

Five key take home messages from the High-level dialogue on Covid-19 vaccine access for migrant and mobile populations in South Africa

Held on 25th August 2021

South Africa's Covid-19 vaccination programme needs to:

1. Be cognisant of the xenophobic climate in the country:

- Non-citizens have been turned away by nurses and site administrators, reportedly due to being foreign nationals. This cannot be tolerated and clear communication is needed from the NDOH to this effect.
- However, ensuring that non-citizens are included in the country's vaccination programme should not draw unnecessary attention to migrant populations:
 - Approaches that separate non-citizens from citizens are not recommended, rather **non-citizens must be integrated into existing responses**.
 - **Networks trusted** by non-citizens should be actively involved in supporting vaccination registration and roll-out. This includes:
 - Community leaders, religious organisations, and NGOs
 - Community Health Workers who understand the dynamics within the communities that they serve
 - NGOs and CSOs who work with migrant and mobile communities
 - Migrant Health Forums – Ehlanzeni, Musina, Waterberg, Johannesburg
 - International organizations including UNHCR and IOM

2. Improve communication for vaccination teams and non-citizens

- Communication of current and future policies and system changes **to vaccine roll-out teams** is imperative – including about policies and legislation regarding the rights of non-citizens to access the vaccine.
- Communication in appropriate languages **about the vaccine is needed to counter misinformation**.
- **Communication in appropriate languages about the ways in which non-citizen populations can access the vaccine** is needed.

3. Engage bilaterally and regionally on complementary vaccination programming across SADC

- **Synchronised regional programmes** are needed, including **clear communication about what vaccine certificates (will) look like** from other countries to avoid non-citizens being accused of fraud if they accessed their vaccine elsewhere.
- **Cross-border spaces are key sites for vaccine roll-outs**:
 - These are areas in which many mobile and migrant groups are found
 - Healthcare workers are often well-equipped to understand the needs of migrant and mobile groups in these areas and how to reach them

- What happens in SA has implications for the region and SA needs to be cognisant of this in its approach to integrating non-citizens, specifically those who are undocumented, in the roll-out in the coming months.

4. Develop and implement a legal Firewall

- Inter-departmental communication and collaboration between the NDOH and the DHA is key to implementing a **respected legal firewall that ensures undocumented non-citizens or those with expired documents can access the vaccine** without facing any penalty.
 - This should include an agreement that the DHA will not access vaccination sites and that staff at vaccination sites should provide services regardless of documentation status

5. Work with the DHA to improve access to documentation

- **Fear of being arrested is a key deterrent to accessing vaccines**
- **Timely access to documentation is a key priority for non-citizens**
- The reopening RROs and DHA offices are key

The Researching Migration and Coronavirus in Southern Africa Coordination (MiCoSA) project is hosted by the Migration and Health Project Southern Africa (maHp) at the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS), Wits University, Johannesburg. MiCoSA co-ordinates an informal network of migrant-led organisations, non-governmental organisations, international organisations, civil society, activists, lawyers, researchers, government officials and policy advisors concerned with the health and well-being of asylum-seekers, refugees, and migrants during the current Coronavirus pandemic. To join this network, please sign up **here**. In addition, MiCoSA has a research programme that sets out to explore the political, structural, and social factors influencing the (dis)connections between migration and health governance structures in the context of Covid-19 in South(ern) Africa. This includes consideration of access to Covid-19 vaccines, the role of vaccine passports, and the impacts of border closures on diverse migrant groups - and how to overcome these in the context of a pandemic.

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