

Can employment and training policies and programmes influence migration decision-making in low- and middle-income countries?

WORKING PAPER



AUTHORS

Gemma Hennessey, Research Officer, ODI;

Jessica Hagen-Zanker, Senior Research Fellow, ODI;



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1. INTRODUCTION

This literature review considers the evidence linking employment and training policies and migration decision-making in low- and middle-income countries. These are some of the policies and programmes considered within the MIDEQ research on migration decision-making, alongside social protection programming (see Himmelstine et al., forthcoming).

The policy interest in this area is high. Europe alone has spent billions of Euros on the ‘development’ of origin and transit countries, for instance through the European Trust Fund for Africa (Raty and Shilhav, 2020), funding education, skills and employment programming on the assumption that this will reduce migration to Europe. Policy-makers in low- and middle-income countries might be interested in the additional financial support to government programming this entails. The wider migration literature shows that migration decision-making is oftentimes linked to employment and education/ skills. For example, the search for better employment opportunities is proposed as a key driver of migration (Carling et al., 2020; Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2016; Van Hear et al., 2018), unemployment is associated with high levels of aspirations to migrate (Aslany et al., 2021; Migali and Scipioni, 2019) and higher education levels are associated with higher levels of migration aspirations (Aslany et al., 2021; OECD, 2017a).

It may be reasonable for policy-makers to assume that promoting education and employment amongst aspiring or returnee migrants can change migration decisions. But do these assumptions actually hold true for specific employment and training *policies and programmes*, including those with specific objectives to impact on migration (mostly an objective to reduce migration)? Does the same relationship hold for internal, regional and international migration? What is the influence of design and implementation, context and other mediating factors?

This literature review sheds light on these questions and summarises the evidence on the influence of employment and training programming on decisions to migrate. It draws on 52 empirical studies that consider the impact of 65 employment and training policies and programmes in low- and middle-income countries on the propensity to migrate internally and internationally, including onward or secondary migration, return and remigration. Employment programmes tend to aim at creating work opportunities (e.g. public works programmes or business support) and training programmes considered in this review often have the objective to boost employability (e.g. vocational training).

This review will first detail the literature review methodology and an overview of the evidence base (section 2). The next section presents a descriptive overview of key findings, first by type of migration outcome, then by type of policy or programme (section 3). Section 4 considers the myriad of factors – design, implementation and

individual and contextual – that mediate the impacts of policies and programmes on migration. Lastly, section 5 concludes, drawing out policy implications and suggesting areas for future research.

2. METHODOLOGY AND EVIDENCE BASE

2.1 METHODOLOGY

This review of the literature focuses on empirical studies, which assess the effect of employment and training policies and programmes in countries of origin or transit on migration decision making. *Employment and training* are defined broadly so as to include a range of policies which influence employment outcomes, including policies which seek to boost employability (Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)), employment opportunities (business support, including microcredit, and job creation), and match job seekers with jobs (job services) and job creation schemes (which include guaranteed employment schemes and cash-for-work schemes)¹. *Migration decision* is also broadly defined to include aspirations, different migration outcomes (outmigration, onward or secondary migration, return migration and remigration) for internal and international migration as well as studies that consider the decision-making process. We consider both the individual and household level.

The literature review draws upon the rigorous literature methodology developed by Hagen-Zanker and Mallett (2013). First, a detailed search protocol was developed. This included a list of key terms and search strings, with which we made searches in Google and Google Scholar. A total of 14 institutional websites were searched to retrieve relevant studies from the grey literature. We approached five academics in the field and asked them to share further relevant studies, some of which were not publicly available. Lastly, we applied the ‘backward’ and ‘forward snowball’ techniques, in other words reviewing the reference lists of retrieved studies, and searching for studies that reference retrieved studies. The search protocol was tested and revised during the search period. The searches were concluded in December 2020.

We then applied inclusion criteria to retrieved studies to ensure only relevant studies were included. There was no inclusion criteria related to strength of data or quality of studies. The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Geographic focus: any low- or middle-income country.
- Time published: any.
- Study type: any study type (quantitative and qualitative). Evaluation reports and grey literature, PhD theses included, but not master’s theses.

¹ Such schemes can also be considered part of social protection and are also included in a complementary MIDEQ review paper by Himmelstine et al., forthcoming.

- Migration type considered: aspiration, decision-making, outmigration, onward, return, remigration at the household or individual level. Both internal and international migration. We include studies that consider any type of migrant, including refugees and asylum seekers, mixed migration and other migrants, thus making the assumption that people move for a variety of reasons and that these can change over time.
- Type of employment or education programming: most are included but basic education policies and food for work schemes are excluded. Both donor and domestic programmes included.
- Language: limited to English studies.

2.2 EVIDENCE BASE

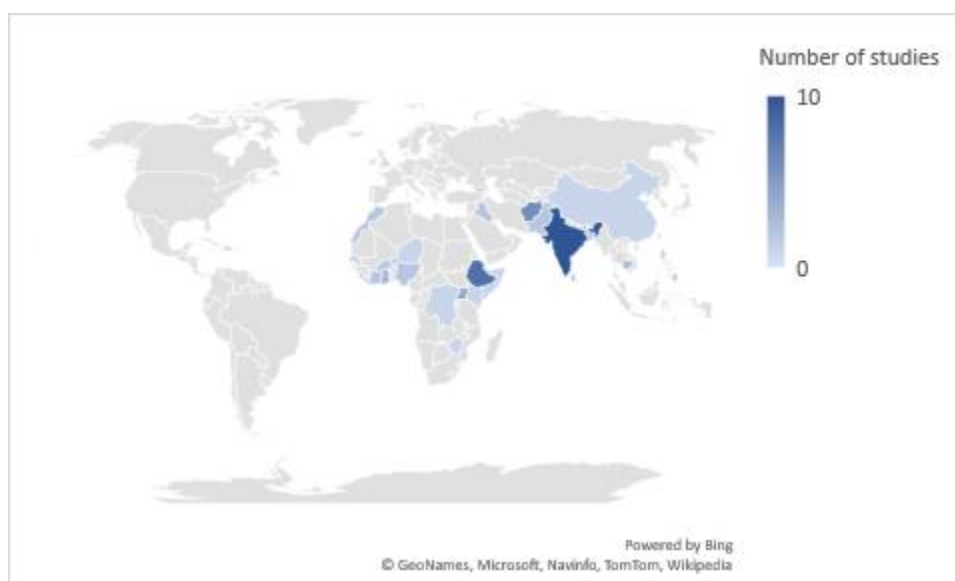
In total we found 52 relevant studies, which met the inclusion criteria. This is a small evidence base considering how widespread employment and training policies and programmes are. This indicates that often the migration outcome of policies are not monitored, which is not surprising given that many of these policies do not have impacts on migration as one of their objectives.

