

# Protecting across borders

Citation for published version (APA):

Serra Mingot, E. (2018). *Protecting across borders: Sudanese families across the Netherlands, the UK and Sudan*. [Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University, Aix-Marseille University]. Datawyse / Universitaire Pers Maastricht. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20181217em>

**Document status and date:**

Published: 01/01/2018

**DOI:**

[10.26481/dis.20181217em](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20181217em)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Please check the document version of this publication:**

- A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
- The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
- The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

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# VALORISATION ADDENDUM

This dissertation investigated how Sudanese migrants in the Netherlands and the UK and their families back home navigate different forms of social protection to cover for their needs locally and across borders. Nowadays more and more people live or are pushed to live away from their country of birth. In doing so, they develop attachments and responsibilities in more than one nation-state—for example, earning their livelihoods, making housing investments, caring for family members, or saving for their old-age in different countries. Yet, the traditional formal social protection systems have been envisaged to cater for sedentary populations, tied to a particular nation-state. Thus, even though migration has often been considered a social protection strategy for migrants and their families, this dissertation showed that, in fact, international migration might present mobile populations—especially those moving from the Global South to the North—with particular dilemmas for how to cover for their own and their families' social protection needs.

On the one hand, migrants move not only between countries, but also between differently regulated labour markets and social protection systems, with different institutionalised levels of formality and informality. Newly arrived migrants may lack strong social networks, and they usually have to wait several years before they have access, if at all, to the formal social protection system in the host country. At the same time, any contributions made to the social protection systems in their country of origin might cease to exist after arriving in the new host country, and vice versa.

On the other hand, migrants are often responsible for providing their families 'back home' in times of need—such as, the illness of a relative or the incapacity of an elderly person to provide for themselves. Supporting family members abroad, however, might become problematic. In this context, migrants and their families develop sophisticated strategies to cover for the social protection needs, through a combination of resources –provided by the state, the market, third-sector organisations and the family and other social networks—that are circulated in a coordinated fashion across two or more nation-states. It is within this backdrop that this thesis addresses how migrants and their families 'back home' make use of different forms of social protection to provide for each other's needs, both locally and transnationally.

This thesis addressed a highly pressing issue in the current context of increasingly restrictive migration regimes and shrinking welfare systems. The findings of this research suggest that two main aspects should be considered in the development of future policies on social protection for mobile populations, both in sending and receiving countries. These are explained below.

### **Exploring and investing in semi-formal arrangements.**

Despite the mixed results yielded by studies addressing the relationship between migration and a country's welfare system, the media, public opinion and political discourse continue to sustain the idea of 'welfare shopping'. In fact, migrants' use—and misuse—of the welfare state in receiving countries has become a major concern for policy makers. This perception is partly due to the fact that in countries of the Global North, the welfare state is usually seen as the main (if not the only) provider of social protection. Therefore, most research and policies on migration and social protection have focused on addressing issues around the accessibility and portability of welfare benefits by migrants in the receiving countries, frequently overlooking other ways through which migrants navigate their social protection.

This thesis shows that the ways in which migrants access social protection often goes beyond the formal provisions of the receiving welfare state. Therefore, in moving towards a more inclusive and fair transnational social protection system, policy makers should consider the emergence and functioning mechanisms of semi-formal institutions. In other words, in the provision of social protection across borders there is a need to look beyond the national welfare states of the receiving countries as the main source of social protection for mobile populations and activate new forms of network, involving actors that used to act separately, namely, state-based institutions, private and third sector actors, as well as with migrants themselves. The advantage of different formal and informal social protection actors working together (e.g. transnational healthcare organisations, where migrants join forces with NGOs, health insurance companies in the receiving country and healthcare providers in the origin country to cover for a number of relatives back home) is that they build on traditional community mechanisms to provide targeted social services to vulnerable groups, strengthening the links between governments and communities.

### **Facilitating transnational family life and social protection arrangements.**

International migration does not necessarily sever the obligations and responsibilities between family members living apart (Baldassar, Baldock, and Wilding 2007; Bryceson and Vuorela 2002). On the contrary, rather than an individual project of income maximization in response to emergencies, migration is a family livelihood strategy or social protection mechanism to diversify income sources, face socioeconomic constraints, and guarantee the wellbeing of the different family members, now and in the future (Stark and Levhari 1982; Sabates-Wheeler and Waite 2003; Mazzucato and Schans 2011). Nevertheless, migrants who want to ensure their own and their families' social protection might face different challenges. Even when migrants enjoy full access to formal social protection provisions in the receiving country, migrants are often responsible for providing for the needs of their families 'back home', who might not be covered by the social protection system (if

