NEWSLETTER

MIGRATION AND HEALTH IN AFRICA

1st Edition September 2023

The Online Series on Health and Migration in Africa implemented by CHELD in conjunction with the AUC and supported by GIZ provides opportunities to explore the intricate relationship between migration and health, addressing critical topics that require urgent attention. It provides a platform for diverse stakeholders to come together, learn from one another, share experiences, and discuss key issues related to migration and health in Africa.

INTERSECTION OF MIGRATION AND HEALTH

The inaugural Online Sensitisation Series on Migration and Health, organized by the Centre for Health Ethics Law and Development (CHELD), in collaboration with the African Union (AU) and with the generous support of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH took place on Monday, 5th December 2023.

Various participants attended the session, including government actors, policymakers, representatives from Civil Society Organisations and migrants from different countries extending beyond Africa.

The series provides opportunities to explore the intricate relationship between migration and health, addressing critical topics that require urgent attention in the context of migration. It is intended to provide a platform for diverse stakeholders to come together, learn from one another, share experiences, and discuss key issues related to migration and health.

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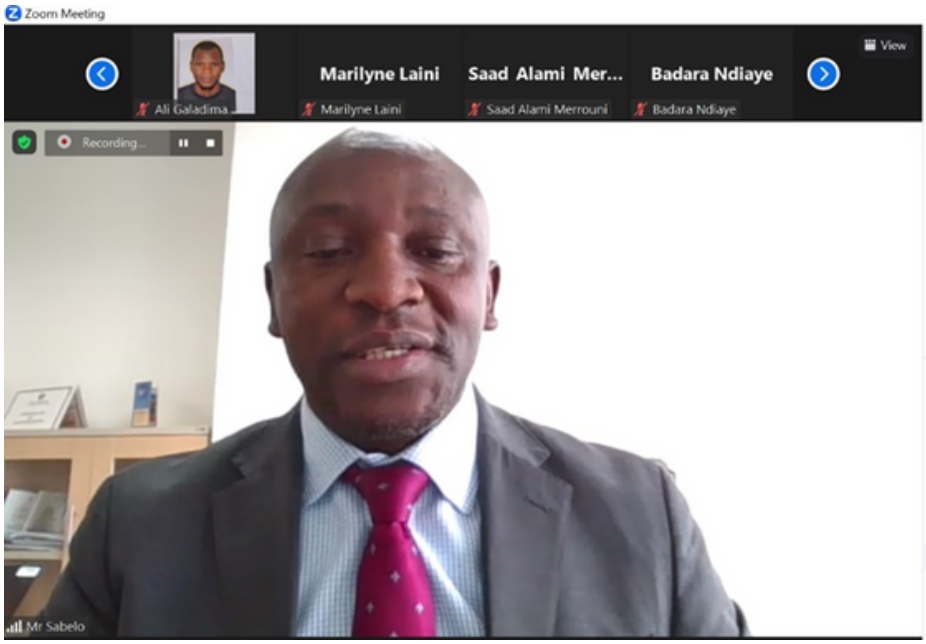
During the first session, Mr Sabelo representing the AUC acknowledged the historical cooperation between the AUC and CHELD, while also emphasising the importance of focusing on migration and health within the African context. He also highlighted the AUC's alignment with EU priorities on access to health for African migrants, which resonate with the African Union's Agenda 2063, particularly Aspiration 1 – "A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development," and Goal A – "A high standard of living, quality of life, and well-being for all citizens." As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is now clear that the health of migrants is intertwined with the health of the wider population, emphasizing the need to prioritise this topic.



Dr Nsofor led a discussion on the policies needed for migrant health within African Union member states. He encouraged participants to actively engage in the conversation and he started by asking a fundamental question: "What migrant health policy should be developed and implemented by African Union member states?" Participants were allowed to provide up to three policy suggestions each.

Key Policy Suggestions by Participants were Universal Health Coverage (UHC), Maternal and Child Health, Health Access, Health services in humanitarian Settings, Basic Health Services, Disability Support, Vaccination, Mental Health Support, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Gender Balance and equity in healthcare services for migrants, Cross-Border Surveillance.

Dr Nsofor then emphasised the importance of considering various features and aspects of migrant health when developing migrant health policies. He stressed the interconnectedness of health and migration, emphasizing that migrants' health is essential not only for their well-being but also for the host communities they pass through or stay in. He highlighted the need for policies that address the health of migrants, whether they are moving within or outside of Africa. He mentioned that policies for migrant health must consider social determinants of health, such as access to water, sanitation, education, and other basic needs.