Due to the small evidence base, we had an expansive inclusion criterion in terms of study type. It should be noted that a third of the evidence base draws on evaluation reports. This notably includes ten evaluations of returnee employment support on re-migration aspirations. Several of these evaluation reports are based on less rigorous methods, for instance with small sample sizes, or the methodology of the evaluation was not clear. This means that findings from these reports need to be considered with care. The remaining studies in the review are empirical reports, working papers, or peer reviewed journal articles (11).

Of the 52 studies, 27 are quantitative, six of these drawing on randomised controlled trials. A total of 17 studies are qualitative, with a further eight drawing on mixed methods.

In terms of geographical scope of the evidence base, the studies are skewed towards three countries: Afghanistan six studies), Ethiopia (eight studies) and India (ten studies), see Figure 1. One study was comparative and covered more than one context (OECD, 2017a).

FIG 1. GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS OF STUDIES

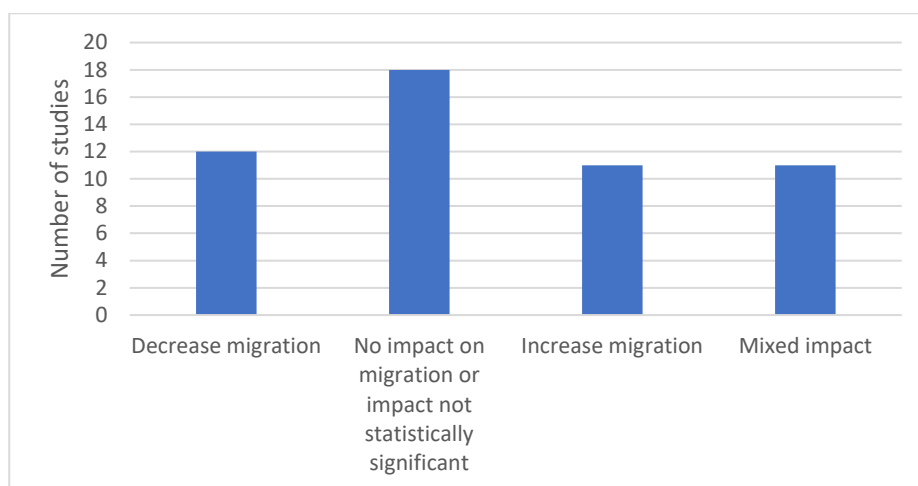


Not all studies disclose the follow up period after the programme; in some cases, this is not applicable for the particular methodology. Of those that do, many are short term, around three-six months after completion of the programme. In a few studies, short-, medium-, and long-term impacts are considered, and it is clear that the temporal dimension is important (e.g. Giambra and McKenzie, 2019). For instance, there may be no impact after one year, but there is an impact after two years, however this medium-term impact is not sustained long-term after five years. Studies restricted to a short follow up period may therefore not reveal the full migration impact of the programme.

3. OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

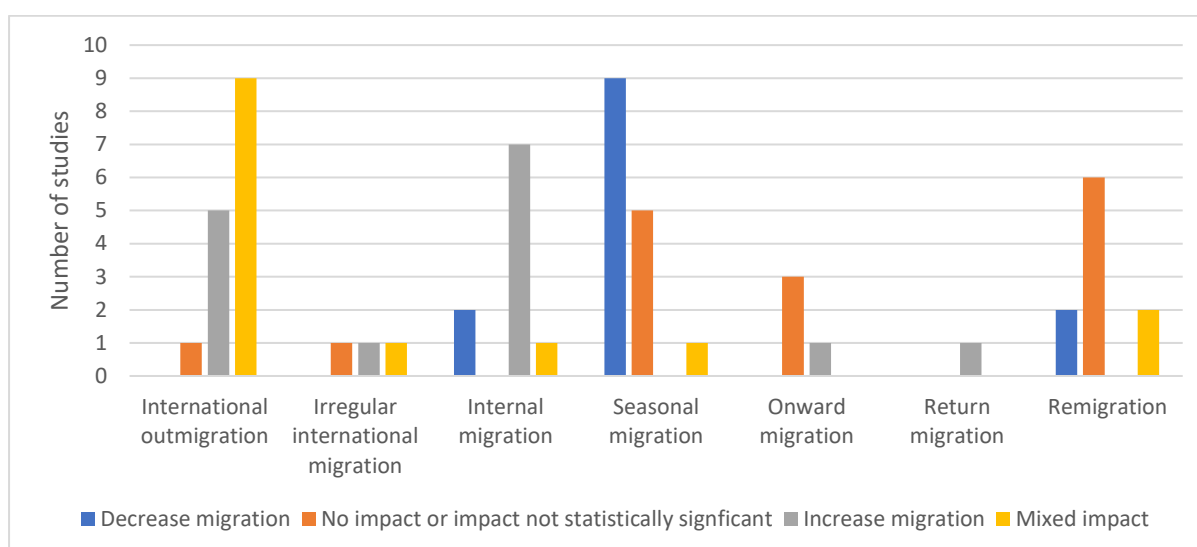
Do employment and training programmes have an impact migration decision-making? This section provides a descriptive overview of findings, disaggregating findings first by migration outcome, following by type of programme. The following analytical section 4 will then discuss explanations for these findings.

Focusing on all studies together, there is no clear trend as to the impact of employment and training programmes on the propensity to migrate, see Figure 2. The majority of studies (18) find no migration impact (or no statistically significant impact) of employment programmes, while a near equal number of studies find that programmes *decrease* migration (12 studies), *increase* migration (11 studies), or a mixed impact (11 studies) – meaning that employment programming is found to both increase or decrease migration depending on the sub-categories of analysis or different effects over time. However, considering migration impacts by type of migration outcome or type of programme provides more illuminating insights.

FIG 2. MIGRATION IMPACTS OF POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

3.1 FINDINGS BY TYPE OF MIGRATION

Do employment and training programmes have the same impacts for different types of migration? The reviewed literature considers several types of migration outcome see Figure 3. It should be noted that we consider aspirations to migrate together with actual movement; around half the literature refers to aspirations only. The majority of studies (39) in the review consider the impact of employment and training programming on outmigration. Of these, 16 focus on international migration (including three on irregular migration as defined by the study), 24 on internal migration, 15 of which consider seasonal migration. Just a handful of studies consider onward migration – all looking at onward movements of refugees. Just one study analyses return migration as an outcome, and ten studies look at remigration as an outcome.

