

Improving social protection for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt: An overview of international practices

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Egypt is the leading country of origin of migrant workers in the Middle East and North Africa, and migration has been a central issue throughout its history. However, in addition to being a traditional country of origin and transit, the importance of Egypt as a country of destination has been growing over the last two decades, with the number of forcibly displaced persons living in the country increasing by more than 18 times and reaching a total of 324,712 at the end of 2019. Data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2020) show that these people face many risks and vulnerabilities, such as high rates of poverty, unemployment or informality, and food insecurity. Women and non-Arabic-speaking refugees are especially vulnerable, and children (aged 0–17 years) represent over 40 per cent of the total population of most of the main migrant groups living in Egypt.

The provision of social protection (SP) for these individuals is a human right. It can protect migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers and increase their chances of contributing to the national economy and society. However, SP is not always guaranteed for international migrants. UNICEF Egypt and the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) joined forces to gather evidence of experiences that can provide valuable insights for a new migration governance framework, a more inclusive SP system and sustainable socio-economic development in Egypt. The report (Andrade, Sato, and Hammad 2021) is guided by three main questions:

To what extent do national SP systems have the capacity to integrate migrants, refugees and asylum seekers? The report takes a human rights-based approach to debate the right to SP for non-nationals and highlights the importance of shock-responsive systems to combat covariate risks faced by families and individuals. Evidence shows that SP programmes can play a substantial role at all stages of the migration process. For instance, in the country of destination it is essential to guarantee non-discriminatory access to SP to ensure that migrants have the right to decent living standards and to work, and can increase access to documentation and public services. In this context, social assistance plays a crucial role in protecting the poorest and most vulnerable migrants and their families, while for migrant workers, social insurance and active labour market policies are central to the realisation of social rights and rights at work. When migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are successfully integrated into host communities and the labour market, they can contribute to national development, as they tend to pay more into contributory social security systems and overall SP systems in the form of taxes than they receive in terms of benefits.

How are other countries ensuring the right to SP for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, especially the most vulnerable? Case studies of countries from different regions across the globe, especially middle-

income countries, were selected to illustrate how social assistance (in the cases of Turkey, Morocco and Brazil), social insurance (Philippines and in the case of social security agreements), labour market policies (Denmark and Colombia), basic health care services (Iran and Turkey) and education (Lebanon) can be more inclusive for non-nationals, especially for refugees.

Some of the main factors that favoured the expansion of coverage to non-nationals highlighted in these cases include: establishing a comprehensive legislative framework that guarantees fundamental rights and access to SP for all individuals; collaborating with international partners to increase the capacities of national systems; reforming migration policies towards a rights-based approach; capacitating social workers to deal with specific vulnerabilities faced by migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; guaranteeing legal status for undocumented individuals; and investing in infrastructure in places with high demand from migrant populations.

What are the opportunities for extending SP to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt? At the statutory level, Egypt has national laws and international obligations to protect migrants. In the Middle East and North Africa, Egypt is one of the countries that has ratified the most human rights conventions that guarantee the provision of SP to non-nationals. Moreover, the Egyptian Constitution (2019) affirms that all citizens have the right to social security and health insurance. Other national laws on access to the labour market, social insurance and social assistance establish rights for non-nationals. At the same time, these laws have limitations such as restrictions on non-nationals working in certain sectors; limited health insurance coverage for migrants working in the informal sector or who are undocumented; and the requirement of possessing/presenting a national identity document to receive benefits from social assistance programmes, such as *Takaful* (a conditional cash transfer) and *Karama* (an unconditional cash transfer).

Based on the findings on the status of access to SP for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt, and the enabling factors observed in other countries, the report ends with an advisory section of policies that aim to advance the agenda on SP for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt, contribute to the ongoing policy debate and promote a more inclusive model for development.

References:

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