

# MIGRATION AND HEALTH IN AFRICA



*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.*

## MIGRANTS' HEALTH AND STRENGTHENING DATA FOR HEALTH SECURITY AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS IN AFRICA

One of the critical tools in strengthening evidence for policy making and health planning for migrants is data collection and analysis. Data-driven approaches enable policymakers, healthcare providers, and humanitarian organizations to understand the health profile of migrant populations, identify emerging health threats, and allocate resources effectively. However, several challenges hinder the effective use of data in addressing migrants' health.

**Are migrants' data considered in pandemic preparedness, response planning, health security legislation and policy?**

While progress has been made in recognizing the importance of including migrants in pandemic preparedness and response planning, there are still challenges to overcome.

There is a lack of comprehensive and standardized data collection systems that capture the health status of migrants across different stages of their journey and in diverse settings.

Many countries also lack robust mechanisms for collecting data on migrant health, leading to gaps in understanding and responding to their health needs. Migrants may also be hesitant to disclose personal health information due to fear of repercussions, including deportation or discrimination. Further, there are ethical and privacy concerns surrounding the collection and sharing of migrants' health data. There are also concerns about how governments and other entities might use migrants' health data, raising questions about consent and data protection.

According to The Africa Migration Report, data obtained during the course of border management is often used for security purposes rather than to inform policy making (IOM, 2020). Finally, the lack of government prioritization of migrants in health security and data sharing poses a significant challenge, potentially hindering effective planning and response to health crises. Without sufficient emphasis on this, there may be gaps in surveillance, coordination, and resource allocation, which are crucial in responding to public health emergencies. This will not be achievable without relevant data surveillance.



### What makes the collection of migrant data essential?

Migrant data collection is important for understanding the unique health needs and challenges faced by migrant populations, enabling tailored interventions and equitable resource allocation. By tracking health trends over time, policymakers can implement timely interventions and preventive measures, ensuring the containment of outbreaks and mitigation of health risks. Moreover, data on migrant health inform evidence-based policymaking, fostering the development of strategies that address health disparities and promote equitable access to healthcare services. These data also serve as a powerful advocacy tool, raising awareness about health challenges and mobilizing support for policy changes aimed at improving migrant health outcomes. Ultimately, migrant data collection plays a vital role in promoting health equity, advancing migrants' rights, and strengthening health systems' capacity to respond effectively to the diverse needs of migrant communities.





## Strengthening Information Sharing Between CSOs, NGOs, and Governments to Improve Migration and Health Policy and Programming

There is a need for greater collaboration and coordination among stakeholders involved in addressing migrants' health. This includes governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and local communities.



Efforts to enhance data collection on migrants' health are crucial, with suggestions for the African Union (AU) to develop specialized guidance for member states (MS) to adopt a systematic approach and common indicators. Additionally, investments in capacity building at the local level for improved data collection are recommended, alongside the issuance of region-specific guidance by Regional Economic Communities (RECs). Furthermore, research bodies are encouraged to support longer-term research partnerships to improve the evidence base for policy-making and health programming. Moreover, to strengthen cross-border infectious disease surveillance, existing networks should be enhanced, with a focus on early identification of outbreaks in remote or cross-border areas. Replicating models of good practice in cross-border disease surveillance is suggested, along with using more inclusive language in health and migration policies to extend health access to migrant groups. Specific guidance at regional and MS levels on good practice concerning migration and health is proposed. The health needs of migrants and refugees should be routinely considered in all health and migration policies and programs, including pandemic preparedness planning.

### Insight from the Session

The fifth Online Sensitization Series on Health and Migration in Africa on "Migrants' Health, Health Security, and Strengthening Evidence for Policy Making," was held on Tuesday, January 23rd, 2024. The session brought together a diverse group of participants, including government representatives, policymakers, members of civil society organizations, and migrants. These participants shared significant insights. Some of these include:

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- **Advocacy and Awareness:** The need for continuous advocacy to raise awareness among governments and stakeholders about the importance of health security and data sharing is important to enhance their ability to detect, monitor, and respond to emerging health emergencies, ultimately safeguarding the health and well-being of their populations.
- **Improving Data sharing:** This can be achieved by developing and implementing standardised protocols for data sharing among African countries, ensuring that information is used for public health purposes and not limited by security concerns alone.
- **Capacity Building:** This involves building capacity for managing migration data, including adopting tools like MIDAS, and advocating for the prioritization of health security in national agendas.
- **Policy Review:** Advocate for policy reforms that include inclusive language in health legislation to address the specific health needs of migrants, ensuring they are not overlooked in healthcare systems.
- **Strengthened collaboration:** This involves fostering greater collaboration among African countries and regional bodies such as ECOWAS and WAHO to promote data sharing and enhance health security across the continent. It will also involve facilitating collaboration between the health sector and other sectors such as security, immigration, and trade to address health security challenges holistically within AU member states.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** There is a need to establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of health security measures and migration data management systems, ensuring accountability and effectiveness
- **Research and Innovation:** There is a need to improve research and innovation in health security and migration data management, encouraging the development of new technologies and approaches to address emerging challenges.

Overall, there is a need for collaboration among countries and regional bodies like ECOWAS to improve health security across the continent. Further, the importance of data sharing, cost-effectiveness, and political will in addressing health security challenges in Africa cannot be overemphasized.

**Data on migrant health inform evidence-based policymaking, fostering the development of strategies that address health disparities and promote equitable access to healthcare services.**



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