

# **Understanding the Links between Social Protection and Migration in Low- and Middle-income Countries**

Discussion Paper, June 2023

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1 Carmen León Himmelstine, Jason Gagnon and Jessica Hagen-Zanker, "How do social protection programmes in low- and middle-income countries affect migration decisions? A review of the literature," *MIDEQ Working Paper* (Coventry: MIDEQ, 2023). Accessible at: <https://www.mideq.org/en/resources-index-page/social-protection-migration-global-south>.

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# 1. Introduction

The drivers of migration are complex, multi-layered, and context specific. Such drivers include, for instance, the need to manage a broad range of socioeconomic risks and livelihood changes, including job loss, old-age, and child-rearing.<sup>2</sup> Migration can occur when environments rife with such risks and with limited social and economic prospects, inequality, political and economic insecurity, conflict, violence, and human rights abuses meet the desire for change.<sup>3</sup>

But even under dire circumstances, migration may not always be the outcome. First, most people have no aspiration to migrate, while others do not have the capacity to migrate even though they may wish to do so.<sup>4</sup> Aspirations to migrate are realized when a number of factors align, including access to a social network that can enable migration pathways, the funds to pay for the costs, and the knowledge and skills required to navigate every step of the way.<sup>5</sup>

Second, in the face of dire livelihood challenges, migration may not even be the only option available to people. Instead, they may opt to manage livelihood risks in other ways. One policy area of particular – and growing – interest is social protection, the range of publicly-mandated actions that seek to address risk and vulnerability, often among poor and near-poor households, such as pensions, child benefits, unemployment benefits, or public works programmes.

Given the important role played by risk in the decision to migrate, access to social protection can affect the decision to migrate.<sup>6</sup>

Social protection was, for a long time, generally limited to high-income countries. In recent years, however, social protection mechanisms have expanded to low- and middle-income countries, with most countries in the world now having at least one social protection programme.<sup>7</sup> As global expansion in social protection continues, so will policy interest on the different, sometimes inadvertent, effects of such expansion. One of these potential effects is its interaction with migration decision-making, that is, whether there is a trade-off between access to social protection and the ability or need to migrate. In this paper, we explore this relationship in order to address simplistic policy assumptions on instruments like social protection being used to potentially ‘stop’ or reduce migration.

Drawing on evidence collated in the comprehensive literature review by Himmelstine et al.,<sup>8</sup> this discussion paper asks the question: “What are the effects that publicly-mandated social protection programmes in countries of origin exert on migration decisions?” It considers migration decisions taken either by individuals or collectively at the household level. This paper provides a review of the relevant mixed methods, quantitative, and qualitative English,

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2 Jason Gagnon and Jessica Hagen-Zanker, “Social protection and risk: the ultimate root cause of migration?” *OECD Development Matters*, 3 July 2019, <https://oecd-development-matters.org/2019/07/03/social-protection-and-risk-the-ultimate-root-cause-of-migration/>; Oded Stark, *The Migration of Labour* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2019).

3 Maryam Aslany, Jørgen Carling, Mathilde Bålsrud Mjelva, and Tone Sommerfelt, “Systematic review of determinants of migration aspirations,” *QuantMig Deliverable 2* (Southampton: University of Southampton, 2021); Jessica Hagen-Zanker and Richard Mallett, “Understanding migrant decision-making: implications for policy,” *MIDEQ Working Paper* (Coventry: Coventry University, 2020).

4 Jørgen Carling and Kerilyn Schewel, “Revisiting aspiration and ability in international migration,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 44 No. 6 (2017): 945–963.

5 Jørgen Carling, “The role of aspirations in migration: Determinants of International Migration,” *International Migration Institute, University of Oxford*, 23–25 September 2014, <https://www.migrationinstitute.org/files/events/carling-j.pdf>; Hein de Haas, “Migration and development: A theoretical perspective,” *International Migration Review* Vol. 44 No. 1 (2018): 227–264; Hein de Haas, “A theory of migration: the aspirations-capabilities framework,” *Comparative Migration Studies* Vol. 9 No. 8 (2021).

6 Jessica Hagen-Zanker, Melissa Siegel, and Chris De Neubourg, “Strings attached. The impediments to migration in Albania and Moldova,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* Vol. 9 No. 4 (2009): 461–481; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Interrelations between Public Policies, Migration and Development* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2017); Rachel Sabates-Wheeler and Martha Waite, *Migration and social protection: A concept paper* (Falmer, UK: University of Sussex, 2003); Guy Stecklov, Paul Winters, Marco Stampini, and Ben Davis, “Do conditional cash transfers influence migration? A study using experimental data from the Mexican PROGRESA program,” *Demography* Vol. 42 No. 4 (2005): 769–790.

7 International Labour Organisation (ILO), *World Social Protection Report 2020–22* (Geneva: ILO, 2023).

8 A search protocol was set up and a formal literature search was conducted using predefined search strings to explore three academic databases, seven academic journals, and 16 websites. The authors also consulted four experts in the field, which increased the number of documents for consideration. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods studies were considered. The search protocol covered publicly mandated social protection programmes only, considering both de facto and de jure access to social protection, including cash transfers, public works programmes, health insurance, health fee waivers, unemployment insurance, school subsidies or fee waivers, and asset transfers. The review was conducted from October to December 2020, building on a previous study authored by Hagen-Zanker and Himmelstine (Jessica Hagen-Zanker and Carmen León Himmelstine, “What do we know about the impact of social protection programmes on the decision to migrate?” *Migration and Development* Vol. 2 No. 1 (2013): 117–131). Additional searches in both French and Spanish were also included.

French, and Spanish literature in this area, focusing on evidence in low, lower-middle, and upper-middle income countries.

### What is the Evidence Base?

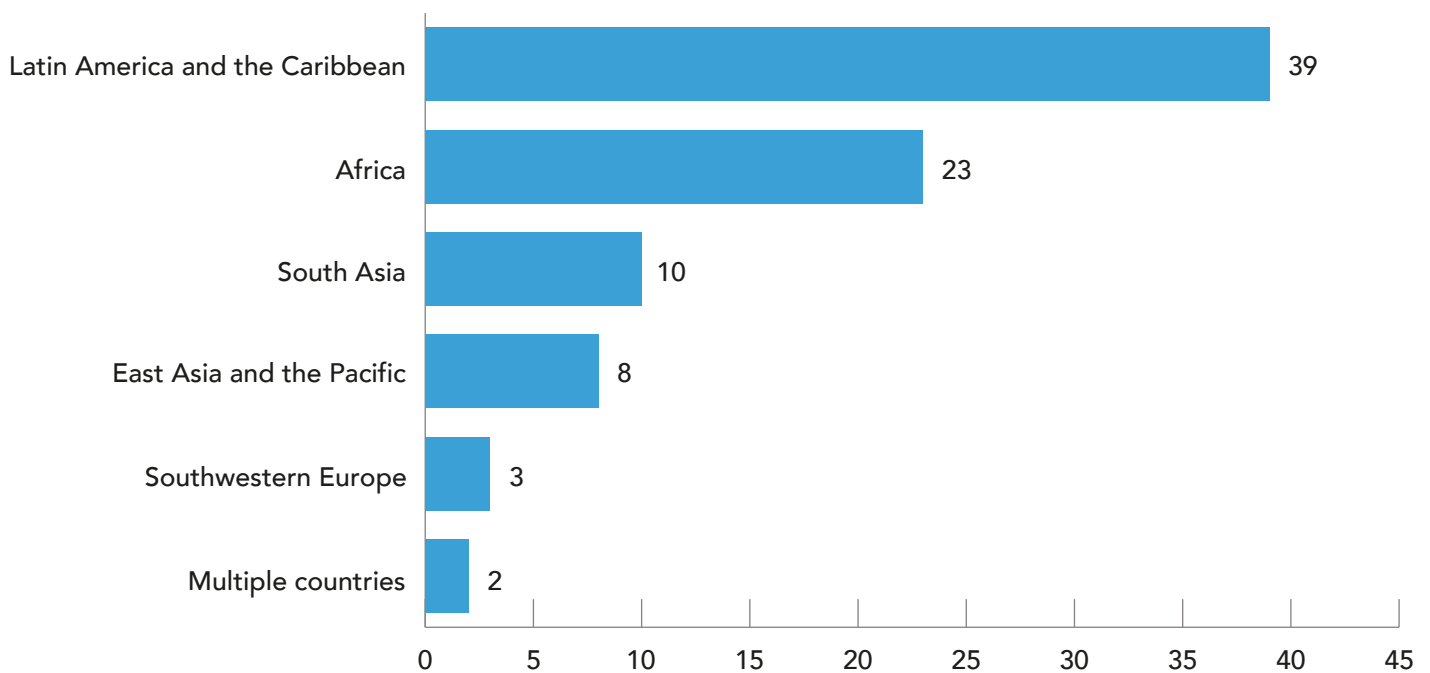
The review included 76 papers, covering 85 countries, published before or in 2020. The evidence is skewed both in terms of types of social protection programmes covered and geographical distribution.

