

Shock-Responsive Social Protection for Displaced Persons in the IGAD Region: Lessons from COVID -19 Compounding Risks

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<https://doi.org/10.62049/jkncu.v4i1.60>

Abstract

Large-scale disasters and shocks are becoming increasingly frequent, protracted and complex. Social protection system is a potentially effective mechanism in reducing the impacts of these risks on vulnerable households and to build their resilience. The need for social protection for migrants during crisis came into sharp focus during the COVID - 19 pandemic. The study used in-depth desk review from secondary sources complemented with key informant interviews from four countries - Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Somalia. The findings show that IGAD Member States with less - developed social protection systems such as Somalia were poorly prepared and struggled to launch rapid and effective social protection responses to COVID - triggered hardship to cover migrants. Unlike non-migrants who were registered as additional beneficiaries on national cash transfer programmes, many migrants lacked similar social protection in the duration of lockdown. In view of complex future shocks in the context of a changing climate, states are strongly encouraged to strengthen their social protection measures to be shock-responsive by reforming their laws, strengthening collaboration, develop data sharing protocols and information management system and linkages to early warning systems to trigger swift transfer of resources in the event of a crisis. This study offers lessons that will inform future inclusive policy responses on social protection for migrants during crises.

Keywords: Migration, Displacement, Shocks, Social Protection, Inclusive Growth

Introduction

Access to social protection is a right that is well as recognised by several global instruments including the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the IGAD region Member States have made encouraging progress to provide social protection to safeguard the rights of their citizens. However, there are significant challenges to accord similar social protection for migrants and displaced persons.

With close to two thirds of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) region classified as Arid and Semi-Arid (ASAL), the region is considered as one of the most vulnerable to disasters and climate change. By end of 2021, the region hosted close to 12.3 million refugees and asylum seekers and another 4.5 million who are internally displaced persons (IDPs) as a result of disasters, violence and conflict (UNHRC, 2022; p.5; IDMC, 2021, p. 19-20). With projected changes in climate, rapid population growth, poorly planned urban centres and economic growth, the number of the people migrating as well as those at risk of displacement is likely to escalate in the future, justifying the need to examine the witnessed disruptions and develop modalities for overcoming them.

This paper focuses on access to social protection to migrants and displaced populations in relation to disasters and climate change based from lessons from the COVID 19 experience in IGAD region. In it, migration refers to principally voluntary movement, internally or a cross borders while displacement is where people are forced to leave their homes as a result of a disaster or in order to avoid the eminent impact of an immediate and foreseeable natural hazard (Nansen Initiative, 2015, p.16). Shock -responsive social protection, on the other hand, refers to the measures designed to respond to household or individual stocks such as droughts, floods, pandemics and conflicts (Slim, 2020). The social protection system therefore should expand horizontally - into new households or individuals or vertically into new programmes such as humanitarian actions in order to provide protection and build their resilience to vulnerable communities and individuals.

This article examines key vulnerabilities migrants face from natural ‘disasters and the policy and programmatic responses by governments in context of COVID -19 and other current and future shocks such as droughts, flood and epidemics including climate change. The paper analyzes the efficacy of social protection measures in place and the extent to which they are adaptive, linked to early warning systems to trigger action, their coverage to communities at risk from shocks and targeting and eligibility criteria to inform effective policy implementation.

Background

Africa is Vulnerable to Climate-Induced Human Mobility

Migrants and displaced persons have been disproportionately affected by COVID -19 and other crises leading to serious socio-economic consequences. Climate change is projected to increase the frequency and intensity of natural hazards hence intensify displacement and migration. Anthropogenic activities have caused at least 1 °C rise in global surface temperatures above pre-industrial levels, with associated impacts and risks in social and ecosystems. For the scenario in which global temperatures increase by 2 °C, sub-Saharan Africa is projected to realize regional temperature increases that are higher than the global average

with adverse consequences on livelihoods and humanity mobility (Déqué *et al.*, 2017, p.3; Ranasinghe *et al.*, 2021, p.4-5; Coppola *et al.* 2020, p.9; Perkins-Kirkpatrick and Gibson, 2017, p.3; IPCC, 2022, p.7)