FIG 3. AS SHOWN BY MIGRATION IMPACTS BY TYPE OF MIGRATION

Notably, no studies which consider the impact of employment and training programmes on *international outmigration* (including aspirations), find that programmes decrease migration. Five studies find that programming *increases* migration. For instance, in Haiti, regression analysis finds that TVET participants are statistically significantly more likely to plan to emigrate than non-participants, with descriptive statistics indicating a similar trend among participants in public employment programmes including cash-for-work schemes (OECD 2017i). The evidence most frequently suggests employment and training policies and programming have a mixed impact on international migration (nine studies), although it should be noted that all of these studies consider more than one type of programming, which often have different migration impacts (OECD, 2017a), see section 3.2 for a consideration of findings by policy or programme type.

Similarly, none of the three studies which consider programming designed to counter *irregular* international migration² found that programmes decrease migration (see section 4). The evidence is inconclusive, with two studies finding no impact or a mixed impact of programming upon irregular international migration aspirations (REF, 2019; Mercy Corps and Samuel Hall, 2018). Meanwhile, one ethnographic study finds a link between expansion of microcredit access in Guatemala and an *increase* in outmigration towards the US, see section 4 for discussion (Stoll, 2010).

Most studies which consider the impact of employment and training programmes upon *internal migration* outcomes (excluding seasonal migration), suggest that

² There is no accepted definition of irregular migration, which is commonly used to refer to people moving outside of regular migration channels (see <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>). Here, we use the term 'irregular migration' to distinguish from international migration, when authors of studies make a distinction or specification of irregular migration. In doing so, we acknowledge the political motivations that may lie behind these labels; particularly because migration can often only be irregular once, migrants are entering destination countries, not at the point of decision-making. With many thanks to Christina Oelgemöeller for her insights on this.

participation increases internal migration including aspirations. For instance, Blattman and Annan (2015) find that an agricultural training programme for ex-combatants in Liberia led to a small increase in internal migration, as graduates sought to capitalise on their acquired skills by positioning themselves nearer to larger agricultural markets. However, this is not the case elsewhere in the literature. Two further studies evaluating self-employment grants in Uganda with randomised control trials find either a negligible or small statistically significant *decrease* in internal migration among the treatment group compared to the control group, see section 4 for discussion (Blattman et al., 2014; 2019).

In contrast, the majority of studies which specifically consider *seasonal* internal migration, find that employment programming – in this case all public works programmes – *reduce* seasonal migration or ‘distress’ rural-urban migration, as programmes provide a secure income during the lean season or during periods of shock (Deshingkar et al., 2013; Hoddinott and Mekasha, 2020). However, a further five studies find these programmes have no impact or no statistically significant impact, for instance in Ghana, see section 4 for discussion (Eshun and Dichaba, 2019; Namara et al., 2018).

Of the four studies which consider the impact of employment and training programmes on *onward migration* (of refugees), the three studies from Ethiopia suggest that programmes have no impact in diminishing aspirations for secondary migration (Samuel Hall, 2014; 2017; Mallett et al., 2017). Meanwhile one study of South Sudanese refugees in Uganda finds a link between participation in TVET and *increased* aspirations for internal onward migration of refugees (REF, 2019).

The same study also finds a link between programming and *return migration* aspirations among refugees in Uganda. Participation in TVET was linked to *increased* aspirations to return to South Sudan, with some study participants expressing a wish to take their new skills in their home country, see section 4 for discussion (REF, 2019).

Finally, the ten studies that consider *remigration* mostly find a limited impact of programming upon remigration aspirations of ‘voluntary’ and involuntary returnees. Two evaluation reports do suggest a link between respondents’ satisfaction with business support and intentions of voluntary returnees to *stay* in their origin countries of Pakistan and Kosovo, but these reports are based on small sample sizes (Reeve et al., 2010; IOM, 2015).

3.2 FINDINGS BY TYPE OF PROGRAMME

What about the mobility impacts of different types of programme? The 52 studies in this review consider 61 programmes, which broadly, fall under four groups (see Figure 4):

1. TVET (including agricultural and business training): 19 studies and 20 specific programmes covered;
2. Business grants and microcredit: 14 studies and 18 specific programmes covered;
3. Public works (including employment guarantee schemes and cash-for-work programmes): 25 studies and 13 specific programmes covered; and
4. Job services (e.g. employment agencies): eight studies and nine specific programmes covered.

FIG 4. PROPORTION OF EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES CONSIDERED BY LITERATURE

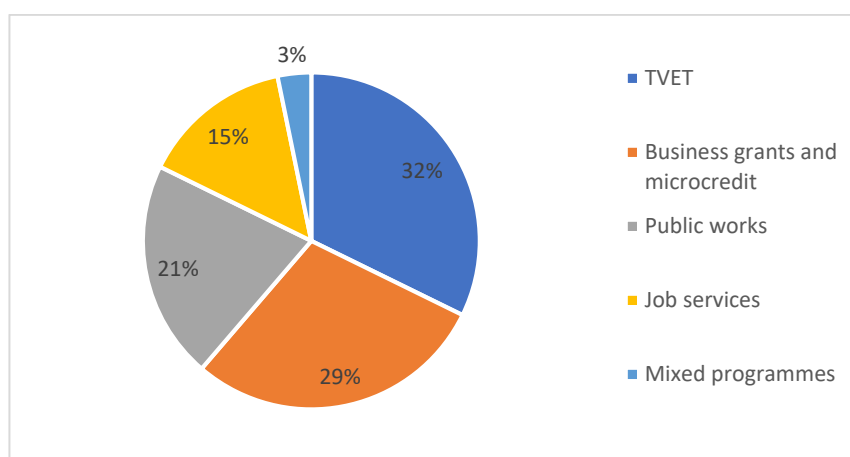
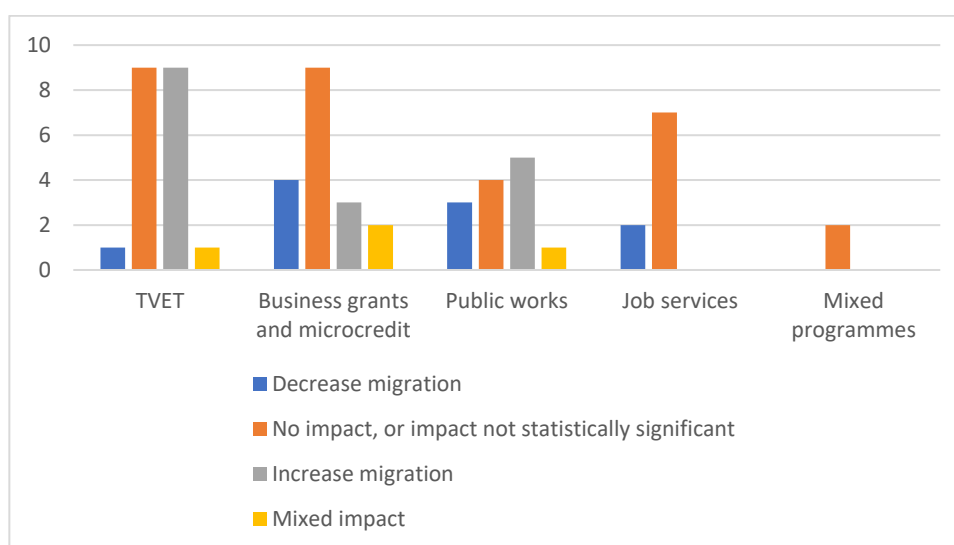


Figure 5 shows that migration impacts vary considerably depending on type or programme. Note, given that some studies consider several programmes in this section, and several studies analyse the same programme, we disaggregate the findings at the programme level, rather than study level.