With regards to the social protection programmes covered, the majority of studies considered effects from conditional cash transfers (CCTs) (33 studies), employment guarantee schemes (17 studies), non-contributory pensions (nine

studies), social and health insurance (eight studies), unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) (seven studies), and two studies examining the effects of various social protection schemes on migration.

With regards to the geographic distribution of the studies, there is a strong concentration of studies in the Latin America and Caribbean region (39 studies), followed by Africa (23), South Asia (10), East Asia and the Pacific (eight), Southwestern Europe (three), and two studies looking at the effects of access to social protection on multiple countries (Figure 1). The evidence base is, in fact, dominated by four countries, which together account for more than half of the studies included: Mexico (28 studies), India (10), South Africa (five), and China (five).

Figure 1 – Regional Distribution of Studies



## 2. What are the Main Findings?

Taken together, the studies do not paint a clear picture. According to a review of the empirical literature, it is not possible to clearly ascertain whether access to social protection leads to an increase or a decrease in either internal, international, or temporary migration. An overview of the 76 studies reveals no clear trend (Figure 2):

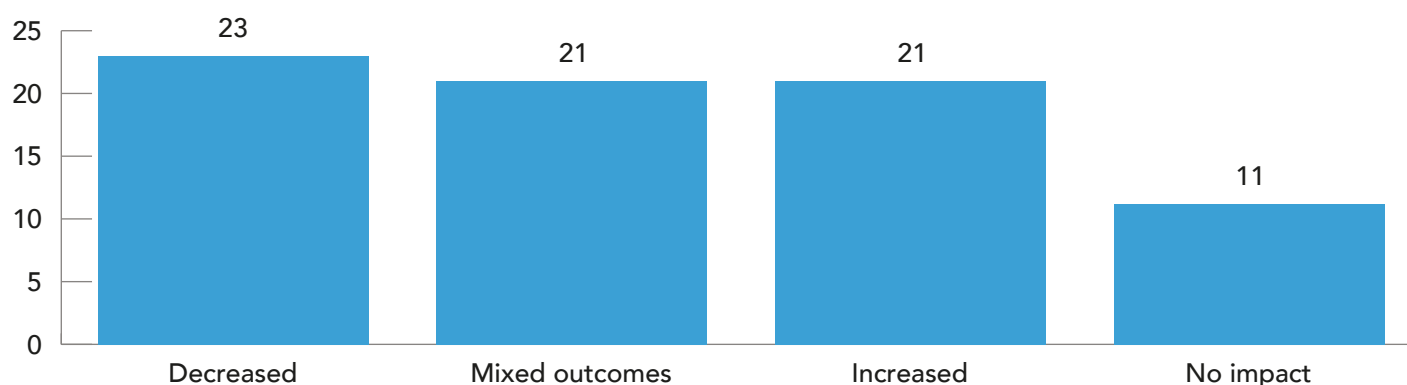
- Twenty-three studies find that access to social protection programmes has decreased migration;
- Twenty-one studies find that it increased migration;
- Twenty-one studies find that it has mixed outcomes of increases and decreases;<sup>9</sup>
- Eleven find that social protection programmes have no effect/statistically significant impact on migration.

### Does the Effect of Social Protection on Migration Vary by the Type of Migration?

#### Internal Migration

The social protection studies that focus on internal migration do not reveal a clear trend (Figure 3). While 17 studies find a decrease in internal migration, a nearly equal number of 18 find an increase. Seven studies describe a mixed impact of both increases and decreases based on a number of factors, and 10 describe situations where there was no impact from social protection. Moreover, the results do not seem to be related to a specific country context or event, nor the level of urbanization or history of internal migration.

Figure 2 – The Impacts of Social Protection on Migration



The main findings, however, aggregate all studies and look at different social protection programmes and types of migration. This aggregation may hide more specific underlying trends. This discussion paper therefore focuses on more specific sub-groups and considers various factors that may influence the impact of social protection on migration decisions.

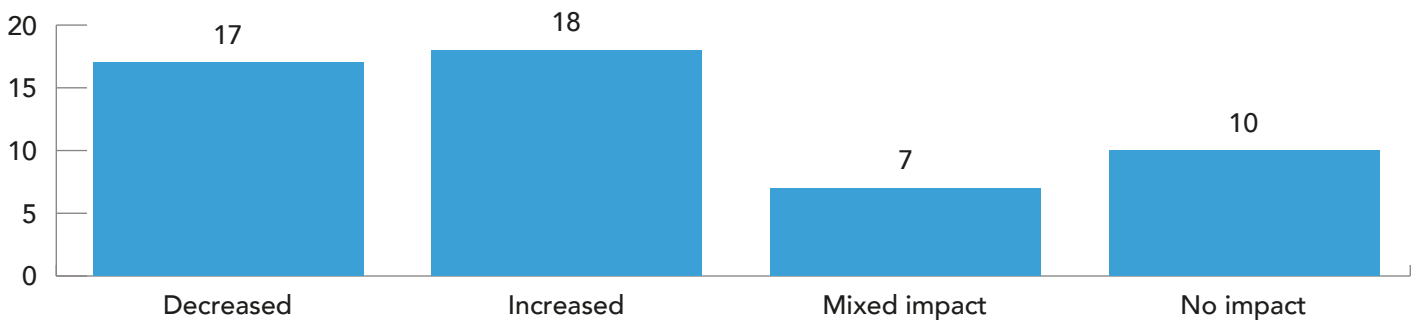
There was some consistency for the case of South Africa's Old Age Grant, a universal, non-contributory pension, where five studies find that the receipt of the Old Age Grant in a household was correlated with the migration of another household member.<sup>10</sup> Looking into the gender dynamics behind this finding, Inder and Maitra<sup>11</sup> found that the Old Age Grant allowed benefiting households to

9 We are classifying mixed outcomes studies as those that show a combination of impacts. For example, those that found different migration outcomes over different periods of time (such as an increase in the short term and decrease in the long term), an increase for some members of the household and a decrease for others, and different outcomes between demographic groups (men and women, youth and older generations) or between regions.

10 Cally Ardington, Anne Case, and Victoria Hosegood, "Labor supply responses to large social transfers: Longitudinal evidence from South Africa," *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* Vol. 1 No. 1 (2009): 22–48; Brett Inder and Pashkar Maitra "Social pensions, migration and household composition: Evidence from South Africa," *Department of Economics Discussion Paper 04/16* (Melbourne: Monash University, 2004); Dorrit Posel, James A. Fairburn, and Frances Lund, "Labour migration and households: A reconsideration of the effects of the social pension on labour supply in South Africa," *Economic Modelling* Vol. 23 No. 5 (2006): 836–853; Alex Sienaert, "Migration, remittances and public transfers: Evidence from South Africa," *Economics Working Paper Series 351* (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2007); Alex Sienaert, "The labour supply effects of the South African state old age pension: Theory, evidence and implications," *Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit Working Paper Series 20* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 2008).