The climate impacts migration raise serious protection concerns that may undermine sustainable development (UN, 2018, P.4; IPCC, 2022, p.30-35; Girvetz *et al.* 2019, p.18, p.18; Seneviratne *et al.* 2012, p.16). Disasters force people to move from the habitual residence by posing serious harm to the individual or community due to vulnerability of the persons and systems, thereby undermining enjoyments of their rights, calling for the need to protect their human rights (Betts *et al.*, 2021, P.3; Nansen Initiative, 2015, p.16).

The Coronavirus Disease 2019, a contagious viral infection that halted movement and increased vulnerability of those displaced, killed over 23 thousand people killed and another 1 million people were infected by the virus during the period in the IGAD region (WHO, 2022).

Studies have shown that by 2050 climate change related disasters will drive close to 140 million people to flee their habitual residences to avoid the effects of slow onset events associated with climate change. The risk is a function of hazard, exposure and vulnerability (World Bank, 2018, p.12; UN, 2018, P.17; Jordan, 2021; Andrade *et al.*, 2021, P. 60; UNDRR, 2015, p.10; IPCC, 2022, P.4-5).

Vulnerability factors interact or co-exists simultaneously with the hazard and coping capacity to culminate into a disaster or a shock (Blaike *et al.*, 1994, p 3-5; Lindsay, 2003, p 4-5; Manyena, 2017, p.2 and IPCC, 2022, P.35), that often drives away the communities from their habitual residences or homes. This requires the need to strengthen the resilience and adaptive capacities of vulnerable persons to positively cope with slow onset or rapid onset events (Manyena, 2016, P.2).

The Need to Social Protection in Emergencies

Social protection is a mixed set of measures that are designed by governments and stakeholders to prevent and reduce poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion through the life cycle of persons. They focus on nine areas including unemployment support, health protection, old-age benefits, and disability benefits among others. Humanitarian assistance that is offered to vulnerable communities during emergencies is also a form social protection (ILO, 2021, P. 16).

Social protection is utilized to bolster the household income, enhance spending power, and hence improve their access to basic needs. Given the high levels of informal employment in the IGAD region, it implies that the majority of the residents have limited access to formal social protection which is even more critical in the event of unemployment, sickness, old age and lack of livelihood or disaster situations. These instruments concur that access to social protection is critical in achieving sustainable development as reflected in the 2030 Agenda Goals 1.3, 3.8, 5.4, 8.5, 8.8, 10.4 and 10.7, all of which emphasize that no one should be left behind (ILO, 2017, p.27; AUC 2022, p.65; UN, 2018, p.9; UNHCR, 2018).

Extending social protection to migrants and displaced persons has also a potential to combat poverty, ensure cohesive and politically stable societies, reduce vulnerability to disasters and climate change, achieve decent jobs, and promote inclusive growth. The other solid argument in favour of social protection is on stimulating aggregate demand for goods and services, injecting cash to local markets during and after crises and supporting recovery (Andrade *et al.*, 2021, p.5; ILO, 2017, p.6).

Thus, social protection is a powerful instrument for building resilience and adaptive capacity of vulnerable individuals, their families and their communities with potential to protect them from falling deeper into poverty before and in the aftermath of shocks and crises. However, evidence has shown that migrants face significant obstacles and challenges to access basic social services and social protection in many developing countries (Andrade *et al.*, 2021, p.1).

Challenges To Social Protection

Displaced persons face obstacles in accessing social protection schemes including legal barriers in the host country, lack of funds, political factors and institutional weaknesses (Betts *et al.*, 2021, P.24-25; Andrade *et al.*, 2021, P27-28). Lack of specific legal provisions on granting social protection to foreigners owing to their nationality, residence, length of stay and limited number of years or months of contribution often block them from being granted protection (ILO, 2017, P. 187). Many countries, particularly in Africa have been hesitant to ratify relevant international conventions due to disagreement in application of some provisions or long to officially recognize the right of stay of the displaced persons and have to wait for a decision to determine their migration status thereby prolonging the delay in accessing their social protection (ILO, 2017, P.188). Additionally, inadequate bilateral arrangements, weak coordination mechanisms and lack of a common data base among States are other obstacles impeding access to social protection by migrants and displaced persons in host countries (ILO; 2017, P.71). This calls for the need to transform these institutions, laws and provide for data sharing protocols for enhanced social protection to migrants and displaced persons.