FIG 5. MIGRATION IMPACT BY TYPE OF POLICY OR PROGRAMME

In general, participation in **TVET programmes** (including business training) is found to *foster* migration or to have no statistically significant impact on the propensity to migrate. In a study covering ten low- and middle-income countries, there is a general trend that those who participated in TVET within the last five years prior to the survey are more likely to plan to migrate internationally than non-participants, as found in Haiti, the Philippines, Côte d'Ivoire, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic, and at the household level in Burkina Faso (OECD, 2017a;c). TVET is also found to foster internal migration, for instance among ex-combatant participants of agricultural training in Liberia (Blattman and Annan, 2015), participants of vocational and on-the-job training in Bangladesh (Shonchoy et al., 2019; Raihan and Shonchoy, 2016), and participants of the EUTF-funded SINCE programme in Ethiopia (REF, 2019).

This trend does not hold for the three training programmes targeted specifically at improving self-employment prospects. For instance, the Start-and-Improve Your Business (SIYB) programme in Sri Lanka has no statistically significant migration impact, despite evidence of large and significant effects on self-employment (Giambra and McKenzie, 2019). Further, among refugee participants of TVET, including the Norwegian Refugee Council's Youth Education Pack (YEP) in Ethiopia, TVET did not appear to have a diminishing effect on already high aspirations for secondary migration, see section 4 for discussion (Samuel Hall and NRC, 2014; 2017).

Evidence on the migration impact of **business grants and microcredit** programmes is mixed, with the majority finding no (statistically significant) impact. Microcredit expansion is found, in two ethnographic studies, to *foster* migration. For instance, Bylander's (2014) study of increased access to low-cost microcredit in the Chanleas Dai area of Northern Cambodia suggests that microcredit does not

stimulate self-employment locally as expected, but rather fosters outmigration (mostly to Thailand), by reducing financial barriers to migration.

Business grants are found to decrease (three programmes) or have no statistically significant impact upon migration (two studies). For instance, a randomised control experiment in Uganda suggested that business grants as part of the Youth Opportunities Program had a (modest) decreasing effect on migration in the medium term (after 4 years) however, interestingly, both the self-employment and migration effects diminished in the long term, and were no longer statistically significant after nine years (Blattman et al., 2014; 2019).

The literature considers ten further business grant programmes, that are part of a support package to encourage voluntary return from destination countries, such as the 'Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration' (AVRR), or similar programmes, designed to encourage migrants firstly to leave countries of destination and then support their economic and social reintegration. On the whole, the evidence suggests that re-migration aspirations are prevalent among returnee participants, and business start-up support has a limited impact upon these aspirations (Bryan et al., 2010; Evans, 2010; Strand et al., 2008; Strand et al., 2016). For two AVRR schemes in Ethiopia and Iraq, remigration aspirations were low among participants, but this is not thought to be related to the assistance received (Strand et al., 2011; 2016), see section 4. In one study, AVRR participation, including business start-up support, were less likely to state they would be in Nigeria in five years' time compared to non-participants, although it should be noted that this was a small-scale evaluation study (Evans and Poulton, 2010).

Taken together, the evidence on the migration impact of **public works** participation is inconclusive. The largest and most studied public works programme is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in India, launched in 2005. Evidence on the migration impact of MGNREGA suggests the programme either decreases seasonal migration or has no or little impact. Five studies find MGNREGA reduces seasonal distress migration, for instance, Ravi et al. (2013) find MGNREGA participation reduced migration for work by seven percentage points and migration for marriage by four percentage points (Imbert and Papp, 2020a; 2020b; Morten, 2019; Parida, 2016). However, three studies find only negligible impacts (Deshingkar et al., 2010; Novotny et al., 2013; Sudarshan, 2010).

A further three programmes are similarly linked to decreased, seasonal or 'distress' migration, including the public works component of the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), nationally implemented since 2004 in Ethiopia, which is found to replace migration as a coping strategy during the lean season (Deshingkar et al., 2013; Hoddinott and Mekasha, 2020). Meanwhile four public works programmes are found to have no migration impact.

In contrast, five public works programmes are associated with increased (internal) migration. This includes the Yigong-Daizhen programme in China. Money

earned through the programme reduced the financial constraints related to migration, together with improved infrastructure increasing connectivity to nearby towns, facilitating migration (Chau et al., 2014).

Lastly, there is some evidence to suggest that **job services** may reduce aspirations to migrate, however the small number of studies (and small coverage of job matching services within those studies) limits this conclusion (OECD, 2017a). In seven of nine countries, participants are less likely to plan to emigrate. However, this was only statistically significant (at 90%) for Burkina Faso and Cambodia (OECD, 2017c;d), see section 4 for discussion.

4. FACTORS THAT MEDIATE MIGRATION

Why do some policies or programmes have an impact on migration when similar programmes do not? This is where mediating factors come in. Design features or implementation may limit the migration impact of a programme, or indeed amplify migration outcomes. Migration outcomes of programmes are also dependent on individual-level factors, and the wider economic, security and political context. These factors are considered, in turn, below.

4.1 DESIGN

The programmes considered in this review differ widely in terms of their design. One interesting distinction to draw is between policies and programmes that are **designed to have a migration impact**, and those which do not include migration amongst the programme's objectives. Just under half of programmes considered by the studies in this review are designed to influence migration outcomes in some way through the provision of TVET or employment programmes, and all but one of these aims to *decrease* migration, including reducing irregular migration, 'distress' seasonal migration, onward migration, or remigration.³ These programmes are largely NGO or donor-implemented, such as the EUTF-funded SINCE project in Ethiopia which in part seeks to reduce irregular migration through TVET programming.

The programmes designed to reduce migration, are often not found to have the desired impact. For instance, neither of the two programmes, which explicitly seek to reduce *irregular* migration from Ethiopia and Afghanistan, establish a link between participation and reduced irregular migration aspirations (Mercy Corps and Samuel Hall 2017 and REF 2020).