11 Brett Inder and Pashkar Maitra, "Social pensions, migration and household composition."

Figure 3 – The Impact of Social Protection on Internal Migration



fund the internal migration of working age women, as long as other members provided care for the children living in the household.<sup>12</sup> Consistent with this finding, Gil-Garcia also found that female participants migrated internally after benefiting from the Oportunidades programme in Mexico.<sup>13</sup>

#### International Migration

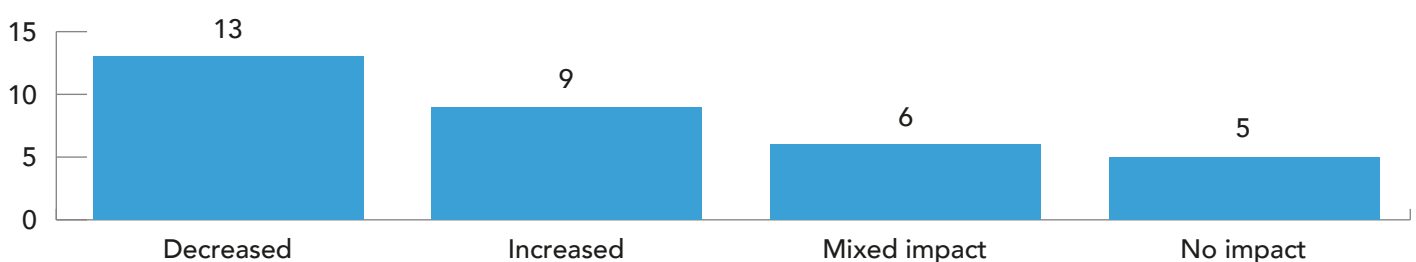
Given that international migration is much costlier and requires more preparation than internal migration, it is unclear whether social protection benefits are sizeable enough to overcome such barriers. As was the case for internal migration, the empirical literature focused on international migration paints quite a mixed picture. The findings suggest that social protection programmes do indeed influence international migration in some instances, but with little consistent pattern. Of the 33 studies reviewed, relatively fewer find that social protection increases (nine) rather than decreases (13) international migration, while six find a mixed impact and five no impact at all (Figure 4). The conclusions do not seem related to migration history, proximity to job-rich countries, migration rates, or any specific event.

To give one example, the pantawid ng pamilyang pilipino program is the largest social protection programme in the Philippines, targeting extremely poor families. It gives a monthly cash transfer to children under 18 years, as well as additional support to help with education expenses, conditional on mothers seeking pre- and post-natal care and children’s school attendance. Households that receive cash transfers are less likely to have an international migrant in the household or receive remittances, suggesting that the support received may act as a substitute to international migration and remittances.<sup>14</sup>

#### Temporary Migration

Few studies explicitly focus on temporary migration, that is, migration which is seasonal, short term, or circular. Part of the reason is that it is difficult to measure whether migration is temporary or not. Altogether, there were 25 studies that mentioned a temporary migration context, with ten finding an increase, six a decrease, seven no impact at all, and two suggesting a mix of impacts (Figure 5). While no clear pattern emerges, there are relatively more studies that conclude a higher incidence of increases in temporary migration in the presence of social protection, rather than decreases.

Figure 4 – The Impact of Social Protection on International Migration



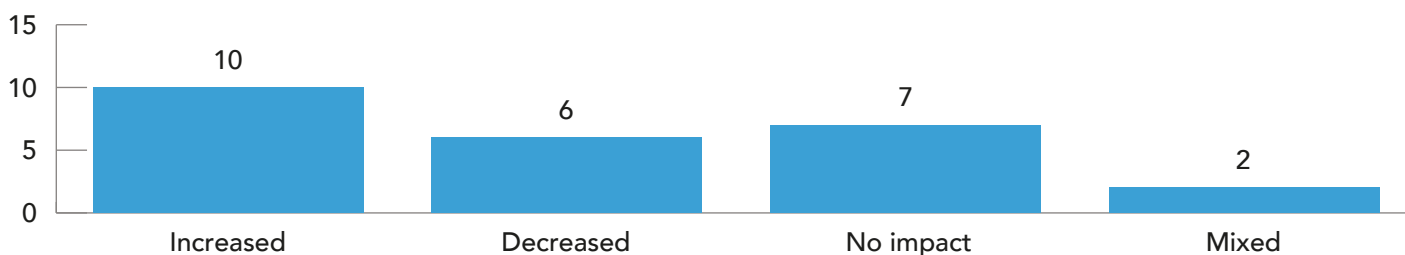
<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Óscar F. Gil-García, “The Prospera conditional cash transfer program and its impact on education, labor, and migration in an indigenous Mayan community in Chiapas, Mexico,” *Journal of Prevention and Intervention in the Community* Vol. 49 No. 1 (2019): 60–80.

<sup>14</sup> OECD, “Interrelations between Public Policies, Migration and Development in the Philippines,” *OECD Development Pathways* (Paris: OECD, 2017).



Figure 5 – The Impact of Social Protection on Temporary Migration



For example, an evaluation of the Youth Employment Support Project, a cash-for-work programme in Sierra Leone that grants young adults 50 to 75 days of paid work on targeted community projects, found that the programme led to an increase in temporary migration.<sup>15</sup> The funds granted through the programme allowed other household members, particularly women, to migrate.

### Does the Type of Social Protection Programme affect Migration Outcomes?

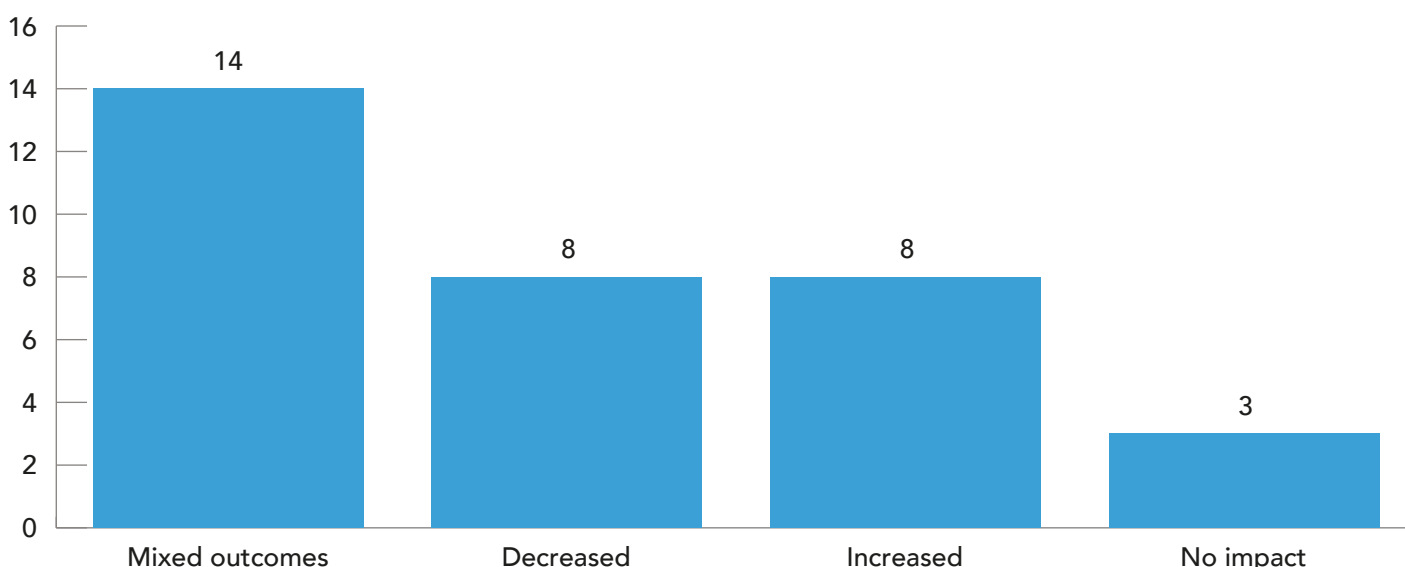
#### CCT Programmes

CCTs have conditions attached to receipt, often requiring some form of presence by family members at the place where they receive the transfer, for instance, at a school or health check. This may result in people deciding not to migrate in order to meet the programme’s requirements.

Yet, there is no clear pattern (Figure 6). About half of the studies reviewed – mainly from Latin America – show both increases (eight studies) and decreases (eight studies) in migration, while the other half of the studies find that access to CCTs yields mixed outcomes on the propensity to migrate. Three studies find no impact.

It is not clear whether CCTs increase or decrease the propensity to migrate, even when looking at one single programme. Many of the studies focus on the former Mexican Oportunidades programme, which ran from 1997 to 2019 and was one of the first and biggest programmes of its kind at the time. Several studies find that Oportunidades reduced the migration of participants, or their household members, in the short term, but increased it in the long term, when former participants, who are now adults, have more autonomy to make decisions, and may decide to move

Figure 6 – The Impact of CCTs on Migration



15 Nina Rosas and Shwetlena Sabarwal, “Can you work it? Evidence on the productive potential of public works from a youth employment program in Sierra Leone,” *Policy Research Working Paper 7580* (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2016).