Methodology

This study assesses the progress countries are making to develop human rights - based risk informed social protection measures in the IGAD region and the attendant obstacles and drivers to their access by vulnerable persons including migrants and displaced persons in disaster situations. The nature of the study necessitated use of a mixed methods approach where both qualitative and quantitative data were utilized. The study used a sample of 4 countries namely Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Uganda who are part of the eight Member States of IGAD and have committed to develop and implement social protection measures. The countries were also selected for the study on the grounds that they have migrants displaced by various shocks that necessitate their protection. The sampled countries concurrently experienced a number of hazards such as floods, drought, conflict and locust invasion often forcing persons out of their homes compounding the COVID – 19 crisis (AUC, 2022). Data was collected through open-ended online questionnaires administered to member states' focal persons in charge of social protection and disaster management. Key Informant Interviews and extensive systematic documentary reviews from the four countries' social protection policies supplemented the data collection. The information was analyzed according to the themes on shocks, social protection measures and shock responsive mechanisms in the states and presented.

Findings

Compounding Crises in The IGAD Region

In the 2020-2021 period, the IGAD region experienced many disasters concurrently in addition to COVID -19 with undesirable impacts on migrants and IDPs. Many countries in the region experienced unprecedented flooding displacing thousands of people internally in Kenya, Ethiopia and Sudan. In Somalia, for example, many internally displaced persons were displaced twice from rural to urban areas due to drought and later on displaced in the urban areas due to violence from Al Shabab. Interviews with Key Informants revealed that many of the persons that had been uprooted by disasters and conflict from their homes were confronted by COVID -19 crises in the camps. Thus, the crises deepened and compounded their vulnerability with unintended consequences on IDPs and refugees in the region.

The findings show the lock-downs due to COVID – 19 caused serious economic shocks that impacted heavily on vulnerable groups, notably unprotected low-income informal workers and migrants, who were unable to work from home and were not protected by existing social assistance or social insurance schemes. Many new programmes were introduced, customized to COVID-19 circumstances, but mostly on a temporary basis (Devereux, 2021; AUC, 2022). Notwithstanding, many governments used existing social protection programmes to deliver income support notably cash, vouchers and food transfers to affected people including in some instances to migrants. Discussion of findings on social protection for the four IGAD countries in response to COVID-19 within this framework is presented below using several categories of instruments. COVID-19 therefore highlighted systemic gaps in social protection systems throughout the IGAD region.

Social Protection in Ethiopia

According to IOM, Ethiopia hosted some 735,204 refugees at the start of 2020 and later with Tigray Conflict, the country had close to 1.8 million IDPs by September 2020 down from a peak of 3.04 million in March of 2019 bringing the number of people in need of social protection to approximately 5 million by the end of 2020 (IOM, 2019). Consequently, the government of Ethiopia developed a comprehensive COVID-19 National Emergency Response Plan which estimated that 30 million people would need assistance in 2020. The swift response included a number of extensive social protection packages of “cash transfers, government subsidies, and tax relief to support citizens and businesses most affected by the crisis” as well as three months of relief food aid to 15 million people.

Consequently, the respondents revealed that the country, with the largest IDP population in the world, faced myriads of social protection concerns ranging from lack of decent shelter, safe access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), critical non-food items and basic lifesaving healthcare. The study found out that fighting factions including government forces blocked humanitarian corridors hence preventing aid agencies from accessing and providing humanitarian support to displaced populations that was mostly made up of women, children and the elderly. Moreover, these victims faced cases of sexual and physical abuse, and did not have access to financial remittances from donors and family members due to closure of remittances to conflict zones by the government.

