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Jonas Nzabamwita & Mulugeta Dinbabo

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## SOCIOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# International migration and social protection in South Africa

Jonas Nzabamwita<sup>1\*</sup> and Mulugeta Dinbabo<sup>2</sup>

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\*Corresponding author: Jonas Nzabamwita, DSI-NRF South African Research Chair in Industrial Development (SARChI-ID), School of Economics, University of Johannesburg, 31 Henley Road, Auckland Park, Johannesburg, 2006, South Africa  
E-mail: [nzabajonas@gmail.com](mailto:nzabajonas@gmail.com)

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Ana María Lopez Narbona, University of Malaga: Universidad de Malaga, Spain

Additional information is available at the end of the article

**Abstract:** For a developing country, South Africa has the most comprehensive social protection system in terms of social grant coverage. Moreover, the country is also often hailed for its transformative constitution which enshrines socio-economic rights for all. Similarly, South Africa is widely praised for its progressive refugee policy, which encourages refugees to self-settle into the local community, and those who are not able to support themselves are provided with services in the same way as the citizens of South Africa. In light of this, in 2012 the Department of Social Development promulgated changes to the regulations, by which refugees became eligible to claim social grants provided by the government of South Africa. Despite these amendments and constitutional rights, information from the literature and qualitative narratives from migrants living in households that receive social grants and key informants from organizations that assist migrants reveal that institutional challenges and impediments, that is, bureaucratic hurdles and administrative

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Jonas Nzabamwita

Jonas Nzabamwita obtained his PhD and MA degrees in Development Studies from the University of the Western Cape, South Africa in 2021 and 2017 respectively. He also holds a Bachelor of Commerce (Honours) in Development Studies from the same university, and a Bachelor of Commerce in Human Resource Management (Cum Laude) from the University of South Africa. Nzabamwita is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the DSI-NRF South African Research Chair in Industrial Development (SARChI-ID), at the School of Economics, University of Johannesburg in South Africa. His research interests cover a wide range of topics, including migration and remittances, social protection, food security and poverty, informal economy, and other areas of macroeconomics as well as labour economics.

Mulugeta Dinbabo is a Professor of Development Studies, at the Institute for Social Development, University of the Western Cape. He obtained his PhD degree in Development Studies from the University of the Western Cape. He also has two MA degrees in Development Management and Development Studies, from the Ruhr University, Germany and the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, respectively. He teaches postgraduate courses on research methods, development management and planning. He has published widely in refereed international journals and edited books. He is also the Chief Editor of the *African Human Mobility Review* (AHMR).

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

South Africa is a quintessentially immigration-preferred destination country for refugees, asylum seekers and poor economic migrants from Africa and further afield. The country also has progressive non-encampment refugee policies and rights-based constitution that guarantee socio-economic rights to all who live in the country, regardless of their nationalities. One such right is the one that affords migrants access to social assistance if they are not able to support themselves and their families. These rights of migrants in South Africa are also underpinned by the international instruments that the South African government has ratified, signed, and acceded to. This study sets out to investigate migrants' rights and plights in accessing social protection programmes in South Africa. The findings of this study provide insights into the problems and challenges that international migrants face in their attempts to access social grants in South Africa. This has culminated in the articulation of "ubuntu", as the value to be espoused in the provision of social assistance to migrants. The study also paves the way for future research in the domain of migration and social protection in South Africa.

constraints along with language barriers and documentation problems prohibit or delay international migrants from accessing social grants in South Africa. In response to these adversities, this research study proposes the “African ubuntu” value as the best humanitarian principle and practice that should guide the South African government in providing social assistance to migrants from indigent groups, such as the unemployed, people with disabilities, children, pregnant and lactating women, and the elderly.

**Subjects:** Political Studies; Sociology; Development Studies; Population & Development; Development Policy; Economics and Development

**Keywords:** Social grants; human rights; international migrants; refugees; social protection; South Africa; ubuntu

### 1. Background and contextualisation

Although the concept of “social protection” encompasses a wide range of definitions and remains unfamiliar, social protection is broader than the term “social security” and entails all programmes and initiatives of the state or private organisations that aim to provide income and transfers to the poor, and to protect vulnerable and marginalised groups from risks, deprivation and poverty (Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2003; Devereux & Nzabamwita, 2018; Fall & Steenkamp, 2020). Based on this definition, South Africa probably has the most comprehensive social protection system for a developing country. The country’s two-pillar social protection system comprises social insurance and social assistance (Devereux, 2010; Nzabamwita, 2021). The social insurance pillar comprises government-administered contributory funds that are not necessarily for poverty alleviation, but to compensate people for certain risks and events, such as the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) for workers during a period of income loss; the Compensation Fund (CF) for medical care for sick and injured workers; and the Road Accident Fund (RAF) for victims of traffic accidents (Fall & Steenkamp, 2020; Nzabamwita, 2021; World Bank, 2021).

The pillar of social assistance consists of tax-financed social grants in the form of regular cash and food transfers to the neediest population outside the labour market, that is, those who are ineligible for private insurance or who receive inadequate benefits. Social grants are also complemented by Expanded Public Works Programmes (EPWPs), which are employment-based basic income security for the working-age population. Social grants—the focus of this paper—are South Africa’s “social safety net”, primarily providing temporary relief to the poor and needy in times of complete destitution (Devereux, 2010; World Bank, 2021). From this perspective, social grants are the most widespread interventions of South Africa’s social security system that are credited for reducing the depth and severity of poverty and income inequality at household level, and reversing the effects of the discriminatory policies of the apartheid regime at national level (Fall & Steenkamp, 2020).