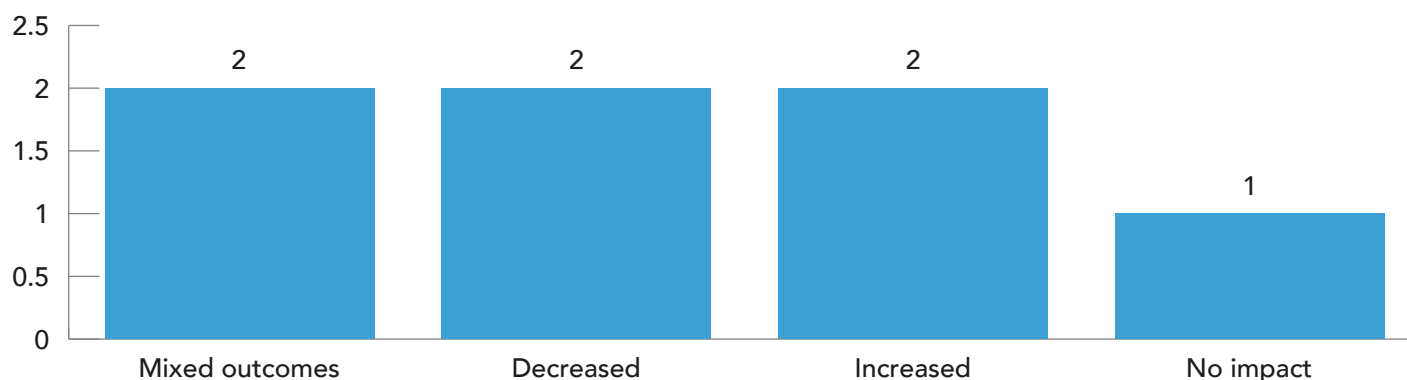
for higher education or to find better-remunerated jobs.<sup>16</sup> In addition, while some direct participants did not migrate in the short term (children and mothers), other members of the household, not bounded by the conditions of the programme, did migrate.<sup>17</sup> Other studies found that international migration was impacted more than internal migration, because it allowed households to send a household member to the United States, when they would have otherwise not been able to afford it, with internal migration already frequently taking place anyway.<sup>18</sup>

### UCT Programmes

The evidence on UCTs is small, but more geographically diverse than studies that focus on CCTs. Studies from China,

The Child Grant Programme in Zambia is an example of a mixed outcome. A study finds that the receipt of UCTs decreased short distance migration of men from wealthier households during periods of extreme heat, a time when agricultural or service labour opportunities for these households reduce, as the cash received smoothed the consumption needs of these households.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the programme increased the migration of men during cool periods, irrespective of their wealth, due to households taking advantage of a regular income source that allowed a household member to migrate under normal climate conditions. In other words, it allowed migration to be more of a strategic undertaking, at least for wealthy households.

Figure 7 – The Impact of UCT Programmes on Migration



Indonesia, and six African countries (Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Niger, South Sudan, and Zambia) were analysed. There is once again no pattern regarding the impact of UCTs on migration, with an equal number of studies finding mixed outcomes, decreases, and increases in migration (Figure 7). One study found no impact.

### Non-contributory Pensions

In terms of non-contributory pensions, there is only evidence from nine studies from China, South Africa, and Uganda (five focus on the Old Age Grant in South Africa, discussed above). There is a more consistent pattern in these studies, with seven studies showing an increase in

16 Mercedes de la Rocha González, *Life after oportunidades: Rural program impact after 10 years of implementation (External evaluation of oportunidades 2008. 1997-2007: 10 Years of intervention in rural areas Volume I)* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, 2008); Carmen León Himmelstine, *The linkages between social protection and migration: a case study of Oportunidades and migration in Oaxaca, Mexico*, Doctoral thesis (Brighton: School of Global Studies, University of Sussex, 2017); Nina Rosas and Shwetlena Sabarwal, “Can you work it? Evidence on the productive potential of public works from a youth employment program in Sierra Leone,” *Policy Research Working Paper 7580* (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2016); Susan Parker and Tom Vogl, “Do conditional cash transfers improve economic outcomes in the next generation? Evidence from Mexico,” *National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) Working Paper Series 24303* (Cambridge, MA: NBER, 2018).

17 Óscar F. Gil-García, “The Prospera conditional cash transfer program and its impact on education, labor, and migration in an indigenous Mayan community in Chiapas, Mexico.”; Carmen León Himmelstine, “The linkages between social protection and migration: a case study of Oportunidades and migration in Oaxaca, Mexico.” Christina Hughes, “Reexamining the Influence of Conditional Cash Transfers on Migration From a Gendered Lens,” *Demography* Vol. 56 No. 5 (2019): 1573–1605; Aki Ishikawa, *The Effect of Mexico’s Conditional Cash Transfer Program on Migration Decisions* (Durham: Duke University, 2014).

18 Manuela Angelucci, “Aid and migration: An analysis of the impact of *progres*a on the timing and size of labour migration,” *Institute of Labor Economics (IZA) Discussion Paper No. 1187* (Bonn: IZA, 2004); Manuela Angelucci, “Migration and Financial Constraints: Evidence from Mexico,” *IZA Discussion Paper No. 7726* (Bonn: IZA, 2013).

19 Valerie Mueller, Clark Gray, Sudhanshu Handa, and David Seidenfeld, “Do social protection programs foster short-term and long-term migration adaptation strategies?” *Environment and Development Economics* Vol. 25 No. 2 (2020): 135–158.

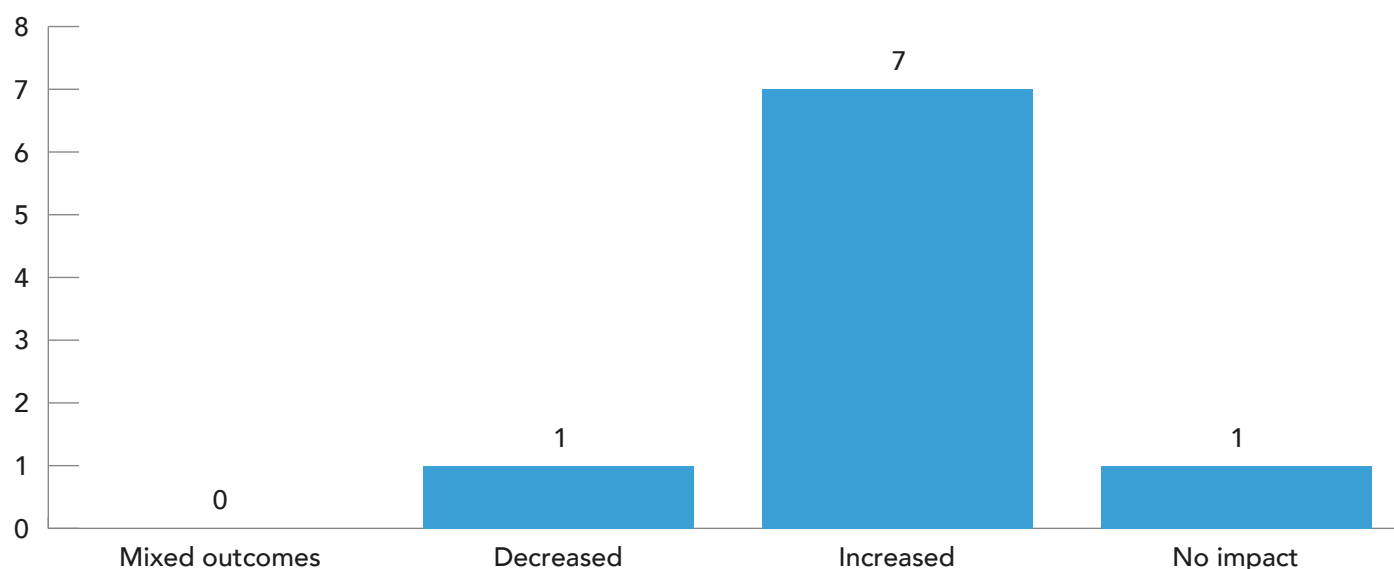
internal migration (Figure 8), one showing a decrease, and one demonstrating no impact on migration.