The country, similar to other Member States, simultaneously endured other crises including a severe drought, flooding, a locust infestation and conflict during COVID-19. This made Ethiopia a key global hunger hotspot with closing of schools, child malnutrition and an information blackout following shutting down of internet and telephone networks that would have provided vital survival information for the vulnerable migrant populations. Besides, Ethiopia also had a severe flooding in October 2020 which affected around 1,102,484 compounding housing and social protection needs (AUC, 2022).

The study revealed that Ethiopia also hosted refugees from neighboring countries such as Somalia, South Sudan, Eritrea and Sudan in 26 camps, unlike Kenya and Uganda where respondents indicated a large population of refugees have been integrated into urban and rural communities while others have been repatriated. To meet their basic and social protection needs, the Ethiopian refugees largely depend on humanitarian aid agencies (IOM, 2021, p.9). The findings show that the school shutdowns resulted in over 200,000 refugee children being out of school.

Whereas the overwhelmed Ethiopia generated her own refugees fleeing due to the conflict, the government largely neglected the social protection needs leaving them at the mercy of the international community and host nations. Respondents revealed that among the fleeing conflict victims were unaccompanied teenage girls, boys, women and the elderly who faced the risk of physical, sexual and labor abuses, kidnappings, torture, trafficking and exposure to natural risks entailed on their migration routes. Additionally, “Ethiopia received more than 34,337 returnees between April 1 and 6 October 2021 from Djibouti (9,380), Somalia (7,460), Sudan (6,542), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (3,842), Kenya (1,488), and 5,625 and other countries” and many more later (AUC, 2022). These people’s social protection was largely neglected to address the increased costs of quarantine. It was also reported that the solitary quarantine conditions for returnees and evacuees fleeing conflicts exposed them to secondary psychological trauma.

Social Protection Responses in Kenya

COVID-19 in Kenya interfaced with multiple disasters including the desert locust infestation, floods, and escalating resource conflicts in herding communities due to droughts. According to interviews with Key Informants and collaborated with literature, the drought resulted in food, water and pasture crisis affecting over 4.5 million herders mostly in the ASALs such as Marsabit (50%), Turkana (40%), Baringo (35%), Mandera (35%), Wajir (35%), Samburu (35%) and Isiolo (30%). The droughts also led to cross-border migration and escalated resource-conflicts (AUC, 2022).

The declaration of the existence of COVID -19 in Kenya by the government limited human movement into, out of or across Kenya. Consequently, 1.7 million people lost their jobs in the first four months of the pandemic with the number rising to over 2 million by December 2021, 70% of households reporting economic impacts. This figure does not account job losses and recoveries within the intermediate period. Thousands of businesses also collapsed turning initial breadwinners and employers into vulnerable dependents (Gikandi, 2020).

The study found that inflow of migrants into Kenya was also heavily limited by the closure of national borders to foreigners. A few Kenyans were reported to have evacuated themselves or were evacuated by the government from COVID infested nations. All these were however abled people who did not have any social protection concerns, just as those concerns did not exist for foreigners who opted to self-evacuate or were evacuated by their governments from Kenya. However, the study further shows that citizens of the

IGAD Member States who resided in Kenya as refugees or economic or social migrants when the lockdowns were declared largely lacked this luxury and had to endure socio-economic challenges with the locals. When the first lockdown was lifted in June 2020, citizens and foreigners who had lost their livelihoods in these cities migrated to their nations or other places in Kenya where they could re-establish their livelihoods or get support from their relatives.

Respondents, collaborated with secondary information sources indicated that in Nairobi, refugees and migrants from IGAD Member States live in packed shelters to reduce their expenses on rent. This population had to endure living with limited food supplies as locals sought alternative livelihoods due to their local knowledge of alternative strategies. The population of migrant street vendors and beggars from the rest of IGAD region who work in various parts of Nairobi, is a good example and who found it hard to switch livelihoods considering that over 80% of them are disabled and cannot take up physically demanding jobs. The findings show that other migrants and refugees work in Kenya's major towns such as Nairobi in informal sectors as hairdressers, makeup artists, hawkers, tailors, cloth sellers, restaurant operators, shop attendants, bar tenders, housekeepers, security guards and importers of farm goods. Their incomes were highly affected and had to rely on support from relatives and friends both from within the country and abroad to cope.