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In the second part of the session, Prof Onyemelukwe emphasised the legal obligations of African Union member states to protect the right to health, including for migrants. She highlighted the importance of ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their migrant status, have the right to non-discrimination and equality when accessing health services. She discussed some international legal instruments including Provisions that prevent discrimination based on migrant status.

The session was participatory and interactive allowing a wide range of stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to share their experience and expertise.

>>> COMPLEXITIES OF HEALTH AND MIGRATION

Health and migration are interconnected in complex ways, presenting a range of challenges and opportunities. The complexities are deepened by the fact that many citizens (not migrants) in African countries lack access to health, budgets are limited and health is often politicized given its importance to securing electoral victory. Thus, issues of migrant health are seemingly moot. But in reality, they are not or ought not to be as many of these countries also have to deal with the challenges of migrants in different forms. Importantly, there are differences in approach to migrant health across the continent which means that different countries are at different levels in their protection of migrant health. These complexities also filter into national and international policies on migration.

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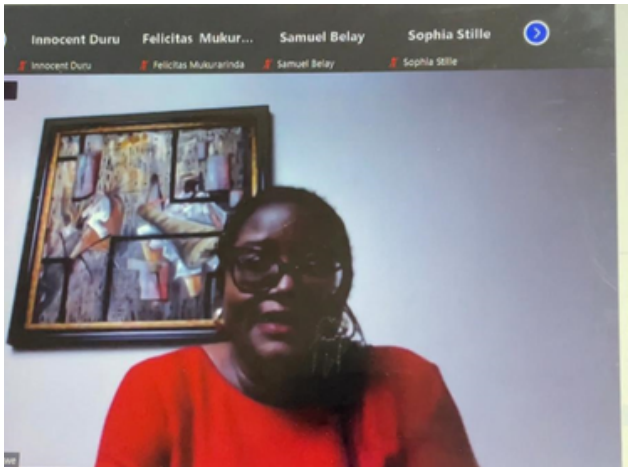
HEALTH AND MIGRATION GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

Governance mechanisms play a crucial role in addressing the complexities of migration and health. Policies that ensure equitable access to healthcare for migrants, regardless of their status, are essential for promoting public health. Moreover, effective health and migration governance involves collaboration between countries to implement strategies for disease surveillance, prevention, and response. This requires harmonising policies, sharing health information, and building resilient health systems.

Many AU Member States are signatories to international legal instruments. Some of these instruments include the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ICESCR, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The importance of these instruments in guaranteeing the right to health for all individuals, including migrants and refugees, was highlighted.



INSIGHTS FROM THE SESSION

The session brought together a diverse group of participants, including government representatives, policymakers, members of civil society organizations, and migrants. These participants, many of whom joined from various regions globally, including places outside Africa, shared significant insights. Some of these include:

- Awareness and Education: Develop comprehensive educational materials and campaigns to raise awareness among policymakers, civil society organizations, and the general public about the legal obligations regarding migrant health.
- Domestication of International Instruments: Encourage member states to incorporate international, regional, and continental instruments related to migrant health into their domestic laws and regulations.

- Data Collection and Analysis: Establish a robust data collection and analysis system that includes health data related to migrants, ensuring it aligns with international standards. This information will help in crafting evidence-based policies and interventions.
- Domestication of International Instruments: Encourage member states to incorporate international, regional, and continental instruments related to migrant health into their domestic laws and regulations.
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- Strengthening Health Systems: Member states should prioritize strengthening their health systems to ensure that migrants, including irregular migrants, have equitable access to healthcare services. This includes training healthcare providers to understand the diverse healthcare needs of migrants.
- Capacity Building: Develop training programs for healthcare workers, legal professionals, and government officials on the legal obligations and rights related to migrant health. This will enhance their ability to advocate for and provide appropriate healthcare services to migrants.
- Advocacy for Policy Reform: Civil society organizations and advocates should engage with governments to reform policies and laws that hinder access to healthcare for migrants, especially irregular migrants.
- Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms: Create mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of international instruments related to migrant health and reporting on progress. This can involve collaboration with international organizations and NGOs.
- Inclusive Healthcare Services: Advocate for healthcare services that are culturally sensitive and language-accessible to address the unique needs of migrants. Ensure that healthcare services are provided without discrimination based on migration status.
- Legal Reforms: Advocate for amendments to national laws and policies that may impede the right to health for migrants. This includes challenging discriminatory laws and practices.
- Research and Impact Assessment: Conduct research and impact assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of policies and interventions related to migrant health, enabling evidence-based adjustments and improvements.

Overall, addressing the complexities of migration and health requires not only domestic policies that prioritize equitable healthcare access for migrants but also regional cooperation to manage cross-border health risks among AU Members. It is hoped that the insights shared will influence the formulation and implementation of future policies and strategies in the face of evolving migration and health challenges in Africa.

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