Several studies focus on the New Rural Social Pension (NRSP) programme in China, a non-contributory pension for persons aged 60 or above. Some studies find that access to the pension scheme is linked with higher internal migration of the participants' adult children since pensioners can afford medical services and rely less on support and care from their children.<sup>20</sup> However, another study finds that the NRSP reduces the migration of adult children since the cash receipts reduce the pensioner's time spent in agriculture, particularly amongst men, and increases the time that adult children spend in agriculture.<sup>21</sup>

finding that social and health insurance is linked with a decrease in migration, and three finding mixed outcomes (Figure 9). As such, the evidence on social and health insurance suggests, generally, that the higher the coverage is in the country of origin, the lower the propensity to migrate. A likely explanation is that social insurance receipt is closely correlated with formal sector employment. Individuals with social insurance coverage may have less need and desire to move, as it would also mean leaving behind social benefits and a good job.

Two studies assess the effects of the Seguro Popular programme, a Mexican programme providing access to public healthcare for uninsured individuals (those who are

Figure 8 – The Impact of Non-contributory Pensions on Migration



### Social and Health Insurance Programmes

There are also a small number of studies on social and health insurance programmes, which tend to be contributory.<sup>22</sup> A number of these studies compare coverage of social insurance across countries, whereas other studies focus on a specific social insurance programme. There is a somewhat consistent pattern, with five of the eight studies

unemployed, self-employed, or informally employed). Both studies find mixed outcomes. Participants in the programme continue to migrate from Mexico to the United States, perhaps because the transfers are not large enough to cover the healthcare needs of those affiliated, or because of the lower quality of healthcare services in Mexico compared to those in the United States.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the economic rewards

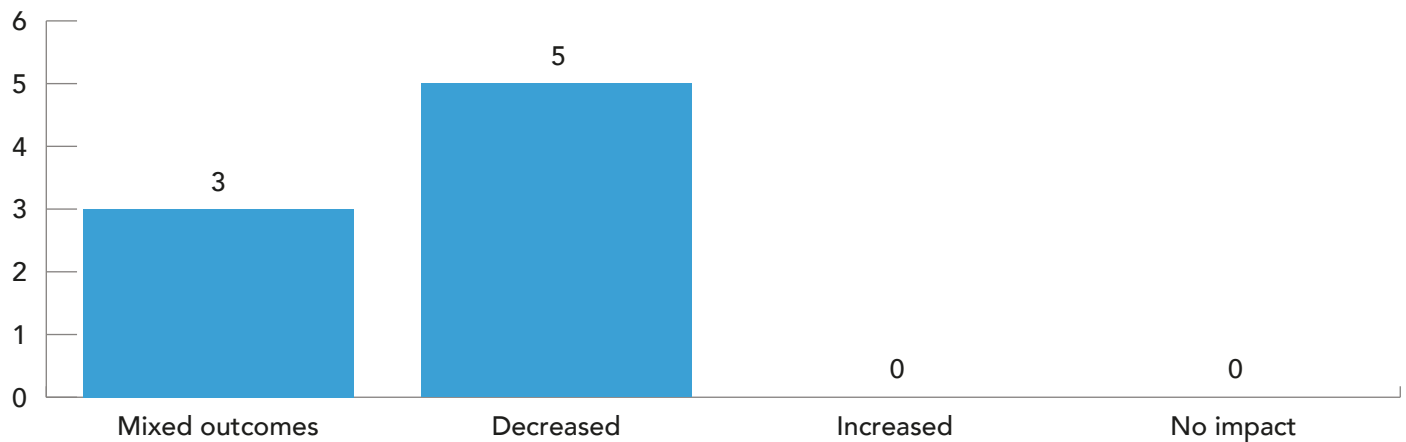
20 Xi Chen, "Old-Age Pension and Extended Families: How Is Adult Children's Internal Migration Affected?" *Contemporary Economic Policy* Vol. 34 No. 4 (2016): 646-659; Karen Eggleston, Ang Sun, and Zhaoguo Zhan, "The impact of rural pensions in China on labor migration," *World Bank Economic Review* Vol. 32 No. 1 (2018): 64-84.

21 Qin Li, Yafeng Wang, and Yaohui Zhao, "The Impact of China's New Rural Pension Program on Elderly Labor, Grandchild Care, and Old-Age Support," *Feminist Economics* Vol. 24 No. 2 (2018): 265-287.

22 A few of the programmes reviewed are tax funded.

23 Ana Isabel López García and Pedro P. Orraca-Romano, "International migration and universal healthcare access: evidence from Mexico's 'Seguro Popular,'" *Oxford Development Studies* Vol. 47 No. 2 (2019): 171-187; Clotilde Mahé, "Publicly provided healthcare and migration," *Economics and Human Biology* Vol. 39 (2020): 1-19.

Figure 9 – The Impact of Social and Health Insurance Programmes on Migration



of international migration may be more appealing than the risks of quitting an informal job, despite the social insurance associated with it. However, the programme is also linked to an increase in the return migration of undocumented migrants from the United States to Mexico, perhaps because being undocumented they could not access healthcare services in the United States during a health crisis.<sup>24</sup>

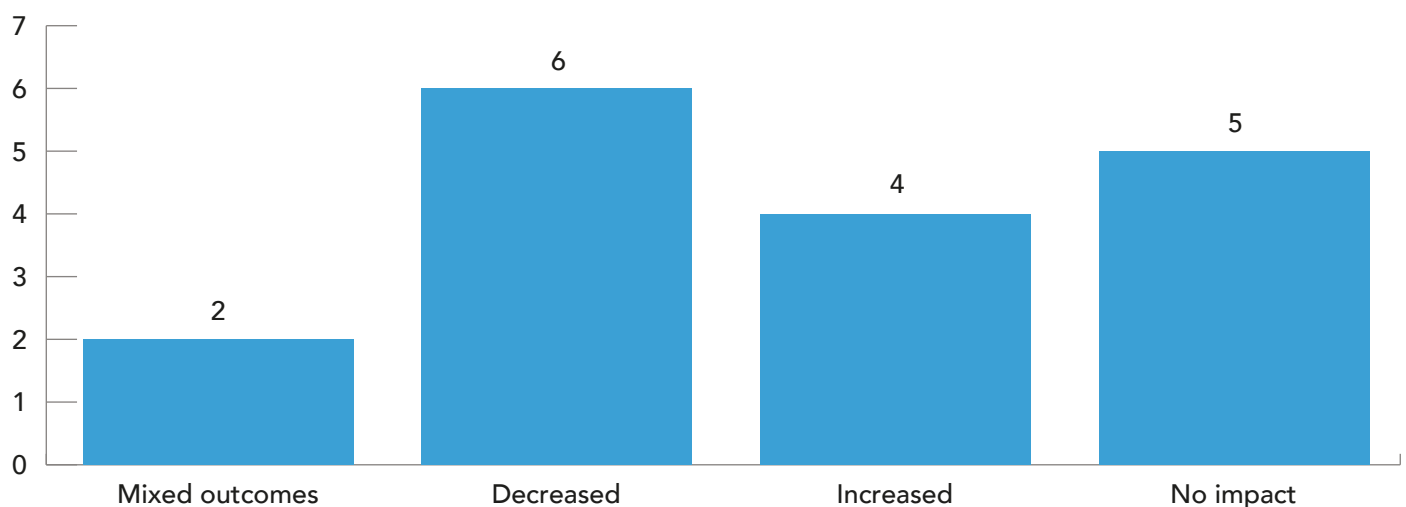
#### Public Works and Employment Guarantee Programmes

There were 17 studies that focused on public works programmes (paid employment on a public works project) or employment guarantee schemes (paid employment

available on a regular basis). Overall, the effect of such programmes on migration is inconsistent, with six studies finding a decrease, four an increase, five finding no impact, and two suggesting mixed impact outcomes on migration (Figure 10).

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) programme in India provides up to 100 days of paid work to rural households each year. One of the programme’s objectives is explicitly to limit rural-urban migration, by providing a means to a livelihood during lean farm seasons.<sup>25</sup> The evidence suggests that the

Figure 10 – The Impact of Public Works and Employment Guarantee Programmes on Migration



<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Priya Deshingkar, Rachel Godfrey-Wood, and Christophe Bene, *Adaptive social protection and migration. The case of cash transfers in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi* (Falmer, UK: Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium, 2015).