Over time, the South African government has significantly augmented the budget allocated to social grants. In 2011, a total of R69 billion, equivalent to 3.2% of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP), was spent on social grant benefits alone (Fall & Steenkamp, 2020). This is relatively higher than the average of 1.4% of GDP that other developing countries with similar socio-economic conditions as South Africa spent on social safety nets (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2019). In real terms, South African government spending on social assistance as a share of GDP has grown at an average annual rate of 5% of GDP from R162.9 billion in 2018/19 to R202.9 billion in 2021/22 (World Bank, 2021). This growth puts South Africa on the global map of countries with a “generous welfare system”. Currently at 3.31% of GDP compared to 1.4% in Brazil, 1.5% in India, 1.9% in Russia, and 2.7% in most Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, South Africa tops the list of countries spending the most on social assistance and ranks tenth among countries for which social spending data is available (Fall & Steenkamp, 2020; World Bank, 2021).

As a result of high government expenditure on social assistance, the number of people accessing social grants in South Africa gradually increased from 2.8 million in 1998 to nearly 11 million in 2006 (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2019). This number substantially rose to about 17.5 million people in 2019. Of South Africa's population of about 57 million, approximately 18.5 million people, mostly children and the elderly, currently receive social grants (Statistics South Africa (STATS SA), 2021; World Bank, 2021).

In the past few years, South Africa's social assistance system underwent considerable policy changes and reforms. One of the changes relevant to migration was the inclusion of foreign nationals in social assistance programmes. In 2012, the Minister of Social Development announced an amendment to Section 5 (2) of the Social Assistance Act No. 13 of 2004, which previously denied foreign migrants access to social assistance benefits in South Africa (Brockhoff, 2013). In line with the amended legislation, refugees recognised by the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) and who meet the legislated criteria of the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) and other accompanying conditions became eligible for all social grants provided by the South African government, apart from the War Veterans Grant (WVG) (Brockhoff, 2013; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2012).

Another notable policy change in the South African social assistance landscape was the Supreme Court ruling on 18 June 2020, by which SASSA was instructed to enact new legislation and publish changes to its policy, thereby allowing asylum seekers and migrants from Angola, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho holding temporary dispensation permits without income during the COVID-19 pandemic, to apply for the Social Relief of Distress Grant (SRDG; Southern African Legal Information Institute (SAFLII), 2020; Scalabrini Centre, 2020). The bold policy changes to permit international migrants access to social grants conform to the South African Constitution. As discussed later in this paper, the South African Constitution is a rights-based document that guarantees socio-economic rights to all people living in the country, including the rights to appropriate and adequate social assistance (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 1996).

Complementing the South African Constitution in terms of migrant protection is the South African Refugee Act No. 130 of 1998, which is hailed by many as a progressive and internationally migrant-friendly framework for refugee policy around the world (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 1998). The Refugee Act upholds the human rights and recognises the dignity of the refugee and asylum seeker migrant population. The main feature of the refugee policy is that asylum seekers, refugees and their immediate family members are not confined to camps in South Africa. Instead, this category of migrants is encouraged to self-settle and self-integrate in the South African society, where it is assumed that the government takes care of asylum seekers' basic needs and refugees receive social services in a similar fashion as they are provided to their South African counterparts (Dinbabo & Carciotto, 2015; Khan & Kolabhai, 2021).

Notwithstanding the exceptionally high GDP allocation to social grants, a constitution that guarantees socio-economic rights to all, and a pro-refugee policy, asylum seekers are excluded from social assistance, and a large number of eligible refugees are unable to access social grants in South Africa. Statistics show that the number of migrants who receive social assistance grants is relatively small compared to that of South African citizens (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021). For instance, out of the three million migrants living in South Africa (Statistics South Africa (STATS SA), 2020; World Bank, 2018), only a tiny percentage of about 1%, of them, that is, 51,604 people (11,602 refugees and 40,002 permanent residents) were receiving social grants at the end of July 2021, compared to more than 30% of the 57 million South Africans who benefitted from social grants during the same period (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021). For migrant children in particular, their situation in accessing social grants is described as a "grim reality" (Africa Check, 2018). The report from SASSA's Department for Strategic Monitoring indicates that in the fiscal year 2020/2021, a total of only 22,821 international migrant children benefitted from child grants, that is, 12,236 with permanent residence and 10,585 with refugee status (Republic of South Africa

(RSA), 2021). This is only about 1.5% of the total 13.5 million recipients of government child grants, compared to 57% of the South African child population who benefitted from all social grants prescribed for children (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021).

The low take-up rate of social grants by international migrants is of great concern in a country characterised by soaring levels of poverty, unemployment and widespread food insecurity. Using the 2020 prices, the World Bank reports that 55.5% of the South African population lives below the upper national poverty line of R1,268, 25% suffer from food poverty of R585, while an estimated 18.5% of the population lives below the international poverty line of R28 (\$1.90) per day (World Bank, 2020). Although statistics of poverty among migrants is very hard to get, a plethora of studies show that the refugee population in South Africa lives in more precarious circumstances than citizens of South Africa (Khan & Kolabhai, 2021; Nzabamwita, 2015, 2018), and four out of six migrants lost their income and livelihood due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Mukumbang et al., 2020; Washinyira, 2020, 2022).

Against the above backdrop, the overall aim of this study is to explore migrants' plights and rights to social protection in South Africa. Within this aim, the study has the following specific objectives: to identify social protection programmes that are in place for international migrants in South Africa, and to investigate the challenges and constraints that deter refugee migrants from accessing social assistance benefits in South Africa. It is envisioned that findings from this study will be used to provide evidence-based recommendations on how to improve accessibility of social grants for migrant populations in South Africa.