any) in their origin countries. At the global level, legal provisions regarding social protection rights for international migrants and their families remain scarce. In the past decades, bilateral social-security agreements between migrant-sending and migrant-receiving countries have become an important instrument to guarantee the portability of social security benefits for internationally mobile workers. Yet, very few developing countries are part of these agreements and only about 23% of international migrants profit from them (Holzmann, 2016). Moreover, supporting family members abroad becomes not only problematic but at times is even penalised. In the case of Sudan, which is the focus of this thesis, sending money through bank transfers is not allowed from the US and many European countries since the US introduced sanctions in 1997. Therefore, the current context of restrictive migration regimes and geographically-fixed national welfare systems often hinders the transnational character of migrants' lives.

Future development on transnational social protection for mobile populations should go beyond what migrants can access *here* and also consider the migrants' responsibilities towards those 'back home'. This thesis showed that even when the migrants' basic needs *here* are covered by the welfare state, their ability to provide for family members abroad continues to be limited, which has an impact on the migrants' wellbeing and often leads them to seek alternative means across formal and informal provisions beyond a single receiving state. For example, the (health-)care needs of the migrants' elderly parents back home often becomes a major source of problems for transnational families. Even when the family has the financial resources to pay for a private operation/medical treatment in Europe, visas are frequently rejected. The intervention, thus, has to be conducted in another country, which often results in pushing other family members to relocate. This might have an impact on the wellbeing of the migrants and their families. Some other times, when no other relatives are available, migrants must go and take care of their parents. In doing so, they must leave their jobs or stop their social assistance (e.g. receiving social assistance is bound to regular visits to the unemployment office). Policy developments towards a more inclusive social protection system that caters for the needs of increasingly mobile populations should acknowledge the important role of the migrants' families 'back home'. Understanding how social protection is arranged in the Global South—where extended families play a crucial role in the sustenance of individuals and communities—should inform any development towards a more inclusive social protection system, where the migrants' needs are linked to the needs of their families 'back home'. This does not mean that welfare states in the receiving countries should provide for the needs of the migrants' family members 'back home'. In fact, this would most likely prove to be unsustainable and could increase inequalities in the sending countries between those who have migrant relatives and those who do not. Yet, 'simple' measures, such as facilitating border crossings of transnational families (e.g. allowing adult children, siblings or elderly parents 'back home' to visit their migrant parents, siblings and children through special visas) could

considerably improve the ways in which these families cover for their needs, especially those related to care.

## **Dissemination activities**

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During my fieldwork in Sudan, the Centre d'études et de documentation économiques, juridiques et sociales (CEDEJ) showed interest in my research and facilitated my fieldwork there. During this time I published a research post in their blog and participated in a seminar where local academics, journalists and other interested people took part. Through the CEDEJ, I was contacted by staff members of the EU External Action, with whom I met and explained the goal of the research. They were interested in my findings, and requested to be informed of any publication based on my data. Based on their interest and the relevance of my research for the current migration projects at the EU External Action in Sudan, I expect to produce a policy brief with the main findings and specific policy recommendations.

Upon my return from Sudan I was also contacted by the GSDRC, a UK-based think tank, with whom I collaborated in their report on Sudan (on-line publication). In September 2017 I was selected, among 25 other PhD to be part of a policy workshop at the METROPOLIS conference in The Hague, where I had the opportunity to present my research to different policy makers and NGO staff. Finally, in November 2017, I applied and obtained a valorisation grant by Maastricht University, whereby I intend to travel to Sudan to conduct three main follow-up activities. First, I will organise a seminar/colloquium at the CEDEJ where I can present my findings and contribute to the knowledge of this institute in the field of Sudanese studies, who supported and facilitated my fieldwork in Sudan. In discussion with the CEDEJ, I would like to extend the invitation to such event to researchers from Ahfad University for Women and Khartoum University, as well as to members of the EU External Action and the Sudanese-Dutch Association. The CEDEJ works closely with several Sudanese scholars, so this would be an excellent way to bring my findings to Sudan and interact with local experts in this regards. The Sudanese context, and in particular the transnational practices between Sudanese migrants in Europe and their families back home, has been largely under-researched, so this research contributes to partly filling in this gap. Second, with the support of the CEDEJ, I intend to organise a workshop on multi-sited methods for interested students. Finally, I will use part of my stay there to conduct preliminary research in preparation for a post-doc application. Based on the feedback I receive from these events I intend to write a policy brief, of interest to EU and Sudanese diaspora audiences, whereby the proposed activities will not only result in knowledge transfer but also knowledge creation.