MGNREGA programme has not been as effective as hoped in reducing internal migration for several reasons. First, the additional income gained through internal migration has been higher than the salary provided through the MGNREGA schemes.<sup>26</sup> Second, the *actual* number of days of work provided has not matched the number promised by the programme.<sup>27</sup> Third, certain implementation challenges have meant that people could not rely on the MGNREGA programme consistently and therefore have continued to migrate to secure other sources of income.<sup>28</sup>

### **How do Individual and Household Factors Mediate the Link between Social Protection and Migration?**

The evidence above suggests that the impact of social protection on migration is mediated by individual and household factors, contextual factors, and programme design and implementation. In this section, individual and household factors are investigated, followed by sections that focus on contextual factors and programme design and implementation.

The characteristics of participants in social protection programmes, as well as those of their households, need to be considered to explain the effects of such programmes on migration decisions. First, skill and education levels can affect credit constraints related to migration, and the potential payoffs one may gain from migration. Six studies consider skills and education levels in their analysis and the findings suggest a mainly consistent positive correlation between education and skills and migration, with more studies focused on internal migration. Generally, higher education and skill levels lead to higher propensities to migrate (see for instance Azuara<sup>29</sup> on Mexico). However,

there are also counter examples. Angelucci, for instance, demonstrates that the migration of unskilled individuals increased as a result of the Oportunidades programme in Mexico, with people in this group now being able to take on loans since they now have a two-year guaranteed income that serves as collateral.<sup>30</sup>

Gender plays an important role, both for the programme participant and other household members. Amongst the 14 studies that consider gender, findings are inconsistent. Several studies show that female participants are more likely to share their income with other household members, allowing other household members, especially other women, to migrate. There is evidence to suggest this in the case of South Africa's Old Age Grant.<sup>31</sup> Other studies suggest women are more likely to migrate than men when participating in social protection programmes, especially when they are high skilled or when programmes enable them to increase their human capital.<sup>32</sup> Several studies on the other hand show that gender norms may restrict mobility. For instance, studies on CCTs find that it is women that must stay behind to meet the conditions of the programmes, either as mothers and caregivers,<sup>33</sup> or to support other household members participating in public works programmes.<sup>34</sup>

Age can also mediate the effects of social protection programmes on migration. Four of the seven studies that look at age find a decrease in migration as age increases. One of the objectives of CCTs is to keep children and youth at risk of dropping out of education in school. Several studies find that CCTs reduce or delay migration in the short term, while children and youth attend school and receive the cash benefit. This was also found in other types of programmes, including the Business Grant Program in South Sudan.<sup>35</sup> Other evidence suggests that social

26 Naomi Jacob, "The impact of NREGA on rural-urban migration: Field survey of Villupuram District, Tamil Nadu," *CCS Working Paper No. 202* (New Delhi: Centre for Civil Society, 2008); Ratna M. Sudarshan, Rina Bhattacharya, and Grace Fernandez, "Women's participation in the NREGA: Some observations from fieldwork in Himachal Pradesh, Kerala and Rajasthan," *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 41 No. 4 (2010): 77-83.

27 Priya Deshingkar, Shaheen Akter, Pramed Sharma, and John Farrington, *The impacts of social protection on labour markets and migration with particular reference to the NREGA* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2010).

28 Ibid.

29 Oliver Azuara, "Does poverty alleviation increase migration? Evidence from Mexico," *MPRA Paper No. 17599* (Munich: Munich Personal RePEc Archive, 2009).

30 M. Angelucci, "Migration and Financial Constraints: Evidence from Mexico."

31 Cally Ardington, Anne Case, and Victoria Hosegood, "Labor supply responses to large social transfers: Longitudinal evidence from South Africa," *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* Vol. 1 (2009): 22-48.

32 M. Hidrobo, V. Mueller, and S. Roy, *Cash Transfers and the Geographic Mobility of the Rural Poor in Mali*, 1-58 (2020); Susan Parker and Tom Vogl, "Do conditional cash transfers improve economic outcomes in the next generation? Evidence from Mexico."

33 C. Hughes, "Reexamining the Influence of Conditional Cash Transfers on Migration From a Gendered Lens.;" Aki Ishikawa, "The Effect of Mexico's Conditional Cash Transfer Program on Migration Decisions."

34 John Hoddinott and Tseday J. Mekasha, "Social Protection, Household Size, and Its Determinants: Evidence from Ethiopia," *Journal of Development Studies* Vol. 56 No. 10 (2020): 1818-1837.

35 Angelika Müller, Utz Johann Pape, and Laura Ralston, "Broken Promises: Evaluating an Incomplete Cash Transfer Program," *Policy Research Working Paper 9016* (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2019).

protection programmes have no effect on young participants, as young participants find migration more profitable than education.<sup>36</sup>

Ethnicity also mediates the outcomes of social protection on migration, although the evidence follows no clear pattern. For example, participation in the Oportunidades programme appeared to increase the internal migration of indigenous youth years down the line, as they may have had less profitable job opportunities at home.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, ethnic minorities are less likely to migrate in China, as other barriers to migration, for instance language or information gaps, may be more critical than financial credit constraints.<sup>38</sup>

In terms of household characteristics, various studies show that the migration of indirect participants (such as young adults and heads of households) belonging to programme participant households tend to increase, while older participants tend to stay.<sup>39</sup> Households with large numbers of children tend not to migrate in the short term, while some children are still completing their studies.<sup>40</sup> This suggests that households adopt different strategies to diversify their income and to benefit from both social protection and migration simultaneously, without having to compromise the benefits of one over the other.

The effect of household income, poverty status, and social class in the link between social protection and migration is unclear. Amongst the 13 studies that have looked at this,

seven have found that poorer and low-asset households tend to migrate more than wealthier ones, as transfers loosen liquidity constraints.<sup>41</sup> For instance, considering the effect of cash transfers on migration from Comoros to Mayotte, where there was a significantly larger effect for households with low levels of savings or risk-aversion, findings suggest that the cash transfers eased liquidity and risk constraints for poorer households.<sup>42</sup> Yet five studies found that the benefit received from a programme is enough to meet their basic needs, so migration decreases.

### **How do Contextual Factors Mediate the Link between Social Protection and Migration?**

Contextual factors also mediate the impact of social protection programmes on migration outcomes. Local labour markets and the availability of jobs can determine the need to migrate and mediate the impact of social protection. When local jobs are scarce or poorly paid, migration continues to take place regardless of the provision of social protection and may even be used to finance migration.<sup>43</sup> Such effects interact with other factors, including education levels, and may change over time (See Box 1). When social protection programmes also aim to boost education levels over time – as some CCTs aim to do – the additional education gained may influence incentives to migrate. Migration can also be mediated by inequalities in access to the labour market or better paying jobs. Ethnic minorities who face intersectional inequalities, for instance, may be more likely to migrate.<sup>44</sup>

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36 Priya Deshingkar, Rachel Godfrey-Wood, and Christophe Bene, “Adaptive social protection and migration. The case of cash transfers in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi.”

37 Mercedes de la Rocha González, *Life after oportunidades: Rural program impact after 10 years of implementation*.

38 Anthony Howell, “Targeted Cash Transfers, Credit Constraints, and Ethnic Migration in the People’s Republic of China,” *ADB Economics Working Paper Series No. 575* (Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2019).

39 Ó. F. Gil-García, “The Prospera conditional cash transfer program and its impact on education, labor, and migration.”; Fernanda Soares Assuncao, “Do cash transfers alter household composition? Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa,” Masters thesis (Washington, DC: Faculty of the School of International Service, American University, 2011); Paul Winters, Guy Steklov, and Jessica Todd, *The impact of conditional cash transfers on household composition, fertility and migration in Central America* (Washington, DC: Department of Economics, American University, 2005).

40 Arturo Aguilar, Cristina Barnard, and Giacomo De Giorgi, “Long-Term Effects of PROSPERA on Welfare,” *Policy Research Working Paper 9002* (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2019).