This research paper comprises five sections. After a general overview of the South African social protection system with specific reference to social grant benefits, the remainder of the paper proceeds as follows: **First**, it discusses the literature on the social assistance benefits to which internal migrants are entitled. **Second**, it traces the main institutional framework for the provision of social assistance to non-citizens. **Third**, it describes the methodology used for data collection. **Fourth**, it presents the findings of the study. **Fifth**, the concluding section introduces the concept of "ubuntu" as a guiding principle and best practice that the South African government could draw upon in providing social assistance to asylum-seeking migrants from the identified indigent groups.

## 2. Conceptual framework of social grants in South Africa

There are seven instruments of unconditional social assistance grants distributed by the Department of Social Development (DSD) and administered by the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) to the poorest and the neediest members of the South African population. Except for the War Veterans' Grant (WVG), which requires South African citizenship as one of the eligibility criteria, refugees and permanent residents are eligible for virtually all the social assistance instruments. These include three that target children—Child Support Grant (CSG); Foster Care Grant (FCG); and Care Dependency Grant (CDG)—and four social grants that target the adult population—Old Age Grant (OAG); Disability Grant (DG); Grant-in-Aid (GIA); and Social Relief of Distress Grant (SRDG; Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2020b). Table 1 below contains an exposition of all these grants.

### 2.1. Means-testing and targeting

To ensure that social grants reach the neediest segment of the population—both citizens of South Africa and migrants—a means test and targeting based on applicants' income levels are applied. In practice, a person or household is considered poor, and therefore in need of social grant, if the applicant's own income and assets (if single) and those of his or her spouse (if married) are below the established threshold. Beside the FCG, all other social grants awarded in South Africa are subject to a means test, and each grant has its own specific requirements. Social grants for children do not consider the value of the applicant's assets. However, to apply for the CSG, an applicant must have an annual income of no more than R50,400 (if single) or R10,800 (if married),

**Table 1. Summary of social grants and conditionalities prescribed for migrants in South Africa**

Grant	Description
<b>Child Support Grant</b>	The Child Support Grant (CSG) is an amount of cash usually provided monthly to citizens of South Africa, refugees, and permanent residents who are primary caregivers of children aged between birth and 18 years (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2020b). The goal of the CSG is to help poor households cover the costs of raising children, influence birth rates, alleviate child poverty, and redistribute income (Fall & Steenkamp, 2020). As of April 2022, the income from the CSG is R480 per child (approximately US\$32) <sup>1</sup> (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021). As displayed in Table 2, the CSG is the second largest grant among the migrant population after the OAG. By the end of July 2021, a total of 22,825 migrants have benefitted from this grant (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021).
<b>Foster Care Grant</b>	The Foster Care Grant (FCG) is the money paid to citizens of South Africa, refugees and permanent resident migrants to support foster children (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2020b). To qualify, the children must be placed in the care of foster parents who are appointed by the courts and supervised by social workers. The children should not have been formally adopted; a Children's Court should have addressed the foster care case; or the children involved were orphaned (Fall & Steenkamp, 2020). The FCG is relatively higher than the CSG; a monthly amount of R1,070 (about US\$71) is granted to families to cover the costs of caring for or raising children who are not their own (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021). The FCG ceases once the foster child is officially adopted, as it is intended to provide relief and a lifeline to children at risk of abuse, neglect, or exploitation. By July 2021, a total of 274 migrants, that is, 259 permanent residents and 15 refugees, have received this subsidy (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021).
<b>Care Dependency Grant</b>	The Care Dependency Grant (CDG) consists of a monetary amount paid to South African, refugee, or permanent resident caregivers who are caring for a child under the age of 18 who suffers from a mental or severe physical disability and requires full-time care (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021). A monthly amount of R1,990 (approximately US\$132) is awarded, and by July 2021, there were 514 migrants who received this grant (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021).
<b>Disability Grant</b>	The Disability Grant (DG) is a monthly amount of R1,990 (approximately US\$132) provided to South African citizens, refugees, and permanent residents between the ages of 18 and 59 who are not receiving other government grants and are not being cared for in a government institution and who are physically and mentally unable to participate effectively in labour market activities (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021). The disability must be severe, temporary, or permanent. To determine this, a panel of nurses and social workers must conduct the assessment, and appointed doctors at the district or provincial level must conduct an examination to confirm the disability (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2020b). When a beneficiary of a DG reaches the age of 60, the grant automatically becomes an OAG. By July 2021, there were 1,192 migrants receiving a DG in South Africa (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021).

(Continued)

