

DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION

Press Release

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Venue: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mobility of African Health Workers comes under the Spotlight Post COVID-19

The African Union's Labour Migration Advisory Committee (LMAC) last week convened a virtual conference where health policy experts discussed ways to better manage the labour market for health workers in Africa. This was the last of three online meetings in which LMAC examined changes in labour migration governance in Africa in the context of disruptions caused by the coronavirus.

In the three virtual exchanges, labor market stakeholders took stock of COVID-19's impact on African migrant workers in and outside the continent. They also examined emerging issues in labour migration including in the informal economy, and strategies to protect labour migrants and build resilience in the face of disruptions such as pandemics.

A representative of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which is the current chair of LMAC, led the meetings, with presentations and recommendations expected to be distilled into policy briefs. These will be shared with policymakers at the African Union Commission, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and stakeholders.

Last week's meeting observed that the mobility of health workers is not a new trend, although the pandemic has cast further light on the global scramble for medical expertise. Despite the strong intra-African movement of health workers, especially within Eastern and Southern Africa, a high number of health workers from the Global South still move to high income countries, leaving Africa with one of the lowest doctor to patient ratios in the world.

These health specialists emigrate given the increased demand for their expertise, and the attractive incomes and working conditions abroad. For instance, in OECD countries one out of four health workers are reported to have been born abroad, while one out of five trained outside Europe.

The experts also agreed that COVID-19 was revealing shortcomings in how the movement of health workers has been managed by both sending and receiving countries. Despite working at the forefront of the pandemic, skilled health workers, as well as countries of origin and destination, have not found ways to work together to reap mutual benefits.

The Chair of LMAC, ECOWAS Director of Social Affairs, Dr Sintiki Ugbe noted that low income countries, especially in Africa, continue to make a significant investment in training health care workers, although this resource is usually lost, leaving huge gaps in the continent's already weak health systems. It was agreed that countries need to adopt responsive policies and strategies to engage the diaspora to contribute back home.

Ms. Sikhule Dhlamini, Programme Manager in the Labour Mobility and Human Development division, IOM Somalia, explained that since 2008 the government of Somali, working with IOM's Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA), is engaging its diaspora to contribute to the development of the country. MIDA is a capacity-building programme that helps to mobilize competencies acquired by African nationals abroad for the benefit of Africa's development.

In her keynote, Prof. Ndioro Ndiaye called on African governments to reform their public health systems to ensure that the workforce responds to new health challenges, and she urged the African Union to coordinate human resource policies and harmonize national legislation on health, among other interventions.

Dr Adam Ahmat, Technical Officer at WHO highlighted the mismatch that exists between the healthcare needs in Africa and the capacity to fill that need. To ensure that low income countries are not further disadvantaged by emigration of its high skilled health workers, WHO has developed the Global Code of Practice on Ethical Recruitment of Health Personnel.

On his part, Dr. Ahmed E. Ogwel Ouma, Deputy Director of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at the African Union Commission, advised Member States to invest in understanding workforce mobility and to document lessons learned from this pandemic to help in combating future challenges. He also echoed the importance of improving the working conditions of health workers.

The virtual conference was organized under the auspices of the AUC-ILO-IOM-ECA Joint Labour Migration Programme for Africa (JLMP). The JLMP seeks to improve labour migration governance in order to achieve safe, orderly and regular migration in Africa, as committed in

relevant frameworks of the African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs), international labour conventions and other processes.

The programme, launched in 2015, works with AU Member States, RECs, social partner organizations, migrants and diaspora associations to address identified challenges to effective labour migration management in many countries. These include labour and skills shortages, dearth of statistics, weak ratification and domestication of labour standards and free circulation frameworks and addressing the challenge of jobless growth and widespread youth unemployment.

See:- [Statement of the African Union \(AU\) Labour Migration Advisory Committee \(LMAC\) on the novel Coronavirus Disease COVID-19 and the condition of African Migrant Workers](#) (April 2020)

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