41 Jeronimo Cortina, “Subsidizing migration? Mexican agricultural policies and migration to the United States,” *Policy Studies Journal* Vol. 42 No. 1 (2014): 101–121; Alice Mesnard, “Migration, Violence and Welfare Programmes in Rural Colombia,” *IFS Working Paper* (London: Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2009); Smriti Tiwari and Paul Winters, “Liquidity Constraints and Migration: Evidence from Indonesia,” *International Migration Review* Vol. 5 No. 1 (2019): 254–282.

42 Jules Gazeaud, Eric Mvukiyehe, and Olivier Sterck, “Cash Transfers and Migration: Theory and Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Trial,” *Working Paper WPS/2019–16* (Oxford: Centre for the Study of African Economies, University of Oxford, 2019).

43 M. Hidrobo, V. Mueller, and S. Roy, *Cash Transfers and the Geographic Mobility of the Rural Poor in Mali*, 1–58 (2020); A. Sienaert, “The labour supply effects of the South African state old age pension: Theory, evidence and implication,” *SALDRU Working Paper Series No. 20* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 2008).

44 Guillermo de la Peña, “Indigenous Urban Families and the Oportunidades Program in Mexico,” *Indigenous Education Policy, Equity, and Intercultural Understanding in Latin America* ed. Regina Cortina (New York: Pelgrave Macmillan, 2017); Mercedes de la Rocha González, *Life after oportunidades: Rural program impact after 10 years of implementation*.

### Box 1. The Influence of Contextual Factors May Change Over Time

A study on the impact of Procampo, a conditional cash transfer targeted at farmers in Mexico, found an increase in migration from Mexico to the United States, with the size of the impact varying over time.<sup>45</sup> One explanation as to why Procampo did not affect migration to the same degree over time is that the context changed. On the one hand, the migration journey became more costly and dangerous due to intensified border enforcements. On the other hand, a slow-down in the US economy reduced the payoffs to be had from migration. This means that migration became a less profitable strategy, and weakened the link between participation in Procampo and migration, not because the programme changed, but because the context did.

Likewise, the attractiveness of a destination, for instance the availability of jobs, its average wage compared to other regions, and the ease of migration, can explain why migration may continue or increase, even in the context of a social protection transfer. The 21 studies that look at this factor overwhelmingly show that migration either continues or increases for participants of social protection when destinations are more economically attractive. When a destination becomes less attractive due to greater border enforcements, for instance,<sup>46</sup> or a sluggish economy,<sup>47</sup> the effect of a decrease due to a social protection programme may be felt more strongly. However, some exceptions for the MGNREGA programme in India show that migration decreases with social protection receipt, as recipients may have a preference for not migrating, even in a context in

which the jobs that are generated through the programme are poorly paid.<sup>48</sup>

Prior exposure to migration and a culture of migration may also explain why migration continues regardless of social protection participation,<sup>49</sup> particularly if there is uncertainty about the future or the continuation of the programme.<sup>50</sup> However, there are no clear trends amongst the five studies that do consider migration culture. Broadly speaking, the impact of social protection is mediated by the social and cultural norms around the purpose and meaning of migration (Box 2<sup>51</sup>).

### Box 2. Individual and Household Level Factors in Mexico's Oportunidades Programme

The former Mexican Oportunidades programme illustrates the ways individual and household characteristics can affect the link between social protection programmes and migration decisions. Migration decisions following Oportunidades can be mediated by the aspirations of beneficiaries and what they consider as the means to achieve social mobility. While in one location where Oportunidades was being implemented, migration was perceived as a means to fulfil educational and other personal hopes and dreams upon completion of the programme; in another individuals migrated for employment purposes prior to completing the programme.

In contexts of higher poverty, Oportunidades improved the living standards of participants and their households, reducing the need to migrate, particularly when they had access to schooling.

45 Jeronimo Cortina, "Subsidizing migration? Mexican agricultural policies and migration to the United States."

46 Ibid.; Agustín Latapí, "Progresas y el bienestar de las familias. Los hallazgos," *Logros y retos: Una evaluación cualitativa de Progresas en México. Evaluación de Resultados del Programa de Educación, Salud y Alimentación. Impacto a nivel comunitario. Programa de Educación, Salud y Alimentación* eds. Agustín Escobar Latapí and Mercedes González de la Rocha (Mexico: Secretaria de Desarrollo Social, 2000).

47 Jeronimo Cortina, "Subsidizing migration? Mexican agricultural policies and migration to the United States."

48 John Papp, "Essays on India's employment guarantee," Doctoral dissertation (Princeton: University of Princeton, 2012); Jajati Keshari Parida, "MGNREGS, distress migration and livelihood conditions: a study in Odisha," *Journal of Social and Economic Development* Vol. 18 No. 1-2 (2016): 17-39. Shamika Ravi, Mudit Kapoor, and Rahul Ahluwalia, "The Impact of NREGS on Urbanization in India," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, Preliminary draft (2012).

49 Guillermo de la Peña, "Indigenous Urban Families and the Oportunidades Program in Mexico.;" Simón Pedro Izcarra Palacios and Karla Lovena Andrade Rubio, "La exclusión de la mujer migrante del programa Oportunidades: el ejemplo de la zona citrícola de Tamaulipas," *Trayectorias* Vol. 14 No. 35 (2012): 44-65.

50 Enrique Martínez Curiel "Emigrar por desesperación: Progresas y la migración interna e internacional."

51 Carmen León Himmelstine, "The linkages between social protection and migration."

Nine studies also consider other shocks households experienced, with no clear patterns on how this affected the relationship between social protection and migration. Economic shocks experienced by participant households can explain why households continue to migrate despite receiving social protection, with social protection often used to overcome credit constraints. One study, however, observed a decrease in migration in the face of climatic shocks, when *Procampo* transfers were larger or more equally distributed.<sup>52</sup> Cash transfers can also facilitate migration in regions of conflict, as observed in Colombia.<sup>53</sup>

### **How do Design and Implementation Factors Mediate the Link between Social Protection and Migration?**

The design of programmes and the way they are implemented are important mediating factors, although they do not result in consistent outcomes for migration decision-making.

#### **Design Factors**

In terms of design, studies consider i) conditionality (in particular whether physical presence is required), ii) characteristics of the participants targeted, iii) geographic location, iv) the amount transferred, v) regularity of the transfer, and vi) whether the financial benefit is cash or mixed with non-cash benefits (cash plus). Overall, there are few clear patterns to be found:

- **Requirement of physical presence in locality.** While the requirement of physical presence in many CCT programmes could influence migration outcomes, such

a link is not borne out in practice. Studies analysing physical presence requirements yield a mix of outcomes, suggesting a reshuffling of who migrates within the household, as well as both increases and decreases in migration.

- **Target group.** The only transfers targeting a specific group in which there is some consistency in findings are those targeting the elderly, who mainly benefit from pension programmes. Such transfers can allow another adult household member to migrate. Whether programmes target children, youth, women and girls, or extreme poverty/households with nutritional needs does not seem to determine whether social protection programmes affect migration outcomes.
- **Geographical targeting.** Not all programmes are nationally implemented, and may be focused on a regional roll-out basis, within specific regions only, or targeted at rural areas. There is more evidence of a positive or negative impact of social protection on migration when programmes are national rather than sub-national or targeted at rural areas. Programmes targeting sub-national and rural areas are not consistent.
- **Amount transferred.** The size of the amount transferred, as assessed by the reviewed papers' authors, does not suggest a clear link with migration outcomes. Both low and higher amounts lead to inconsistent findings. There are several examples in the reviewed literature where transfers are argued to be too low to keep individuals or households in their home country or locality. High transfers may not be enough, however, to prevent migration if other factors are at play (Box 3).

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52 Isabelle Chort and Maelys de la Rupelle, "Managing the Impact of Climate on Migration: Evidence from Mexico," *IZA Discussion Paper No. 12227* (Bonn: IZA, 2019).

53 A. Mesnard, "Migration, Violence and Welfare Programmes in Rural Colombia."



### Box 3. How High do Transfer Amounts Need to Be to Influence Migration Decisions?

One important design feature of interest in the link between social protection programmes and migration decisions is the amount transferred. At what amount are the effects of the social programme likely to have an influence on the decision to migrate?