**Table 1. (Continued)**

Grant	Description
<b>Old Age Grant</b>	The Old Age Grant (OAG), also known as the State Pension Grant (SPG), consists of a monthly income provided to elderly South African citizens, refugees, and permanent residents who are 60 years and older (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2020b). As of April 2022, SASSA pays R1,890 (approximately US \$126) per month and R1,900 (about US\$127) per month to beneficiaries older than 60 years and 70 years, respectively (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021). OAG applicants must not be housed in government institutions. A total of 26,228 foreigners were receiving this grant as at the end of July 2021 (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021).
<b>Grant-in-Aid</b>	The Grant-in-Aid (GIA) is intended to cover the full cost of care for adult persons who are unable to care for themselves and can be applied for together with other social grants. In practice, GIA is paid as supplemental income to recipients of disability, old-age, and veterans' benefits who require regular care from another person because of their mental condition and physical disability (Fall & Steenkamp, 2020). GIA applicants must not be receiving care in a state or state-subsidised facility (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2020b). This is to avoid the “double-dipping effect”, in which the state incurs double costs by paying both the facilities and the beneficiary. For GIA, a monthly amount of R480 (approximately US \$32) is granted, and by the end of July 2021, there were 463 migrants who received this grant (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021).
<b>Emergency Assistance Grant or Social Relief of Distress Grant</b>	The Social Relief of Distress Grant (SRDG) provides temporary and urgent assistance for people who are in crisis or need immediate help to survive. It is a form of assistance for people in unforeseen events, crises, and catastrophic situations. The SRDG is usually provided to beneficiaries monthly for a maximum period of three months and is sometimes extended to six months in exceptional circumstances (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2020b). It usually consists of an amount of R460 (about US\$30) per month per person (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021). The SRDG can be provided as an in-kind benefit in the form of food parcels or vouchers, rather than as a cash transfer. As at 21 July 2021, there were 463 migrants receiving these grants (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021). Since the SRDG is intended for individuals affected by a disaster, the most recent assistance is that of the Corona virus—the COVID-19 SRDG.

(Continued)

Grant	Description
<b>COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant</b>	The COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant (COVID-19 SRDG) is a temporary grant, but there is discussion about making it a permanent part of the South African social protection system. It was introduced in May 2020 during the National State of Disaster, which led to a complete lockdown because of the global COVID-19 pandemic that destroyed people's livelihoods (SAFLI, 2020). The COVID-19 SRDG consists of an amount of R350 (approximately US\$23) paid monthly to adults who receive no income or other assistance during the lockdown (Scalabrini Centre, 2020). Persons who are eligible for the COVID-SRDG, include South African citizens and permanent residents, registered refugees and asylum seekers, and migrants from Angola, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho who have special dispensation permits (Southern African Legal Information Institute (SAFLII), 2020; Scalabrini Centre, 2020). Although the exact number of migrants receiving the COVID-19 SRDG could not be determined at the time of writing, Washinyira (2020) reports that as of October 2020, approximately 5,444 asylum seekers and permit holders have received this emergency fund.

while the CDG requires the applicant to have an annual income of no more than R223,200 (if single) or R446,400 (if married; Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2020b).

For social grants aimed at adult recipients, both the applicant's income and asset value are considered. The DG applicant's annual income must not exceed R82,440 (if single) and R164,880 (if married), while the applicant's asset value should not be more than R1,174,800 (single) and R2,349,600 (married; Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2020b). For the OAG, the applicant's annual income must be less than R82,440 (single) and R164,880 (married) and the asset value must not exceed R1,174,800 (single) and R2,349,600 (married; Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2020b). For the COVID-19 SRDG, applicants should not be receiving income or government benefits and should have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Southern African Legal Information Institute (SAFLII), 2020).

## 2.2. Regional distribution of migrant social grant recipients

The Republic of South Africa is divided into nine provinces. The DSD in each province is mandated to make grant payments to migrants living in a particular province. The provinces of South Africa are: Eastern Cape (EC), Free State (FS), Gauteng Province (GP), KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), Limpopo Province (LP), Mpumalanga Province (MP), North West (NW), Northern Cape (NC), and Western Cape (WC). As of July 2021, Gauteng Province had the highest number of migrants receiving social grants with a total of 22,055 recipients, followed by Mpumalanga with 8,321 recipients and Limpopo with 7,969 recipients (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021).

The lowest number of migrants benefitting from grants by July 2021 resided in the Northern Cape Province, followed by the North-West Province with 287 and 1,121 beneficiaries respectively (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021). Contrary to the general trend among South African citizens where the CSG has the highest take-up rate, the number of migrant grant beneficiaries is the highest in the OAG with 26,228, and the lowest in the FCG with 274 recipients (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021). The spatial distribution of social grants to international migrants in South Africa, excluding the number of the COVID-19 SRDG recipients in each province is illustrated in Table 2 below.



**Table 2. Number of migrant beneficiaries of social grants by province (as of July 2021)**

Region	EC	FS	GP	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	Total
<b>Grants</b>										
CDG	28	11	166	40	47	53	6	5	158	514
CSG	845	438	8,873	978	4,645	2,978	345	85	3,638	22,825
DG	59	29	258	59	192	328	29	32	206	1,192
FCG	7	6	41	8	111	74	7	1	19	274
GIA	9	9	49	43	118	172	5	11	47	463
OAG	729	769	12,668	1,852	2,856	4,716	729	153	1,866	26,338
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,677</b>	<b>1,262</b>	<b>22,055</b>	<b>2,980</b>	<b>7,969</b>	<b>8,321</b>	<b>1,121</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>5,934</b>	<b>51,606</b>

Source: Authors' own calculation based on SASSA report (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2021).

### 3. Regulations for the provision of social assistance to migrants

#### 3.1. National legal frameworks

In South Africa, rights to access social assistance programmes are enshrined in the constitution. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 1996) is the supreme law of the land and serves to “define the functions and duties of the state and set out the rights that people must enjoy”. The preamble to the constitution calls on South Africa to be a social state and to build an inclusive, comprehensive social protection system that is fair to all residents of the country (Oliver, 2010).

