



STATEMENT BY THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN NATIONALITY NETWORK TO SADC MEMBER STATES

“STATELESS IN A GLOBAL PANDEMIC: INCLUSIVITY IS KEY TO ENDING THE PANDEMIC”

12 FEBRUARY 2021:

As the Covid-19 virus has spread across the world, we were all beset with fear and uncertainty that has now been somewhat abated by the emergence of a vaccination. However, for vulnerable groups such as refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, undocumented persons and stateless persons, the anxiety of being left behind or forgotten persists.

Statelessness is often considered an abstract notion, but it is the reality of hundreds of thousands, possibly millions of Africans who do not have access to citizenship and the rights connected with it. Statelessness inherently results in exclusion in almost all aspects of life, including access to health care, for those affected by it.

As SADC States embark on processes to develop vaccination programmes, the Southern African Nationality Network (“SANN”) advocates for equitable and non-discriminatory programmes that include already marginalised and vulnerable groups such as refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, undocumented persons and stateless persons. SANN supports the position of the World Health Organisation that the vaccination should be made available as a global public good and that there is no place for “vaccine nationalism” in the context of a global pandemic – “*equity in access will lead to equity in health for all*”. Health experts have indicated that it is impossible to break or sustainably slow the transmission of the virus unless about 70% of a national population has acquired immunity. Therefore, excluding specific groups on the arbitrary basis of citizenship, immigration or documentation status will not only violate their human right to health, but will also affect the success rate of any vaccination programme.

To ensure the protection and inclusion of stateless persons in State Covid-19 responses and vaccination programmes in particular, we urge SADC States to:

- adopt [the policy recommendations and good practices](#) on the impact of Covid-19 on stateless populations issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- provide transparency and public details on Covid-19 vaccination programmes and include civil society and other important stakeholders with a platform for proper consultation and participation in the planning and implementation of Covid-19 vaccination roll-out strategies
- make free or affordable Covid-19 testing and treatment, including vaccination, accessible for all regardless of citizenship, documentation or immigration status
- create a firewall between health and immigration services during this period to enable irregular migrants, undocumented persons and stateless persons to access health care without fear and risk of arrest or detention
- ensure the inclusion of all citizens and non-citizens in Covid-19 information and awareness raising campaigns; and
- denounce xenophobia and all forms of arbitrary discrimination in Covid-19 responses.

The Southern African Nationality Network would like to emphasize that: *“inclusivity is key to ending the pandemic. It is not only the right thing to do but it is in the best interest of us all, for no one is safe until everyone is safe.”*

See also: the Global Joint Statement in Solidarity with the Stateless: https://files.institutesi.org/Joint_Statement_in_Solidarity_with_the_Stateless.pdf

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