For the programmes (all public works) which seek to reduce internal migration - including seasonal migration - the evidence suggests that these schemes either reduce or have a negligible impact on migration. For instance, the MGNREGA is on

³ Note that whilst not all studies explicitly mention reduce remigration as the intention, rather reintegration, often policy makers view remigration as an indicator of failed reintegration (Kuschminder, 2017).

the whole found to reduce seasonal ‘distress’ migration (e.g. Imbert and Papps 2020). Meanwhile, the LIPW does not succeed in reducing rural-urban internal migration flows from Northern to Southern Ghana (Eshun and Dicheba, 2019), see discussion below.

The single programme which seeks to *encourage* migration, in this case to work in the garment sector in Bangladesh, is successful in encouraging internal migration (Raihan and Shonchoy, 2016; Shonchoy et al., 2019).

Meanwhile, there is similarly no clear pattern in mobility outcomes among participants of programmes that are *not* designed to have a migration impact. This is an interesting finding, suggesting that regardless of whether or not programmes are explicitly designed to influence mobility, mobility outcomes of programmes are often not expected, or not as expected.

Another design feature that mediates the migration impact of schemes is whether the programme has been designed to **match the needs of labour market**. If TVET programmes offer training in skills which are not demanded by the local labour market, they are unlikely to lead to improved livelihoods locally, and may foster migration, as participants seek to use their newly acquired skills elsewhere (OECD, 2017a). For one programme in Ethiopia, although offered TVET courses that were designed around assessments by local employers and of the job market demands, trainees still often failed to secure jobs post programme participation, due to the enduring gap between skills provided and requirements of employers (REF, 2019). The same can be said for when entrepreneurship support does not fill gaps in the labour market. For instance, in Ethiopian refugee camps, several different programmes offered support to start small-scale chicken farm businesses, leading to oversaturation (Mallett et al., 2017). As a result, programme participation had limited effects on improving livelihoods, or reducing high onward migration aspirations among refugees (ibid).

Meanwhile, for public works, it is important to look beyond the (short-term) employment these provide. The **type of assets that are created** and how these are linked to local livelihood opportunities can also affect migration impacts. For instance, the natural resource assets (dams and dugouts) created in the LIPW scheme in Northern Ghana did not improve the livelihoods of youths during the dry season, and thus had a limited impact on youth outmigration (Eshun and Dichaba, 2019; Namara et al., 2018). In contrast in India, the public works projects selected, such as irrigation improvements, were successful in fostering rural development and in part linked to reduced distress migration (Jacobs, 2008). Chau et al. (2014) compare different types of public works projects as part of the Yigong-Daizhen programme in China, namely productivity improvement projects (construction/irrigation systems) and cost reduction projects (road construction). The authors find a larger (increasing) migration effect in villages with cost reduction

projects, as improved infrastructure increased connectivity to nearby towns, facilitating migration.

Another, related, design feature, which mediates migration impacts of employment and training programming, is **value adequacy of wages, stipends or grants**. Public works schemes, which could reduce migration, for instance, by providing an alternative to seasonal or distress migration in agricultural off-seasons, may have limited impacts on migration due to wages being too low to offer a viable alternative to migration (OECD, 2017a; Novotny et al. 2013). Similarly, when business grants are too small to establish long term viable businesses for individuals to support themselves long term it limits their migration impacts. For instance participants of AVR in Pakistan who set up a shop were often not able to buy adequate stock to earn a liveable wage and many new businesses often do not stay operational after the first investments or grants depleted, thus limiting livelihood and migration impacts (Reeve et al., 2010).

Transfer modality (e.g. whether cash is provided) can also affect migration outcomes. Money offered by programmes may *foster* migration by reducing the financial constraints involved in migration. In Comoros, participation in public works was linked to increased migration to the neighbouring richer island Mayotte by 38% (Gazeaud et al., 2019). The authors explain that the monetary compensation offered was not an alternative to migration as it did not increase the opportunity cost of migration for likely migrants, rather the scheme increased individuals' capacity to migrate by alleviating financial obstacles to moving. Similarly, wages from the Yigong-Daizhen programme (as well as infrastructure improvements) also reduced the financial constraints of internal migration in China (Chau et al., 2014). This echoes the finding that the expansion of microcredit access fosters migration in Cambodia and Guatemala as individuals put money towards financing migration (Bylander, 2014; Stoll, 2010). Indeed, in Guatemala, the expansion of microcredit has led to a cycle of debt of migration, where microcredit, utilised for the purpose of migration to the US, has created high levels of debt, which in turn has driven more people to migrate out of economic necessity, to pay off the loans (Stoll, 2010).

In contrast, a couple of studies find that even when public works offers lower wages than seasonal migration would bring in, it may still reduce migration. Imbert and Papp (2020b) find that when offered employment in local MGNREGA public works, most seasonal rural migrants prefer to stay and earn 35% percent less than they would by migrating to cities to work in construction. The authors conclude that since monetary costs of migrating (transportation costs or unemployment risks) of rural-urban migration are small, this phenomenon is explained in part by high *non-monetary* costs of the migration decision. These include harsh living and working conditions in cities. For women, even if earnings were less with MGNREGA, it offers a steadier flow of income as opposed to the uncertainties of migration (Jacob, 2008).

A related design feature is whether or not the **programme is supplemented by complementary support or money**. Programmes may have more impact when additional support, such as mentoring is provided. For instance, one programme in Nigeria, which offered long term mentoring and training opportunities, on top of large business grants, increased self-employment and decreased internal migration after five years (although it should be noted that mentoring recipients were not compared to those who did not receive mentoring) (Giambra and McKenzie, 2019). Several studies consider the impact of TVET when additionally supplemented with cash, for instance so that participants can utilise newly acquired skills in a business, or have subsistence whilst searching for jobs in their new area of expertise. In a difference-in-difference study assessing the migration impact of a scheme to encourage migration in Bangladesh, Shonchoy et al. (2019) compare the impact of training with training combined with a supplementary stipend (to cover expenses during job searches) and training plus paid on the job training. The authors find that skills training alone is insufficient to encourage participants to migrate for work, the programme had a positive influence on migration *only* when combined with the stipend or paid, on-the-job training.

However, the evidence on this is not conclusive. Giambra and McKenzie (2019) find that three business training programmes, all coupled with a small grant, in Kenya, Sri Lanka and Uganda, do not have statistically significant migration impacts. Further, comparing the migration outcomes of TVET participation with and without unconditional cash transfers in Afghanistan, Mercy Corps and Samuel Hall (2018) find that at the end of the programme, recipients of cash were ten percentage points more likely to say they are likely to migrate than those who did not receive cash. Yet six to nine months after the programme, recipients of cash were more likely to express a greater preference for *staying* in Afghanistan than non-recipients of cash.

