

DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION

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African Union Launches a new program on Migration and Health

The nexus between migration and health is conspicuously apparent at this time of corona virus which permeates all spheres of life. The situation of migrants and refugees in Africa is exacerbated by the pervasive spectre of conflicts, climate change and impact of irregular migration. This, compounded by recent outbreaks of illnesses declared, the public health emergencies of global concern and pandemics such as COVID-19, presents Africa with a huge fast-paced challenge requiring dynamism all response approaches shaped by African Union Member States.

Inadequate access to health services and unfavourable conditions many migrants live and work in, make them subject to a variety of health risks. This concerns in particular vulnerable groups, including Forced Migrants, Refugees and IDPs that might not access concomitant Human Rights enshrined in the international law.

Against this backdrop, the Department for Social Affairs of the African Union Commission (AUC), held a webinar today on the topic: "Migration and Health: Addressing the Health Challenges of Migrants & Refugees in Africa".

The main objective for the webinar is to initiate and define Policy and Programming priorities to advance discourse on access to health for migrants and refugees and highlighting guiding principles specific to the transient populations in AU Member States. The specific objectives of the meeting are to:

- 1) Initiate and proffer AU Migration & Health Programme/Thematic Area;
- 2) Conduct a scoping exercise to map out the existing migration and health work streams and gaps;
- 3) Identify key priorities for promotion of migration health in AU Member States; and
- 4) Elaborate the guiding principles to promote the health of migrants and refugees.

Giving her keynote speech to the Virtual Meeting, the Director of Social Affairs, Mrs. Cisse Mariama, observed that: "African dream of being an integrated, prosperous and peaceful continent is under tremendous threat induced by the reverberating and spiralling adverse impact of COVID-19".

Mrs. Cisse underlined the need to fight the pandemic of inequality through a new social contract for a new era. She said "Only together we can fend off the common threat of COVID-19 and inject recovery initiatives in Africa".

Ms. Maureen Achieng, IOM Ethiopia Chief of Mission and Representative to the AU, also noted that the enforcement of containment policies in response to the spread of the COVID-19, has left several stranded and vulnerable, most especially refugee, stateless and migrant groups - for

whom social distancing is a privilege and in many parts of the world, have limited access to health services and adequate sanitation.

These heightened vulnerabilities have put the institutionalization of integrated and inclusive health policies at the forefront of addressing migrant rights to life and health. “This is furthermore stipulated in the African Union Migration Policy Framework (MPFA), which takes note of the need for strategic public health responses, in countering health risks such as the spread of diseases, on the continent”, concluded Ms. Maureen Achieng.

It was highlighted during the meeting that measures are needed to improve the health status and overall well-being of migrants, reduce migrant vulnerability, protect global public health, facilitate integration and contribute to social and economic development. It is important for Africa to develop a continental Migration and Health thematic/policy initiative to highlight the key priorities upon which AU’s interventions will be anchored.

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