

MIGRATION AND HEALTH IN AFRICA

2nd Edition

October 2023



UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE

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.

A DIVE INTO UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE (UHC)

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines Universal health coverage (UHC) as “all people and communities, having access to the basic health services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship” (WHO, 2020). According to the WHO, the objectives of UHC are:

- equity in access to health services – everyone who needs services should get them, not only those who can pay for them;
- the quality of health services should be good enough to improve the health of those receiving services; and
- people should be protected against financial risk, ensuring that the cost of using services does not put people at risk of financial harm (WHO, 2020).

The second Online Sensitisation Series on Migration and Health, Organized by the Centre For Health Ethics Law and Development (CHELD), in collaboration with the African Union (AUC) and with the generous support of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH was focused on the inclusion of migrants in the Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

The session highlighted the importance of comprehensive healthcare accessibility for all individuals, regardless of their migration status. Dr. Nsofor, one of the session's speakers, initiated the session with a participatory exercise using Mentimeter, aimed at understanding the diverse perspectives and knowledge levels regarding UHC.

➤➤➤ THE VITAL QUESTION: WHO IS COVERED?

The question of "Who is Covered?" was one of the central focus of discussions surrounding Universal Health Coverage (UHC), defining the scope of "all individuals" under UHC. The word "universal" in UHC emphasizes the idea of universality inherent in the concept. Migrants, regardless of category, are thought to be included in the concept. The consensus was that health coverage should extend to migrants, irrespective of their legal status, in line with the principle of non-discrimination. Thus, identifying and addressing disparities within countries is crucial to achieving genuine universality in healthcare access. The concept of "basic healthcare services" was explored and it was agreed that services should encompass a wide range, from primary care to specialized services such as maternity and mental health support. The goal is to provide comprehensive care and protection to all individuals.

The consensus was that health coverage should extend to migrants, irrespective of their legal status, in line with the principle of non-discrimination.



WHAT IS COVERED? ACCESS AND CHALLENGES FOR MIGRANTS

The components of UHC include improved access to needed, effective services while protecting users of healthcare systems from financial ruin/hardship. Access to healthcare, especially for migrants, presents distinct challenges. High out-of-pocket expenditures, language barriers and disparities in healthcare provision across different regions were discussed. Prof Onyemelukwe discussed the importance of healthcare delivery and highlighted the need for intercultural competence and people-centered care in healthcare facilities which should be sensitive to the diverse cultural backgrounds of the people. Throughout the session, she encouraged participants to scrutinize the language used in policies and legislation related to UHC to ensure that it promotes inclusivity and doesn't exclude migrants. Additionally, Prof Onyemelukwe provided examples from Kenya, Italy, and Thailand to illustrate different approaches to including migrants in UHC. Some countries struggle to provide adequate healthcare for irregular migrants, underscoring the importance of addressing these issues comprehensively. Mental health was recognized as a vital aspect of healthcare for migrants because people move for various reasons. As a result, mental health services must be included within UHC, acknowledging the unique challenges faced by migrants and refugees.



WHAT HEALTH SERVICES ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO MIGRANT POPULATIONS?

Primary health care remains one of the most important drivers for the achievement of Universal Health Coverage. It provides the best way to address health comprehensively, including communicable and non-communicable diseases, maternal health and child care, and mental health demographic challenges including those posed by migration.

Primary health care remains one of the most important drivers for the achievement of Universal Health Coverage.



EXPERIENCE SHARING FROM GHANA

Dr Ernest Asiedu, a former head of quality and safety at the Ministry of Health in Ghana and currently at the National Center for Coordination of Early Warning and Response Mechanism (NCCERM), provided an overview of Ghana's vision and mission for the health sector.

He presented an overview of Ghana's health system, which is characterized by its pluralistic nature, including both orthodox and traditional alternative medicine, as well as a mix of public and private sectors. He discussed the importance of universal access to health services and the role of the National Health Insurance Scheme in Ghana's healthcare financing. Dr Asiedu talked about the challenges and bottlenecks facing the Ghanaian healthcare system, including issues related to the availability of CHPS and the migration of healthcare professionals to other countries. He also highlighted the need for better availability of essential medicines, diagnostic services, and medical supplies.

