

International Migration, Health and Human Rights



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PREFACE

Today, more than 214 million people are living outside their countries of origin. They have left their homes for a variety of reasons, including conflict, natural disasters or environmental degradation, political persecution, poverty, discrimination and lack of access to basic services and the search for new opportunities, particularly in terms of work or education.

One aspect of migration that is attracting renewed attention is the impact that it has on public health. Migrants may be subjected to multiple discrimination, violence and exploitation, all of which often directly affect their physical and mental health. In addition, migrants may have health problems that are not well known or understood in their new countries of residence. To compound this problem, legal and socioeconomic barriers impede access to health services in many cases; in cases where migrants do have access to health services, these may not be migrant-sensitive or culturally and linguistically appropriate.

Communities receiving large numbers of migrants face new challenges, such as increased diversity of the population and the consequent change in the cultural profile and health perspectives of its patients. This inevitably impacts the day-to-day work of health professionals. Current approaches to managing the health of migrants need to keep pace with the growing challenges associated with the complexity, volume, speed, diversity and disparity of modern migration flows to ensure that all migrants are able to realize their fundamental right to health.

The right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health has long been established in international human rights law. So, too, have the principles of equality and non-discrimination. It is therefore critical for national health systems and policies to address migrants' right to health, regardless of the legal status of the migrant. Doing so requires active collaboration across the different sectors and close cooperation between governments and the many non-state actors involved in the migration process.

In this publication, the World Health Organization, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Organization for Migration explore the multifaceted health and human rights challenges that migrants face and report on recent developments in this area.

Our aim in producing this publication is to provide all stakeholders with a reference on key health and human rights issues in the context of international migration. We hope that it provides inspiration to policymakers to devise migration policies and programmes that are guided by public health considerations and human rights imperatives, with a view to protecting the human rights and improving the health of both migrants and the communities in which they live.

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