In building a non-discriminatory social security system, the South African Constitution contains many basic legal provisions regarding migrants’ social welfare rights, including the mechanisms for implementing, enforcing, and adjudicating those rights. More specifically, Chapter Two of the South African Constitution entrenches the Bill of Rights, and Section 27 (1) (c) of this chapter makes provision for the socio-economic rights that all South Africans, including immigrants living in South Africa, must enjoy (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 1996). It states that “everyone has the right to access social security, including adequate social assistance for those who are unable to support themselves and their families” (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 1996). It further states that “the State should take appropriate legislative and other measures within its means to achieve the progressive realization of social rights” (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 1996).

The provisions of the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution mean that migrants with refugee residency permits and those with permanent residency permits are entitled to the same rights as South Africans, except for a set of political rights that are strictly limited to South African citizens (Addaney & Quan, 2015). These political rights are set out in Section 19 of the South African Constitution and include rights to form or join a political party and rights to vote or stand for political positions (Dinbabo & Carciotto, 2015; Kavuro, 2018).

Aspirations of the South African Constitution impose duty and responsibility on the state to provide social assistance to the poor migrants and their dependants. However, the constitution contains a caveat and recognises that the government might not have sufficient resources to provide social security. Hence, the constitution recommends that if all resources and means have been exhausted, and the state is unable to fulfil its obligations of providing social assistance, an alternative solution must be found. Some of the solutions to be considered include seeking development partners’ support, inviting or making specific arrangements with the United Nations agencies, and partnering with the private sector. The Scalabrini Centre (2020) and the Southern African Legal Information Institute (SAFLII; 2020) argue that, if the government fails to meet its constitutional obligations to protect and fulfil the rights of migrants or deprives them of their rights to social security, the courts can be approached, and compliance is to be imposed.

#### 3.2. International legal frameworks

In accordance with its rights-based constitution, South Africa has also acceded to and ratified several international instruments in the form of declarations, standards, regulations, treaties, conventions, and protocols which require the government to promote and protect human rights and human dignity and ensure the provision of social protection to migrants and stateless persons residing in the country. Of relevance to the provision of social assistance to migrants are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR), and the African Convention for the Protection of Refugees (ACPR). In general, the UDHR underpins all fundamental human rights that must be universally and globally protected (Dinbabo, 2020; Fourie, 2021; Nyeti et al., 2007). It is based on the principle that “all people who are not nationals of the country in which they live by virtue of their humanity and dignity should enjoy their fundamental human rights and States should strive to achieve this goal” (Makhema, 2009). The UDHR is not a legally binding document for the South African government (Brickenstein, 2015). However, it has become an integral part of the legal system as the South

African government has endorsed its purpose and preamble to create a common understanding of human rights, fundamental freedoms, and common standards for all people living in South Africa (Lamarche, 2014; Makhema, 2009). The human rights declarations contain some important aspects that advocate for immigrants' right to social protection, including social security. Article 22 states:

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to the realization, through national efforts and international cooperation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights essential to his dignity and to the free development of his personality. (Brickenstein, 2015, p. 7)

In addition, the UDHR document also addresses other areas of social protection and prescribes the rights of all people, including migrants, as follows:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. (Van Rensburg, 1997, p. 23)

Furthermore, the UDHR gives special recognition to children and other vulnerable groups such as lactating and pregnant women, the elderly, and the disabled in terms of social protection. From this perspective, the Declaration calls on the South African government to guarantee the entitlements to "special care and assistance" for this category of vulnerable groups by ensuring that children and their families live in dignity and that their incomes are supplemented by many means, including social protection (Van Rensburg, 1997). Based on the UDHR, the South African government signed the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Program of Action in 1995, which contains an important commitment and establishes a basic framework that places migrants at the centre of sustainable development. The main purpose of the Copenhagen Declaration is to call on the government to prioritise social development, promote the full integration of migrants, and address the problem of discrimination by investing in the eradication of poverty, the improvement of human well-being, and the promotion of cooperation to achieve a safe, just, and stable society for all people regardless of their origin and nationality (Correll, 2008; Mutanda, 2022).

In addition to the social development commitments promoted by the Copenhagen Declaration, South Africa has acceded to another law through the 1996 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which requires states to ensure social security for all (Fourie, 2021; Makhema, 2009; Samsudin et al., 2022). The main principle of the Covenant is to ensure the protection of social, economic and cultural rights of all people, regardless of their origin and nationality. Indeed, Article 2 (1) of the Covenant describes how States and their institutions can achieve social protection:

States parties must undertake this obligation individually or through international assistance or cooperation to realize access to social security for all, progressively and to the fullest extent of available resources. (Nyeti et al., 2007, p. 9)

The Covenant also includes specific equality rules for developing countries such as South Africa, according to Article 2 (3) of the ICESCR:

Developing countries must decide and determine the extent to which they will guarantee the economic rights recognized in this Covenant to non-citizens, considering human rights and dignity in their economies. (Nyeti et al., 2007, p. 10)

Both the UDHR and the Copenhagen Declaration formed the basis for the drafting and formulation of the African Convention for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons.

The Convention is a rights-based protection instrument founded on the humanitarian principle of non-discrimination against refugees and asylum seekers based on race, sex, nationality or religion. The Convention obligates all governments to provide protection to all people classified as “forced migrants” living within their borders. In addition to prohibiting discrimination, the Convention Relating to Refugees and Stateless Persons requires states to provide forced migrants and other foreign migrants with the same social benefits as citizens (Foster et al., 2016). Article 23 of the African Convention on Refugees contains the following provision:

Refugees should have the same rights as citizens and receive the same treatment as nationals when it comes to issues of public assistance and social welfare. (Makhema, 2009, p. 16)

In essence, the above international instruments are rights and dignity-based social protection instruments built on the humanitarian principle of non-discrimination against non-citizens because of gender, religion, race or nationality. They might not be legally binding on the South African government but impose moral obligations and responsibilities on it—they are simply “customary law” of South Africa. Gerber (2011) argues that international instruments on the protection of migrants constitute what are known as an “International Bill of Rights” in terms of promoting equal treatment of foreign nationals in South Africa. By acceding to these documents and instruments, therefore, the South African government has committed itself to the goals of social development and the welfare of international migrants within its sphere of influence.