The answer depends greatly on the local context, and the availability of better alternatives. The Comoran Social Safety Net Program, which offered up to \$320 in cash for 60 days of public work, did not reduce migration to the richer island of Mayotte.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, the transfers of about \$75 offered by the Mexican Procampo agricultural cash transfer programme was not enough to limit migration,<sup>55</sup> although that finding may itself be related to the reason for migration. Evidence suggests that climate-induced migration decreased in the context of Procampo transfers.<sup>56</sup> In Mali, the monthly Filets Sociaux cash transfers of 30k FCFA (\$18) were not enough to stop women and men from migrating.<sup>57</sup> In addition, the transfers made in the Nicaraguan Red de Proteccion programme, equivalent to 18 per cent of pre-programme household expenditures, were also not enough to stop migration.

The universal, unconditional South African Old Age Grant is generally considered generous (in 2012, transfers were 1200 Rand per month, or about \$130, equivalent to approximately 175 per cent of the median wage in South Africa). These transfers were still linked with spurring internal migration within South Africa, however.<sup>58</sup> This is also true of the Chinese NRSP, which, although less generous than the South African Old Age Grant, was still linked with the migration of adult children living in benefiting households. The NRSP transfer is equivalent to 25 per cent of per capita income and targets those aged more than 60.<sup>59</sup>

- **Frequency and regularity of payments.** Amongst studies considering the consistency of transfers, regular transfers tend to be associated more with increases in migration, as the regularity of a transfer increases its predictability, enabling participants to plan ahead and take into consideration a programme's requirements – for instance, ensuring they are not away from home when the transfers are administered. When transfers are less frequent than once per month, research tends to find more mixed outcomes. When transfers are either one-time (such as employment programmes), or on a needs basis (such as with insurance), decreases or no impact are more common.
- **Type of benefit.** Cash transfers, particularly if they are not conditional, do not necessarily physically tie the participant to the place of origin, and therefore may be more likely to lead to migration. On the other hand, in-kind transfers, training, and services must be received or consumed in-person, and therefore may reduce migration, at least while one benefits from the programme. Studies suggest that purely cash-based programmes are much more likely to be associated with increases in migration (20 studies), whereas those that consider mixed benefits (including nutrition, medicine, and training), are more likely to lead to decreases in migration or show mixed outcomes (46 studies).

### Implementation Factors

How programmes are actually implemented and how this mediates impact is insufficiently covered in the literature. While the literature points out various implementation challenges, such as arbitrary targeting for a programme in Indonesia<sup>60</sup> or corruption with regards to the MGNREGA programme, there are no consistent patterns for implementation issues and migration outcomes in the seven studies that consider this factor.

Some studies find that CCTs are costly and difficult to administer, and therefore implemented without the full set of conditions in place. For instance, in the Nicaraguan Red

54 Jules Gazeaud, Eric Mvukiyehe, and Olivier Streak, "Cash Transfers and Migration: Theory and Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Trial."

55 Jeronimo Cortina, "Subsidizing migration? Mexican agricultural policies and migration to the United States."

56 Isabelle Chort and Maelys de la Rupelle, "Managing the Impact of Climate on Migration: Evidence from Mexico."

57 M. Hidrobo, V. Mueller, and S. Roy, *Cash Transfers and the Geographic Mobility of the Rural Poor in Mali*.

58 Ingrid Woolard, Kenneth Harttgen and Stephan Klasen (2011), "The history and impact of social security in South Africa: experiences and lessons," *Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue canadienne d'études du développement*, Vol. 32 No. 4 (2011): 357-380, DOI: 10.1080/02255189.2011.647654.

59 Karen Eggleston, Ang Sun, and Zhaoguo Zhan, "The impact of rural pensions in China on labor migration."

60 Smriti Tiwari and Paul Winters, "Liquidity Constraints, and Migration: Evidence from Indonesia."

de Protección Social programme, enforcing the requirements of child health checks, and the presence of the primary caretaker, is deemed too challenging to effectively and regularly control, which may explain why the authors find mixed outcomes in regards to migration.<sup>61</sup>

Issues related to the implementation of the MGNREGA programme in India include its short duration, inherent corruption, the provision of the number of work days not matching the number promised by the programme, and delays in payments, which ultimately lead to households not relying on the programme as a steady and consistent social protection mechanism. Thus, some studies find that participants continued to favour migration.<sup>62</sup> Consistent

implementation and reliability, on the other hand, can be just as important. In the case of Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), a cash transfer and public works programme, evidence shows that when implemented correctly, it provided a safety net for vulnerable populations since it enabled elderly people to stay, rather than migrate, during the lean season.<sup>63</sup>

According to the literature, a lack of training was the main reason that youth continued to migrate internally despite Ghana's Labour-Intensive Public Work programme. This cash-for-work scheme was tied to the development of assets in the localities of origin, which were never used because youth were never properly trained on how to use them.<sup>64</sup>

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61 Paul Winters, Guy Steklov, and Jessica Todd, *The impact of conditional cash transfers on household composition, fertility and migration in Central America*.

62 Priya Deshingkar, Shaheen Akter, Pramed Sharma, and John Farrington, *The impacts of social protection on labour markets and migration with particular reference to the NREGA*.

63 Priya Deshingkar, Rachel Godfrey-Wood, and Christophe Bene, "Adaptive social protection and migration. The case of cash transfers in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi."

64 Samuel Nuamah Eshun and Mpho Mildred Dichaba, "Labour Intensive Public Work (LIPW) programme and youth migration in Ghana: A study of Daffiama Bussie Issah District," *African Renaissance* Vol. 16 No. 3 (2019): 221-247.

### 3. What are the Implications for Policymakers?

**Identify whether migration objectives are relevant in social protection programmes:** The primary reason for social protection programmes is the protection of the social and economic livelihoods of people. However, policymakers may explicitly or implicitly develop migration outcomes within the objectives of the programme, for instance, by targeting the retention of skilled workers. Policymakers must decide whether migration outcomes are important to the objectives of the programmes or not, and act accordingly – given the inadvertent effects such programmes may have on migration. The influence of social protection on migration varies widely, and if migration objectives are included in social protection programming, these must be accounted for. Programmes must be designed carefully to ensure that unintended and possibly even incoherent outcomes are avoided.

**Involve a broad set of actors at the design and implementation stages of social protection programmes:** In order to account for the inadvertent effects of social protection on migration, more relevant actors should be involved at the conception, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation stages. Such actors should include social protection and migration experts and policymakers, but also other actors that may have a good grasp of the interlinkages between social protection and migration, including members of civil society, local authorities, representatives of potential group participants, private sector actors, and departments and ministries across government.

**Account for the structural context and the characteristics of social protection programme participants:** Potential programme participants may face specific economic, gender, ethnic, and class barriers that prevent them from creating the lives that they value. Understanding the ways that social protection can support them to fulfil their life aspirations (which may or may not include migration) and challenge the contextual and/or individual barriers that they face is important when designing social protection programmes. Furthermore, context may differ within countries, states, or regions. Programmes should not be

designed by presuming that all individuals in rural localities suffer from the same constraints and that implementation of the programme would produce the same results across one country or region. Outcomes on migration can differ and programmes may need to be tailored to these local contexts and to the characteristics of programme participants. The effects and the variety of migration outcomes vary by specific, often vulnerable groups, such as youth, women, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, elderly people, rural people, and lower educated or illiterate individuals. Each group represents specific needs as the link they may have with both social protection and migration is not uniform across subgroups.

**Equip individuals and households with skills and the ability to reduce risks, through social protection programmes:** Purely cash-based programmes tend to increase migration, compared to cash plus non-monetary transfers, services, or insurance. In other words, programmes that in addition to cash provide incentives to invest locally and build education, skills, and agency are less likely to lead to migration. This is because it allows participants to manage risks in a variety of ways and create the lives they value.

**Monitor and evaluate social protection programmes for their impact on migration:** Given the inadvertent effects of the interlinkage between social protection and migration, as well the choice of making migration an explicit objective of the social protection programmes or not, monitoring and evaluation of such links should be regularly undertaken. This is all the more important given that the interlinkages may vary over time and differ according to contexts, the characteristics of household members, the type of programme, and the capacity to implement such programmes. As programmes may have long-term effects, especially when they target children, long-term monitoring and evaluation should also be planned, as migration outcomes may materialize later in life. Programmes should therefore be able to adapt as migration flows and individual choices change over time.

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