Another design feature is the **duration of programmes**. When public works programmes are short in duration, often just weeks or months, this may be too little to alter the long-term factors involved in migration decision making (OECD, 2017a). Meanwhile public works programmes which are *longer* in duration and take place at certain times in the year, e.g. the agricultural low season, and which guarantee employment like the large scale and well established MGNREGA in India, and the similar work component of the PSNP in Ethiopia, are both linked to reduced seasonal out-migration. When training is too short or insufficient to acquire the skills needed to secure a new profession, it is unlikely that it will affect underlying migration aspirations in any way. For instance, in Afghanistan, one-year on-the-job training was deemed too short to qualify for a new profession, and returnee participants did not have the money to pay for follow up courses afterwards (Altai, 2009).

4.2 IMPLEMENTATION

Alongside design factors, several implementation factors mediate migration impacts of programmes. Firstly, a key mediating factor are **application requirements and processes**. The IOM's requirement to produce extensive documentation to access funding was an inhibiting barrier for Pakistani returnees attempting to start businesses since returnees usually need to pay bribes to government officials to procure the required documents (Reeve et al., 2010). Similarly, a requirement for business grant recipients to obtain three quotes before getting in-kind business assistance in Iraq was felt to be frustrating, confusing and time-consuming (Strand et al., 2011).

Secondly, **levels of adequate resourcing** mediate the migration impacts of programmes (Jacob, 2008; Mallett et al., 2017). Lack of resources mean that projects cannot be delivered as they were designed or promised to participants, undermining livelihood and potential migration impacts. For instance, tool kits, which were part of training for refugees in Ethiopia, were not delivered on time which undermined programme effectiveness (Samuel Hall and NRC, 2014). Relatedly, when the provision of the actual number of days of work did not match the number promised by MGNREGA, some participants reported continuing to favour seasonal migration as a livelihood strategy, as they were not able to rely on the scheme (Deshingkar et al., 2010; Novotny et al., 2013).

A third implementation factor is whether **payments are made in a timely manner**. Irregularities in payment methods and timings are thought to undermine the migration impact of the MGNREGA in India (Deshingkar et al., 2010).

Finally, the studies included in this review suggest that programmes have more of an impact on both livelihoods and migration when providers offer **(adequate) follow up**. Among returnees in Zimbabwe, lack of follow up support for recipients of business grants is linked to the lack of long-term business sustainability (Evans, 2010). Mentoring on how to invest business grants can impact migration outcomes. Meanwhile, in Ethiopia, lack of follow up support to TVET, such as trainings, start-up cash and tools, means that participants cannot utilise their new skills to earn a stable income (Mallett et al., 2017). Dugouts built as part of public works in Ghana had no impact on seasonal migration as participants were unable to mobilise funds or access nearby land required for dry season irrigation farming (Eshun and Dichaba, 2019).

4.3 INDIVIDUAL FACTORS AND WIDER CONTEXT

Perhaps most importantly, individual and contextual factors mediate the impact of programmes employment and training programmes on mobility outcomes. Migration decision-making is complex, shaped by many micro, meso and macro level factors. At the micro-level, it is well established in the wider migration literature that socio-economic factors, gender, and migration experience shape decisions to

migrate (e.g. Aslany et al., 2021). The literature also increasingly considers the more subjective and intangible individual level factors, including personality traits, emotions and beliefs, and how these influence migration decisions (Hagen-Zanker and Hennessey, 2021). At a more macro level, several structural factors including economic, institutional and security situations are also considered key drivers of migration (Reinprecht and Czaika, 2020), and migration and family networks are crucial at the meso level. How these micro, meso and macro level factors mediate the impact of employment and training programmes is the focus of this section.

4.3.1 INDIVIDUAL LEVEL FACTORS

WEALTH AND CLASS

Firstly, wealth and class may mediate the migration impact of training or employment programmes. This may be due to the fact that wealth is an enabling factor for migration, as individuals have more (financial) capacity, to migrate. For instance, in China, the mobility impact (increased migration) of the Yigong-Daizhen public work scheme was most profound for the middle class (Chau et al., 2014). Similarly, Strand et al. (2016) suggest that the low re-migration aspirations among AVRRO participants in Ethiopia are not as a result of business support providing a sustainable livelihood situation, but rather because participants do not have the financial capacity to remigrate or in other words they are 'involuntary immobile' (see Carling, 2002). Meanwhile, in the context of seasonal migration, Parida's (2016) study of the MGNREGA finds participation in the employment guarantee scheme reduced levels of 'distress' seasonal migration more for those who were from more socially disadvantaged caste groups, compared to other castes, and for those that are 'landless', compared to land owners.

GENDER

Gender is also a mediating factor, with many programmes having different impacts for men and women. This may be due to the differing migration tendencies of men and women in different contexts. For instance, Sudarshan et al. (2010) find that the high take up rate of women in the MGNREGA does not have a statistically significant effect in reducing short-term migration as it is predominantly men who migrate, and they continue to do so. The positive correlation between TVET participation and emigration plans is stronger for women (in urban areas) in the Dominican Republic, but stronger for men in Haiti (OECD, 2017i). While the study does not offer an explanation for this pattern, it is interesting to note that in Haiti, the majority of TVET participants are male, while in Dominican Republic the majority of participants are female.

EDUCATION

Education level also mediates the impacts of programmes. For instance, the suggestion that job centres reduce migration intentions is mediated by the fact that participants are more likely to be highly educated and have jobs in the public sector, which are regarded as secure (OECD, 2017a). Disaggregating by education level, Ravi et al. (2013) find that participation in an employment guarantee scheme significantly reduced rural-urban migration for work of uneducated individuals, whilst educated individuals were unaffected by the scheme. This may be as a result that participation in the scheme offers an alternative to 'distress' seasonal migration for unskilled workers.

PRIOR MIGRATION EXPERIENCE

Moreover, an individual's prior migration experience may mediate the impact of schemes. Comparing the impact of AVRR for former regular and irregular migrants in Senegal and DRC, Flahaux (2017) suggests assistance had a more positive effect on reintegration of participants who previously migrated through irregular channels compared to non-participants; their migration aspirations were also lower.

INTANGIBLE FACTORS

The literature also highlights some more subjective and intangible factors that shape migration decision-making and hence mediate the impact of programmes. Individuals can have personal career or migration ambitions that then influence how they respond to a programme. For instance, a person may have underlying migration aspirations and be initially motivated to participate in TVET in order to acquire the skills to find a job abroad or in urban areas, rather than at home (OECD, 2017a; Mallett et al., 2017; REF, 2019).