#### **4. Research approach and methodology**

Although this study presents various kinds of quantitative data, overall, the study is qualitative in nature. It adopted a hybrid method of secondary data analysis and primary data collection to understand the issues involved in the social protection for international migrants in South Africa, specifically pertaining to rights and adversities in accessing social grants.

##### **4.1. Data source and sampling strategy**

The research team collected secondary data from different literature sources, including textbooks, online journal articles, government publications and policy documents as well as research reports from national and international organisations. On the other hand, the researchers collected primary data by means of semi-structured questionnaires administered to 103 heads of migrant households that receive social grants, conducted in-depth interviews with five key informants from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that assist migrants, and conducted a focus group discussion (FGD) with 12 members of migrant communities.

The study used a non-probabilistic sampling strategy to choose participants. The research team purposively and conveniently selected 15 household heads, as an entry point. These participants then referred the researchers to more participants through the snowballing method, until the desired number was reached. The research team selected informants based on their availability. Moreover, the researchers selected the 12 members of the FGD in a stratified manner, making a considerable effort to include participants from various households, and with different characteristics—age, gender, nationalities, and types of social grants received.

The rationale behind the use of the non-probability sampling method was because migrant social grant recipients are geographically dispersed throughout Cape Town, and there was no list of names or sampling frame from which researchers could draw from. For purposes of this study, to qualify as a household head, a person had to be (i) an adult living permanently in the household receiving social grants; (ii) a self-declared household head or appointed by other members. The criteria for key informants were that an individual had to be an appointed representative of an NGO that provides support and services to migrants in South Africa.

#### **4.2. Study area**

The study is situated in South Africa, and participants were chosen from the city of Cape Town in the Western Cape province. Cape Town is of interest to this study because it has the most burgeoning, transforming and gentrifying economy that attracts tens of thousands of vulnerable migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in South Africa (Ruiters et al., 2020). In addition, the Western Cape province is of significance, because in the past it had the highest number of foreign-born people in the country (Africa Check, 2016, 2018). Similarly, the province accounted for the second largest number of migrant grant recipients after the Gauteng province during the 2015–2016 fiscal year (Africa Check, 2018). Additionally, the Western Cape has historically been the province of South Africa with the highest number of eligible migrant children excluded and rejected from social assistance (Africa Check, 2016).

#### **4.3. Data analysis**

For data analysis, the research team used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps of thematic content analysis. The researchers first read the transcripts to establish familiarity and then proceeded with coding meaningful data segments. The research team employed codes such as institutional impediments, system barriers, documentation and communication obstacles to identify various challenges that hampered migrants from accessing social assistance. Thereafter, they identified sub-themes from the most pertinent issues within each code. For example, in institutional impediments, the sub-themes discussed were application and payment of social grants. In the end, the researchers presented and discussed the overarching themes in a narrative format.

#### **4.4. Ethical considerations**

This study was approved by the University of the Western Cape's Research Ethics Committee (Registration number HS17/9/22). During the data collection stage, the researchers translated the various instruments, including interview-guiding questionnaires, consent forms and information sheets, into participants' respective languages. They guaranteed the participants of anonymity and informed participants of their voluntary participation and their rights to withdraw from the study at any time. The research team conducted the interviews and discussions, only after the participants had granted their consent and permission to audio-record all the discussions.

### **5. Findings and discussion**

The South African government has implemented several initiatives and practices to make social grants more accessible in South Africa. These include digitizing the social grant system to reduce the turn-around time for application processing, revising payment processes, either by introducing new payment options such as an e-wallet, or by adding other options that permit beneficiaries to access their grant money at anytime and anywhere in the country. Despite these initiatives, this study found that the institutional constraints and impediments, poor communication, lack of proper documentation, insufficient amounts of social grants, rampant corruption, and a hostile environment prevent non-South African applicants from accessing social assistance programmes or delay existing beneficiaries from receiving social grants in South Africa.

#### **5.1. Institutional challenges and impediments**

Institutional inefficiency and ineffectiveness are some of the major challenges barring migrants from accessing social assistance. The literature suggests that the current government of South Africa inherited institutions from the apartheid regime that are frayed and fragmented. One such institution is the welfare department, which was designed to provide racially differentiated social protection benefits, by which the minority white population group enjoyed high and unrestricted benefits, while the majority indigenous black Africans received low-level benefits (Dekker, 2005; Van der Berg, 1997). The outcome of such segregation is an overburdened and fiscally constrained social assistance system. Hence, as the current government uses social grants to restore social equity, it faces administrative challenges. During the discussions and interviews, key informants pointed out that the SASSA—an agency mandated to manage, administer and pay social grants—

lacks capacity, infrastructure and resources to process new applications and effect payment of social grants timeously.

A further analysis revealed that administrative challenges and capacity problems severely prevented vulnerable migrants from accessing the emergency assistance grant (COVID-19 SRDG), which was introduced in 2020 under the National State of Disaster regulations. The COVID-19 grant featured a paperless, online technology-based application process. However, its processing and delivery was hampered by the lack of a proper system that could handle the high volume of applications (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2020a). The Chief Executive Officer of SASSA reported that after receiving 3.5 million applications, the online system was overwhelmed and experienced teething problems, which led to a total “system crash” (Gronbach et al., 2022; Seekings, 2020). As a result of the system crash, many eligible applicants—South Africans and migrants alike—felt frustrated and abandoned their applications for the cash-based emergency fund.

