nowhereland.info>

A survey of best practices for improving undocumented migrants' entitlement and access to appropriate health care.

4. Quality in and Equality of Access to Healthcare Services: HealthQUEST

http://www.euro.centre.org/detail.php?xml_id=866

Includes a study of access to health care for migrants, ethnic minorities and asylum seekers in 8 European countries.

A Europe-wide research network on migrant health, financed by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) :

HOME (Health and Social Care for Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in Europe)

http://www.cost.esf.org/domains_actions/isch/Actions/HOME

Set up to promote interdisciplinary and international collaboration, HOME aims to consolidate and review work carried out so far, identify blind spots and persistent problems, and recommend ways forward. It currently has over 100 members in 29 countries.

Recommendations for the European institutions

- Give priority to collaborative European research projects on migrant health within the Programme of Community Action in the Field of Health 2008-2013, the Seventh Framework Programme and COST Actions.
- Avoid overlap and duplication of effort between collaborative projects, ensure even coverage of countries and topics and actively promote synergies. To this end, steps should be taken to ensure that the objectives of the former EU Health and Migration Advisory Group are fulfilled.
- Ensure that projects aimed at the reduction of health inequalities pay adequate attention to migrants and their offspring.
- Explore the possibility of setting up a European body (a 'Migrant Health Observatory') to oversee and stimulate activities in research, policy and practice in this area.

Recommendations for EU Member States

- Ensure that adequate background information is available on the numbers of migrants, origins, characteristics and situation in the host country, while paying due regard to their privacy and political rights.
- Actively promote and financially support high quality research on all aspects of migrant health, including by setting up centres of expertise.

Recommendations for national stakeholders

- Research institutions, service providers and universities should stimulate research on migrant health, taking account of the methodological problems that accompany research on migrants and minority populations; migrants themselves should be involved in all phases of research.
- All organisations concerned should avail themselves of the latest research to provide a sound basis for their policies and practices.

Policy Background

The right of migrants to good health and health care is explicitly endorsed by many international and European conventions, declarations and other texts:

United Nations

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976)
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990)
- UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General Comment No. 14: The Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health (Art. 12 of the Covenant) (2000)

World Health Organisation

- Resolution concerning the Health of Migrants (WHA, 2008)

Council of Europe

- Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights) (1950)
- European Social Charter (1961, revised 1996)
- Recommendations of the Parliamentary Assembly and Council of Ministers (e.g. 2001, 2006, 2008)

European Union

- Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union (2000)
- EC Directive combating discrimination (2000)
- EC Communication on Solidarity in Health: Reducing Health Inequalities in the EU (2009)

The requirement that health policies and practices should be 'evidence-based' is a fundamental principle of modern health care, endorsed by the WHO in 2003 (Global Programme on Evidence for Health Policy). The Council of the EU's Note on Health and Migration in the EU (2007) recommended the sharing of information on migrant health and the establishment of a network of national experts on health and migration.