



Safeguarding Access and Quality of Care for People on the Move

Dr Musonda Simwinga

Zambart (Zambia)

Population mobility has increased globally, driven by different factors including floods, droughts, conflict, economic pressures and insecurity. Due to climate change, the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as floods and drought are increasing, forcing people to move in search of safer and more stable places. Floods also damage health infrastructure, disrupting supply chains, and cutting access to health services by those who need it most. Similarly, human-made crises such as armed conflict, political instability, and violence compel people to move as their lives, safety and livelihoods are threatened.

Health systems struggle to meet the healthcare needs of mobile populations because they become overwhelmed as they are primarily designed to serve stable, fixed communities. Therefore, the biggest challenge (risk) is not that people move, but rather that their continuity of care is interrupted following the movement or displacement. Displaced people experience delayed diagnosis and treatment for various diseases and conditions while they remain disconnected from health systems. They also experience interruptions in care and treatment as health facilities become inaccessible, records are lost, and supply chains are disrupted causing drug shortages. These challenges affect the entire continuum of care, from maternal health, vaccination, TB, HIV, digital systems, and cross-border care.

To safeguard access and quality of care for mobile populations, health systems must evolve, become flexible and adapt to the needs of the people on the move. Timely, accurate, and connected information systems are essential for continuity of care. This calls for service delivery models that are both innovative and resilient, capable of adapting to instability and disruption while incorporating emerging diagnostics and technological advances to strengthen early detection and continuity of care.