Asylum seekers and short-term permit holders particularly faced multiple other barriers. Key informants indicated that short-term migrants and asylum seekers were initially excluded from receiving the COVID-19 SRDG. When they were admitted, following the Supreme Court ruling, the SASSA system could not accommodate their permits because it only recognised the 13-digit identity documents assigned only to South Africans. According to Washinyira (2022), applicants with asylum-seeker permits and dispensation permits had to wait for a special application portal that took more than four months to become operational. They then experienced more delays, awaiting the validation of their documents and verification for their income and employment status. Khan and Kolabhai (2021) and Washinyira (2020) argue that verifying migrants’ income is an impossible exercise because the majority derive their income from informal sectors and are not registered in the government data base. Consequently, large numbers of migrants were rejected, and the very few whose applications were successful missed out on the payments, because the grant pay-outs began much later than that of their South African counterparts.

Another challenge was accessing the online application process. This study established that many migrants failed or struggled to access the online application portal, either because of limited knowledge or general lack of access to digital technology. FGD members emphasised that most communities in informal settlements do not have access to cell phones, computers, and laptops. Moreover, those residing in urban areas lack technical knowledge on how to use digital devices or do not have internet networks, airtime, or data packages for connectivity. Resultantly, the digital system made it difficult or impossible for many prospective migrants to submit their applications. To some extent, this finding corroborates Washinyira’s (2022) survey, which disclosed that despite adding six million beneficiaries to the system, the virtual online application system did not permit grant applicants who were rejected in the first round to lodge their appeals because emails went unanswered. This is also consistent with Gronbach et al.’s (2022) study that found that SASSA was inundated with numerous calls and complaints and had difficulty handling them. This resulted in a large number of migrants feeling demotivated, becoming discouraged and seeing little value in further pursuing their applications.

The findings by which prospective beneficiaries are frustrated by the system and subsequently abandon their applications were not only limited to international migrants during the emergency assistance. Instead, they corroborate results from other studies that highlight several trials and tribulations experienced by internal South African migrants in their attempts to claim their payments and update their information in the SASSA database. For instance, the study by Valley (2016) shows that internal migrants who move between provinces within South Africa are seriously delayed when updating their information—personal details, medical conditions, financial circumstances and payment methods. This further confirms Deacon et al.’s (2015) research, which assert that the myriad reasons, including social and administrative inefficiency, work individually or in tandem with fiscal constraints to obstruct the realisation of social welfare programmes in South Africa.

It also transpired that the means-test and targeting processes preclude refugee migrants from accessing social assistance. SASSA uses a means-testing method to assess eligibility for social grants. In the process, the applicants undergo burdensome bureaucratic procedures and lengthy administrative processes to prove that their income level is below the stipulated threshold. This requires a cumbersome process of submitting a horde of documents consisting of recent pay slips and bank statements, pension certificates, unemployment certificates, birth certificates, affidavits, and proof of address. With all these requirements, household heads concluded that the means-test is complex and sophisticated. In the same vein, key informants noted that the sophisticated means-test penalises and demotivates potential applicants, because some of the documents are difficult to obtain by short-term residents like refugees and asylum seekers. These findings on the complicated procedure are in consonance with Reddy and Sokomani (2008) and Delany and Jehoma (2016), whose research among South Africans demonstrates that the means-test is the catalyst to administrative flaws and deficiencies in social protection. According to these scholars, a sophisticated administrative system prompts welfare officers to take short-cuts, simply interview applicants, and take their information at face value, which results in most income-eligible children being disqualified or excluded from the social grant system.

Moreover, the sophisticated administrative and management system of social grants drives up costs of application in the form of transportation. Recipients of social grants noted that they incurred high costs to travel long distances from one application centre to the next and to make multiple trips to different SASSA offices before being accepted. This was recounted by a participant in the following excerpt:

Applying for social grants is a nightmare. Imagine, to get R400 child support, I had to move from one office to the next because for some reason SASSA staff in certain branches do not accept applications from non-South Africans – perhaps they do not know that refugees are eligible to apply for social grants. When I was turned away at the Bellville branch, I went to Mitchells Plain, where I was repeatedly told to come back the next day. After four visits with no assistance, my friend advised me to go to the Wynberg branch and there I was accepted after two visits (FGD participant).

From a cost-benefit point of view, the above excerpt indicates that the return on investment to access a CSG in terms of time and resources is negative. This finding is not surprising, as a study conducted among South African female grant recipients revealed that a costly and time-consuming application process dilutes and even diminishes the value of the grants, especially social grants that carry small amounts (Wright et al., 2015). This further substantiates the findings from the joint research conducted by the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the Black Sash, in which Piper et al. (2019) assert that in 2018 alone, rural beneficiaries spent up to 6% of their grant money to travel to multiple outlets to claim their money or in bank charges. Likewise, these findings resonate with the hypothesis that a sudden decommissioning of 80% of cash pay points throughout South Africa increased security risks of elderly beneficiaries from rural and peri-urban areas who have to go to the shopping malls to withdraw their grant money (Piper et al., 2019).

