The International Centre for Migration and Health (ICMH) has been established in a collaborative effort by the International Organization for Migration and the University of Geneva, with the active support of WHO. Its mandate is to assess and report on how voluntary and involuntary migration affects health, and how the health of migrants and displaced people can be protected and actively promoted. ICMH sees healthy migration as a basic human right that is fundamental to human, social and economic development. In one way or another, migration affects the lives of people everywhere and, as a worldwide phenomenon, it calls for a global response.

Today more people are travelling further more rapidly and for longer periods of time than ever before. This has implications both for the health of migrants themselves and for that of the societies they move into. The capacity for health problems to emerge and for diseases to move quickly to and from countries has never been greater.

Migration involves a break with the past, with family and with traditional values. For many, it means coping with diseases they already had while also dealing with the stress of resettlement. For others, migration will precipitate new problems or diseases that until then were latent. Still others will develop health problems as a natural process of aging, while adjusting to new environments. For migrant workers, occupational health has become a prime concern everywhere but one about which all too little is known. Migration is almost always characterized by some degree of social and cultural marginalization, and this often imposes constraints on the extent to which local health and social services are understood and can be effectively used. It causes particular concern in times of limited resources and growing migration.

Underlying all the work of ICMH is the belief that migration can and should be a healthy process, and that it is ultimately in the best interests of all countries to bring this about. As a result ICMH is collaborating with countries and agencies to help formulate the type of health policies that respect, protect and promote the human rights of migrants in a way that is consonant with both their health needs and those of the countries that receive them. In the belief that the results of research on migration and health must always be applicable to actual situations, the Centre also plays an advocacy role, working closely with national governments, international agencies and nongovernmental organizations to promote new perspectives on what is an age-old problem.

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