Ghana's commitment to achieving UHC by 2030 dates back to 1978 when the country committed to the Alma Ata Declaration. Dr Asiedu discussed the role of primary healthcare and the model Ghana is implementing, emphasizing the need for efficient and interconnected healthcare facilities, especially in rural areas. He presented various strategies to address these challenges, including efforts to strengthen governance, engage communities, and improve domestic resource mobilization. Dr Asiedu also shared data on healthcare indicators, showing progress in areas such as maternal health and infant mortality while acknowledging that further improvements are necessary. He went ahead to introduce Ghana's "community scorecard," which is a tool used to assess the quality of healthcare services based on nine primary indicators, empowering communities to provide feedback and demand better care. Dr Asiedu emphasised the importance of communities mobilizing themselves to support healthcare facilities, sharing examples of initiatives where communities assisted in building construction, water provision, and other support.

Mental health was recognized as a vital aspect of healthcare for migrants because people move for various reasons.



EXPERIENCE SHARING FROM GHANA

Overall, Dr Asiedu discussed Ghana's approach to achieving UHC through the "network of practice," strengthening primary healthcare and interconnected healthcare facilities. He also underlined the role of telemedicine and emergency transport in enhancing healthcare delivery. His presentation provided insight into Ghana's efforts to achieve UHC and the challenges it faces, along with strategies and initiatives aimed at improving healthcare services and ensuring that all residents, including migrants, have access to quality care.

CHALLENGES TO UHC IDENTIFIED DURING THE SESSION PLENARY

- The diversity of backgrounds and cultures among migrants. Different groups may have specific health needs and cultural beliefs that need to be taken into account when developing healthcare programs. Generally, participants emphasized the heterogeneity of migrant populations. Migrants come from various countries and regions, and they have diverse backgrounds and experiences. This diversity can make it challenging to create one-size-fits-all healthcare programs.
- Language barriers were identified as a significant challenge. Migrants often speak different languages, making it difficult for healthcare providers to communicate effectively and provide the necessary care. Overcoming language barriers is crucial for ensuring migrants receive adequate healthcare.
- Participants noted that migrants may face stigma and discrimination, both within the healthcare system and in society at large. Stigma can deter migrants from seeking healthcare services and can negatively impact their overall well-being.
- Socioeconomic factors were identified as playing a role in migrants' access to healthcare. Migrants, particularly those in irregular situations or with limited financial resources, may face additional barriers to accessing healthcare services.

Socioeconomic factors were identified as playing a role in migrants' access to healthcare.



- Participants emphasized the critical role of human resources for health. Even if funding is available, the expertise and healthcare professionals are essential for providing healthcare to migrants. The shortage of healthcare workers is a significant challenge that needs to be addressed.
- The issue of brain drain, where healthcare professionals migrate from African countries to other regions, was raised. It was mentioned that strategies and policies to address brain drain would be discussed further in the next session of the meeting.
- The challenge of undocumented migrants who often face extreme difficulty accessing healthcare services. Their undocumented status can result in exclusion from healthcare systems, putting their health and well-being at risk.

TACKLING THE LIMITATIONS IN UHC IN AFRICA

Participants highlighted the need for coordination between different ministries and agencies, such as those responsible for health and humanitarian affairs. Effective collaboration is essential to ensure that policies and programs address the complex needs of migrants. Recognizing the heterogeneity of migrants, the importance of tailoring healthcare programs to specific migrant groups was emphasized and programs are required to consider factors such as language, culture, and socioeconomic status. Healthcare providers should receive training and support to develop cultural competence, enabling them to understand and address the unique needs of migrant populations. Cultural competence can help healthcare workers build trust and rapport with migrants.

Participants discussed the importance of including migrants in healthcare data. They stressed the need to recognize migrants as part of the population when collecting healthcare data and formulating policies. Data should reflect the diverse groups of migrants. It was noted that ensuring access to basic healthcare should be seen as a shared responsibility among member states of the African Union and the global community. Providing basic healthcare is a fundamental human right and a duty that transcends borders.



The Online Sensitisation Series is intended to provide a platform for collaboration, learning, and advocacy to ensure the well-being of migrants within the African. Together, we strive for a future where the health of migrants is not just a priority but an integral part of our shared pursuit on the African continent.

**Effective collaboration
is essential to ensure
that policies and
programs address the
complex needs of
migrants.**



CONTACT INFORMATION

Centre for Health Ethics Law and Development (CHELD)
Suite 202, Dew International Complex
58, Omorinre Johnson Street
Lekki Phase 1
Lagos, Nigeria
info@cheld.org || www.cheld.org