Similarly, some returnees took part in AVRR already with the determination to re-migrate from their country of origin at a later date (Strand et al., 2016). In some contexts, programmes which target populations with high levels of migration aspirations, such as refugees in refugee camps, or 'voluntary' returnee migrants are unlikely to influence these prevalent aspirations (e.g. Samuel Hall and NRC, 2014;2017; Evans, 2010).

Another subjective factor is an individual's level of risk tolerance or aversion. Gazeaud et al. (2019) finds that risk aversion moderated the impact of public works programming on migration outcomes in Comoros. The authors find greater mobility among the households that were more risk averse at the baseline, suggesting that participation in the public works programme alleviated risk constraints. An emotional connection to one's homeland may mediate the migration impact of programmes for migrant beneficiaries: among South-Sudanese refugees in Uganda, some participants aspired to return to South Sudan after TVET, wishing to use their new

skills to rebuild their country (REF, 2019). A strong attachment to traditional land may also explain the negligible or decreasing internal migration impact of self-employment agricultural grants in Uganda (Blattman et al., 2014).

Finally, business acumen and knowledge has been found to have an impact on the sustainability of businesses initiated with reintegration assistance (Strand et al. 2008).

4.3.2 CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

The evidence base highlights several contextual factors – three meso and two macro-level – which shape migration outcomes of employment and training policies and programmes.

Meso level factors include societal norms around migration or the so-called ‘culture of migration’. In one village in Cambodia, due to the history of and strong preference for migration as a livelihood strategy, availability of microcredit was viewed as best used to finance migration instead of income generating activities at home (Bylander, 2014).

Gender norms may also mediate the migration impact of programmes. Hoddinott and Mekasha (2020) find that the public works component of PSNP in Ethiopia reduced female migration for marriage, suggesting this is because households substitute adult female labour of programme participants with adolescents who stay in the household to carry out unpaid care and domestic work.

The local security context mediates the impact of programming. The security situation in many countries which (in) voluntary returnees return to and receive AVR is often precarious. As a result, remigration aspirations are often high, and remain so, despite programming, for instance in Afghanistan (e.g. Strand et al., 2016).

The first macro-level factor is the **labour market and local job opportunities**. A lack of local job opportunities undermines the long-term impact of TVET and may foster migration, as newly qualified individuals cannot utilise their skills and look abroad for opportunities (OECD, 2017a; REF, 2019). Similarly, an agricultural training programme for ex-combatants in Liberia led to a small increase in internal migration as graduates sought to capitalise on their acquired skills by positioning themselves nearer to larger agricultural markets (Blattman and Annan, 2015). The substantial increase in migration linked to the expansion of micro-finance institutions in Cambodia, may be a result of increased credit availability not being matched by increases in local investment opportunities (Bylander, 2014). As a result, migration is seen as a more secure investment than local livelihood opportunities. Relatedly, policies to encourage entrepreneurship are undermined when business environments are not conducive for small businesses (e.g. Strand et al., 2016).

Explicit **restrictions on the right to work** also undermines any impact of policies. One example of this is evident in this review, namely Eritrean refugees’ lack

of legal rights to work (now overturned) in Ethiopia. These legal restrictions meant that TVET participants were unable to use their newly acquired vocational skills and did not have decent employment prospects (Samuel Hall and NRC, 2014 and 2017; Mallett et al., 2017).

5. CONCLUSION

This paper retrieved and synthesised the (English-language) evidence on the influence of employment and education policies and programmes on migration, including both quantitative and qualitative studies. We retrieved 52 relevant studies, with the majority of studies considering the effect of public works programmes (24), followed by TVET (21) and business grants and microcredit (17). The evidence base is small and diverse, with methodological approaches and rigour ranging widely, and on the whole, the evidence in this area is quite weak. There is also lack of multi-site, comparative research. The size of the evidence base, and measurement issues such as length of follow up period after intervention, and diversity in methodological rigour, limit the conclusions that can be drawn.

5.1 KEY FINDINGS

All studies taken together offer no conclusive link between employment and education policies and programmes and migration decision making. In cases where programmes are found to have an influence – whether increasing or decreasing the propensity to migrate – the magnitude of the impact is often small.

That being said, there are some patterns between different types of migratory flows and programme types. Considering different types of migration outcomes, **for international migration, oftentimes employment and training programmes increase migration, particularly with the provision of TVET.** Considering irregular migration aspirations separately, the findings are less clear cut – with programmes often having no or mixed impacts. For internal migration, on the whole, programmes tend to lead to an increase. However, studies which focus specifically on seasonal migration suggest that programmes (all public works) more often than not reduce or have no impact on seasonal migration. Of the small numbers of studies that consider onward or return migration, all focusing on refugees, programmes tend to have little impact. Similarly, programmes tend to have a limited impact on the remigration aspirations of voluntary or involuntary returnees.

The review found that across the range of policies and programmes TVET typically fosters migration aspirations, perhaps as individuals seek to utilise their newly acquired skills elsewhere, although this is not always the case, and often no impact is found. Microcredit expansion is also found to lead to an increase in out-migration. More targeted business support, including cash grants, tends to moderately reduce migration, or have no impact (Giambra and McKenzie, 2019). The evidence on public works programmes is very mixed, with some evidence

showing a decrease in temporary or seasonal migration, but an increase in other internal or international migration (e.g. Gazeaud et al., 2019). Some limited evidence suggests that job services could reduce migration aspirations (OECD, 2017a).

The migration impact of programmes is mediated by their design and implementation. Interestingly, programmes which are specifically designed to influence migration are often found not to have achieved the desired impact, for instance among programmes aiming to reduce irregular migration (e.g. Mercy Corps and Samuel Hall, 2018).

A key design feature is whether or not the programme matches the needs of the local labour market. For instance, if skills acquired from a TVET scheme are unable to be utilised locally, participants may seek more relevant employment opportunities elsewhere (OECD, 2017a). Relatedly, the type of assets created by public works schemes may shape migration decisions of participants. Certain types of infrastructure, for instance improved roads as a result of the Yigong-Daizhen programme in China, may encourage migration by increasing travel connections, compared to other types (Chau et al., 2012).