Further information by UNHCR respondent indicated that migrants became vulnerable during the pandemic due to diminishing assistance due to funding shortfalls and reprioritization by donor countries. According to UNHCR refugees were receiving rations of 80 percent or less than the minimum standard required to meet their needs during the crisis due to re-prioritization of resources due to the demands of COVID-19 and competing demands for humanitarian aid, hence many organizations lacked capacity to attend to all needs of all migrants and refugees in the country.

Kenya therefore seems to have established a mix of coping measures for migrants and vulnerable displaced populations with majority of the cases being left suffer without limited government protection during the period. During the period, the government called on schools and landlords to be more understanding of all persons including migrants who were unable to pay for their services during the crisis. There was mixed report that some migrants were suffering financial and psychosocial needs, while others enjoyed life attracting loathsome attention from citizens. This also depended on the country of origin for the affected clusters of migrants. Kenya however lacks accurate statistics on affected population and remedies.

Social Protection in Somalia

At the start of the pandemic in 2020, Somalia which had approximately 2.6 million IDPs and thousands of transiting migrants lacked structured administrative systems needed to effect meaningful programmes to address social protection needs of the vulnerable population (UNHCR, 2020). The study found that during the period the migrants entered Somalia from Ethiopia following the Tigray conflict arriving with no information on COVID containment measures hence exposing them further to possible infection. This information gap for transitory groups that lack access to phone networks, internet, TV and Radios can result in dangers to them, including those arising from rapid onset weather related disasters such as floods and storms, considering how suddenly these can happen in ASALs.

Respondents revealed that COVID-19 Somalia coincided with violence and insecurity, droughts, a locust infestation and cholera outbreak that had existed since 2017 and flash floods that affected over one million people. Most significantly, the country lacked health facilities and personnel, limiting their ability to prioritize the needs of migrants, leave alone the vulnerable population among them. Due to the urgent need to attend to the pandemic, other vital services slowed exposing IDPs, migrants and the vulnerable population to hunger and malnutrition, limited access to other non-COVID -19 related health services and lowered prospects of accessing quality education due to an inconsistent school calendar. The pandemic was also expected to increase child mortality.

During the COVID - 19 pandemic. IOM, WHO, Action Against Hunger and the Bill and Melinda Gates provided the needed public awareness, sanitation equipment and resources required by hospitals to attend to people who contacted the disease. These services were provided to every needy case, including refugees, IDPs and transitory migrants. Most Key Informants were in agreement that the country also needs increased investment in medical facilities and training of healthcare personnel to enable her to prepare for future disaster risks considering that despite the low caseloads that were reported, her capacity to handle the few COVID cases was extremely overwhelmed. According to the WHO reports, Somalia was the “least prepared countries in the world to detect and report epidemics, or to execute a rapid response” to health emergencies. Previously, the government has also largely unable to address needs arising from disasters, often having to rely on external assistance from international non-governmental and inter-governmental institutions to offer basic public services needed during emergencies (UNHCR, 2018).

The study also established the need to protect Somali migrants on transit and in their destinations. This is alarming for a country that has approximately 1.1 million refugees spread across the world and cumulatively, over 2 million of her population living abroad. These populations can be vulnerable to xenophobia, fall victims of human trafficking, abuse and exploitation, and may be victims of other disasters where host nations may fail to adequately attend to their needs. The lack of coordinated migration also makes them choose dangerous routes and means exposing them to risks.

Social Protection in Uganda

Uganda is IGAD region’s largest refugee-hosting country with over 1.4 million refugees. The country closed its international borders to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in 2020. Discussions with Key Informants indicated that the World Food Program-supported camps and settlements but experienced significant reduction in funding for relief food. The meagre resources led to the reduction in planned rations for the refugees. There was full lockdown of some refugee settlements, as well as COVID-19 related loss of temporary employment opportunities that negatively affected the refugee situation in country.

