



## POLICY BRIEF

# Improving health care for migrant populations using practice innovations and strategic alliances to drive change: The U.S. case

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 ‘Improving health care for migrant populations using practice innovations and strategic alliances to drive change: The U.S. case’ 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.

This brief highlights the impact that different players and policy agendas can have to advance the cause of better health care for migrants and minority communities, as seen in the U.S. These include the role of minority specific service delivery innovations and policy developments, and the work of individual sectoral efforts as well as the powerful strategic alliances between them.

### Why this topic?

Migration and its implications for health have become important issues for European, North American and other countries. While the United States and the European Union have different health care systems, they both share the challenge of delivering better health services to, and improving the health status of, migrant and minority populations. Due to a growing number of migrants, health care professionals and policymakers need to take into account the importance of providing appropriate health care for culturally diverse populations.



### Topic in context

A number of agendas in mainstream health care can only be fully realized if there are also health care improvements for migrant and minority populations:

- **Patient safety:** Without interpretation services and translated materials, patients who face language barriers are at higher risk of medical errors and treatment adherence failures.
- **Quality improvement:** Health care organizations need to integrate cultural and linguistic issues to attain the pursued aim of quality care.
- **Health disparities reduction:** Culturally sensitivity needs to be integrated into treatment approaches and health professions training to help reduce the health inequities faced by migrants.
- **Cost-effectiveness:** Linguistic and cultural barriers can lead to inappropriate utilisation of health care services by migrants, leading to poorer health status and higher costs to treat conditions that have advanced beyond the prevention and early treatment stages.



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### Policy Background

The migrant health agenda in the U.S. has been greatly advanced by the below highlighted texts which have served as catalysts for the cause:

- ▲ The Civil Rights Act (1964): a critical policy tool used to advance the establishment of bilingual, interpretation and translation services in health and social services for migrant groups in the early days.
- ▲ The National Standards on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) in Health Care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health, 2000): these standards recommend a number of actions health care organizations can take to improve the quality of care for migrant populations.
- ▲ Unequal Treatment – Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care (Institute of Medicine, 2003): this report called for additional research, funding and practice changes to address migrants' needs.

These texts have been utilized to recognize migrants' health rights and to demonstrate the growing need for health care providers and policymakers to support, in policy and practice, better health care for culturally diverse populations.

### Recommendations for the European institutions

- Promote improved social and health services for migrants;
- Ensure that migrant health research at the national and European level is able to collect stratified data for migrant communities that tracks health disparities and can help define targeted efforts, plan and evaluate progress;
- Foster research and tool development to enhance knowledge and good practice;
- Promote awareness-raising and advocacy to improve practices and policy structures in this area.

### Recommendations for national stakeholders

- Promote funding and healthcare practice changes to support migrants' health needs;
- Foster health research and services that engage the active participation of migrant populations;
- Reach beyond traditional "advocates" and bring mainstream health stakeholders to the discussion and development of migrant health issues by demonstrating that addressing the needs of diverse populations can help make progress on the wider population health care priorities.

### Recommendations for EU Member States

- ▲ Ensure that national policies and laws respect the health rights of migrants;
- ▲ Support migrant health research and foster health care environments that are culturally sensitive and favour migrants' access to quality health promotion, prevention, care and treatment;
- ▲ Collect demographic, ethnographic and linguistic data to measure and appropriately address health disparities over time;
- ▲ Foster multi-sectoral alliances to address the underlying inequalities faced by migrants, and lead the consensus building among concerned stakeholders;
- ▲ Ensure the development and harmonization of cultural competence education for health care professionals and staff;
- ▲ Ensure use of interpreting and translated materials, as well as cultural mediators, community health workers and culturally sensitive health promotion strategies;
- ▲ Foster migrant and minority community engagement in planning and evaluation of services.