The value adequacy of wages, stipends or grants offered by employment and training programmes too mediates migration impacts. If too low, programmes may not offer a viable alternative to migration, and as a result have negligible impact (e.g. Novotny et al. 2013). On the other hand, stipends offered by programmes may *increase* individuals' financial capability to move (e.g. Gazeaud et al., 2019). Programmes coupled with complementary mentoring or financial support may have more of a migration impact (e.g. Shonchoy and Raihan, 2019), although the impact of cash grants coupled with training is not conclusive (Mercy Corps and Samuel Hall, 2018). The duration of programmes, too, mediates impact. For instance, if training is insufficient to qualify an individual for a new profession, participation is unlikely to influence livelihood nor migration outcomes (Altai, 2009), though drawing on a small sample. Similarly, a short-term public works scheme may not offer an alternative to migration (OECD, 2017a),

Implementation factors that mediate programme impact include inhibitive application requirements and processes (e.g. Reeve et al., 2010) and low levels of adequate resourcing (Mallett et al., 2017). Lack of resources mean that projects cannot be delivered as they were designed or promised to participants, undermining livelihood and potential migration impacts. When payments are not made in a regular or timely manner, migration impacts are also undermined as individuals are not able to rely on the programme as an alternative to migration (Deshingkar et al., 2010). Adequate follow up by providers is also a key implementation factor mediating impact. Lack of follow up support may mean that investments in TVET or business start-ups are not sustainable (Evans, 2010; Mallett et al., 2017).

However, even well designed or implemented programmes may also not have a mobility impact, partly as individual and wider structural or contextual factors also

mediate migration impacts. A range of individual level factors, both tangible – gender, socio-economic status – and intangible – e.g. level of risk tolerance or personal ambitions – mediate the extent to which programmes influence migration decision-making. At the same time, contextual factors such as the structure of labour markets and business environment conditions, access to resources and opportunities, the presence of a culture of migration (or staying), as well as the wider security context are also mediating factors.

5.2 WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR POLICY?

In the EU and other high-income migration destinations, much focus of migration policy-making has been on containment strategies, ranging from border securitisation to tackling the ‘root causes’ of migration. The questions covered in this review are thus of great interest to ongoing debates around the factors that shape migration decision making processes. A number of the programmes included in this review are even specifically designed to reduce migration. As such, the findings in this review may be somewhat unsatisfactory to policy-makers. There are no clear patterns and many programmes seem to have unintended or unexpected effects. On the one hand, this may be due to the relatively small evidence base comprised of studies of varying methodological rigour. But there are other possible explanations for this lack of a clear trend, as we explain below.

Impacts on migration in turn depend on whether employment and training programmes achieve their intended outcomes, that is does lead to a reduction in unemployment, job opportunities, better economic opportunities locally and so on. That in turn depends both on the design and implementation of the programme, and the nature of the local labour market, or the wider business environment. If programmes are not well designed or implemented, they are unlikely to achieve their intended outcomes. This review identified numerous such examples, ranging from poor targeting, training not being matched to labour market needs to inadequate levels of resourcing. More generally, a review of labour market policies including TVET and job services found that such programmes are often not successful in improving employment outcomes (McKenzie, 2017). As such, these programmes are unlikely to tackle the factors that drive migration aspirations and decision-making.

Furthermore, we also need to look at the demand for labour: when local labour markets are unable to absorb those looking for jobs, including those newly graduated from trainings, they will look for employment opportunities elsewhere. This review showed that all too often skills are ‘mass-produced’, with beneficiaries receiving the same training and with labour markets subsequently not being able to absorb all graduates. Or with regards to business support, often beneficiaries are supported to set up the same kind of business and businesses subsequently failing in a saturated market. This means that education and employment programmes need to be designed with a good understanding of local labour markets, particularly what drives

changes in the demand for labour and potentially be accompanied by job creation schemes.

Even when programmes are well designed and implemented, in line with the nature of the local labour market, policies or programmes may still lead to increases in migration. One explanation is that ‘structural determinants in origin and destination countries’, such as a high demand for labour in destination countries, and ‘internal dynamics of migration networks and systems’ drive migration outcomes (Czaika and de Haas, 2013). It is within these migration networks and systems, where (potential) migrants may or may not encounter implemented policies and programmes.

Research suggests that as policies move through multiple stages, design, implementation, and then to encounter by the intended target population – details can get lost, diluted, misinterpreted or simply not acted upon (Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, under review). For policies and programmes to influence decisions, (potential) migrants need to have access to information about the policy, understand it, interpret it ‘correctly’, and then respond in the intended way; these conditions are often not met (ibid). This means that rather than stopping at the implementation of policy, policy-makers also need to consider whether and how it is encountered.

5.3 AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The links between employment, training and skills policies and migration decision-making is a growing area and the evidence base is still fairly small. Often, the mobility impact of many programmes is unknown or inadequately monitored, indeed this contributes as to why so few studies were retrieved in this literature review. This is in part due to short funding cycles of some donor programmes, which have insufficient follow up periods and limited capacity to monitor medium or long-term migration impacts of projects (Black et al., 2021; Samuel Hall and NRC, 2017).

In particular, longitudinal data collection and long-term follow up studies are required to fully evaluate the mobility impact of employment promotion programmes. Research, which analyses short, medium- and long-term effects, is needed to understand the long-term implications of programming, especially what happens when support is lifted or grants run out. Giambra and McKenzie’s (2019) analysis of seven self-employment programmes find that often migration impacts took many years to occur, or migration impacts may actually diminish in the long term. Blattman et al., (2019) also find that the highly significant, short-term migration impacts, were not sustained long term, after nine years. However, since most studies do not monitor long-term migration impacts of programmes long term, these largely remain unknown.

There have been recent methodological advances in measuring how development policies impact migration decision making. Employing agent-based modelling, the MigChoice project have designed a model which uses computer simulations to understand how changes in policy influences the likelihood of

choosing to migrate (MIGCHOICE, 2021).⁴ This ongoing project is likely provide interesting and valuable avenues for future research.

Furthermore, there are gaps in the evidence for specific policies or programmes. The role of both vocational skills and self-employment in migration decision making is under-researched in general, and is a key area for future research. There are some suggestions in the literature that job services may reduce the need for migration by matching skills to the demands of the labour market (OECD, 2017a), however this is underexplored. Whilst public works schemes for short-term employment are well explored, longer term employment schemes are absent in the literature.

Finally, there is a gap in the evidence around how (potential) migrants encounter and engage with programmes. It is not clear how exactly employment and training programme feature in migration decision-making, for example are they seen as an incentive for migration or a means to cover the costs for migration. It is thus important to generate in-depth, micro-level analysis on migration decision-making (an area we will focus on in MIDEQ) alongside the longitudinal quantitative evidence measuring aggregate impacts.

⁴ <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/government/departments/international-development/research/projects/2019/migchoice/about.aspx>

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Contact authors

Jessica Hagen-Zanker, Overseas Development Institute
j.hagen-zanker@odi.org.uk



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Cover image

Participants in the JRS centre in Adi Harush refugee camp. Photo by Gabriel Pecot for ODI. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

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Contact MIDEQ

Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR)
Coventry University, IV5, Innovation Village
Cheetah Road, Coventry, CV1 2TL UK

Tel. +44 24 7765 1182

E-mail: mideq@coventry.ac.uk