To address the adverse impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable communities within the refugee and host population, WFP and the Government of Uganda provided emergency cash-transfers to more than 56,000 pregnant and lactating women and children under the age of two. This included cash support to 43,300 women and children who were benefitting from WFP’s Mother and Child Health and Nutrition (MCHN) initiative in addition to another 13,200 people assisted through the Development Response to Displacement Impacts Project (DRDIP) and the Third Northern Uganda Social Action Fund 3 (NUSAF 3) public works programmes. The cash transfers were intended to stabilize women’s and children’s feeding following

disruptions in their access to nutritious food due to COVID-19 lockdown, which coincided with WFP food ration cuts.

Uganda government had another program in collaboration with European Union (EU) where refugees who lost their livelihoods due to the pandemic with at least €10 million. According to Hirose, Nikac and Tamagno (2011; ISSA 2014), there should be equality of treatment: to the extent possible, migrant workers should have the same rights and obligations as nationals of the destination country in respect of social security coverage and benefits, this is as per the ILO standards of relevance to migrant workers' social protection.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study has revealed that the four IGAD Member States had functional social protection measures in place before COVID hit the region. These measures include access to labour markets, food assistance, cash transfers, and access to water and health care were the main social protection measures.

These social protection measures were modified and expanded in response to the socio – economic impacts of COVID -19 and other crises targeting vulnerable persons including the elderly, migrants and displaced persons. However, COVID-19, that occurred concurrently alongside other crises in the region such as floods, locust invasion and drought, highlighted the vulnerabilities of forcibly displaced populations and the challenges in reaching them with social protection.

Although the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons in the IGAD region allow progressive realization of rights of migrants and displaced persons to their social protection, a number of challenges impede the enjoyment of this right across the region in the event of a shock. Some States such as Somalia had long running institutional weaknesses that hampered effective response to social protection. There was limited willingness by States to incorporate refugees into national social protection programmes and significant challenges in securing the necessary long-term financing for social protection.

Assistance to forcibly displaced populations proved also be complex socially and politically for national governments, particularly in contexts experiencing conflict such as in Ethiopia's Tigray region. In those circumstances, there will be a continued need to support refugees and IDPs through international agencies and NGOs, but this should be accompanied by measures to align support migrants with national social protection systems as far as possible. Among the strategies that can be employed include allowing vulnerable migrant populations access to affirmative programmes such as the youth and women funds for starting and shoring up businesses and incomes, free universal healthcare and free primary and tertiary education that already exist in countries such as Kenya. These will ensure that vulnerable migrants not only survive during shocks, but also access opportunities for achieving financial freedom, quality healthcare, sustainable livelihoods and knowledge and skills they need to survive and access jobs today and in the future.

In view of escalating complex future shocks and risks, countries in the IGAD region are strongly encouraged to work together to strengthen their social protection system to be shock-responsive by developing databases and data sharing protocols, establish an information management system for social protection and conduct comprehensive vulnerable assessment to support identification of the priority areas

and persons. Linking the mobile cash transfer to a single registry and the social protection system to early warning systems can help trigger swift transfer of the funds/vouchers and sensitize the communities on these measures. The states need to further collaborate to conduct studies to establish the minimum expenditure basket to be supported by the mechanism. The states may need to engage closely with communities to reach vulnerable persons in remote areas, while ensuring they participate to avoid duplication of the service.

Finally, there is need to strengthen transnational, regional and international cooperation to surmount these challenges and bolster social protection for vulnerable migrants in disaster situations in the IGAD region given their low incomes and limited budget that tend to relegate the protection of migrants to UN agencies, well-wisher corporations and NGOs. The study offers lessons that will inform future inclusive policy responses on social protection for migrants during crises which is projected to escalate with climate change. This will expand opportunities that can enable them to fully enjoy their human rights and facilitate the achievement of sustainable development for all.

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