Furthermore, there is a problem of long queues and delays in services. Migrant beneficiaries noted that due to the uncertainty in the services, they often sleep on the pavements outside SASSA offices to get help. Similarly, it was pointed out that applicants spend many hours in long lines in scorching sun or rainy weather, without shelter, food, water, and protection, only to be told to go home and return the following day. This finding, by which applicants and beneficiaries camp overnight and wait at SASSA offices, corresponds with what the literature has dubbed, an “endless cycle of problems and crises in the social assistance system” (African News Agency (ANA), 2020; African News Agency (ANA), 2021). For example, the African News Agency (ANA; 2021) reported that in January 2021, grant recipients and applicants—both migrants and South Africans—were forced to wait for hours in long, snail-moving queues in terrible weather, and without protection at various welfare offices in the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Gauteng provinces. Afterwards, it was proclaimed that the waiting

resulted in the deaths of two people, and police used water cannons and rubber bullets to disperse the crowd and enforce social distancing (African News Agency (ANA), 2021).

### **5.2. Communication and documents**

Poor communication and lack of proper documentation present additional challenges to accessing social grants. To establish eligibility, applicants must undergo interviews, and there have been concerns about the language used. According to recipients of the DG and the OAG, the entire process—from application to payment—is written exclusively in a highly technical language that migrants cannot master. Interviews are conducted in English and paperwork is completed without the assistance of an interpreter. In addition to the use of English, FGD members complained about the problem of poor, unclear, and inadequate communication from SASSA and the general lack of information about the available grants they can apply for. This was expressed in the following narrative:

SASSA's communication methods and approaches are problematic. Sending messages, emails, text messages, and written notifications to illiterate beneficiaries does not work, and sending postal letters to beneficiaries in informal settlements that get lost is untenable. These fancy and lengthy messages in a complicated language make it very difficult for non-English speakers and exclude us French speakers as we cannot follow and know what is happening at SASSA (Female head of household).

Communication is a two-way approach. In South Africa, the Social Assistance Act compels both beneficiaries and SASSA to engage in regular communication—at least 90 days before the social grant elapses—for the purpose of updating information and reviewing social grants (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2020b). However, a deeper analysis of responses from migrants such as the excerpt above, blames SASSA for the poor communication. This finding somehow contradicts Mtshali (2020), whose observations put the blame on both parties for the lack of communication. He argues that in the Gauteng province many beneficiaries failed to comply and request for a review on time, which resulted in their grants being suspended, while the SASSA letter informing recipients that they are due for review, did not reach them.

Another pertinent issue that was raised concerns documentation. Household heads noted with concern that the refugee documents have a short validity period, as they must be renewed every six months or four years. Every time that a new refugee status is issued, it should be verified and during the verification, social grants are suspended and bank account frozen. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the department responsible for documenting foreign nationals in South Africa, is under-resourced and eroded by mismanagement, corruption, and fraud and has a backlog of unprocessed applications (Landau et al., 2005). To make matters worse, the DHA is not processing new asylum cases in most Refugee Reception Offices (RROs). In addition, due to the pandemic, in March 2020, the DHA suspended all refugee services across the country, and migrants have consequently been unable to file applications or renew their documents. At the time of writing this article, services were still suspended. The Minister of Home Affairs offered a blanket renewal of residency permits and established an online renewal system for asylum-seeker permits and refugee status (Scalabrini Centre, 2020). However, many refugees and asylum seekers still struggle to renew their documents, and without valid documents they are self-excluded, or unable to access their grant payments (Washinyira, 2022).

Another obstacle related to documentation is the lack of birth certificates for children. This study's fieldwork revealed that many eligible migrant children, particularly infants without birth certificates and adolescents born outside of South Africa, are excluded from receiving social grants. Many applicants of the CSG lamented that their applications were denied on the grounds that their children's names on the abridged certificate did not match those on their parents' documents, because in some countries and cultures, children do not necessarily have to bear their parents' surnames.



In line with the existing body of knowledge, it could be argued that freezing migrants' bank accounts and their inability to access services—including social grants—with expired documents realign with the requirement of the Financial Intelligence Centre Act (FICA) No. 38 of 2001 (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2001). Widely critiqued for making migrants' lives in South Africa “unbearable” and “miserable” (see, e.g., Bester et al., 2010; Nzabamwita, 2015), FICA's provisions require institutions in South Africa to perform due diligence by regularly verifying information and profiles of foreigners with whom they engage in business dealings and reporting them for deportation if their documents have expired (Bester et al., 2010).

Regarding the challenge of documentation, stringent conditions governing birth certificates for the receipt of the CSGs have been a contentious issue amongst political pundits and defenders of human rights. The former underscore that a birth certificate is a mandatory life-long passport to establish a child's age, origin, and information on parents and guardians. The human rights defenders, on the other hand, advocate that the exclusion of migrant children from social assistance based on documents—which children have no control over—is a violation of their rights to social protection. Between the dichotomy of politics and human rights, this study upholds the view that the existing corpus of international instruments signed and ratified by South Africa and its constitutional obligations—discussed in section 3—should be respected and upheld to ensure that children enjoy their fundamental human rights of social assistance.

### **5.3. Corruption, hostile environment and stigma**

Other problems that bedevilled migrants are fraud, unfriendly environment and stigmatisation. Widespread corruption, specifically the leakage of funds from institutions of social protection has been well documented (see, e.g., African News Agency (ANA), 2021; Gondwe, 2021; Reddy & Sokomani, 2008). During the Minister of Social Development's presentation, members of the Parliamentary Monitoring Committee highlighted that the emergency food parcel distribution in many provinces was marred by rampant corruption—local councillors either charged beneficiaries delivery fees or diverted food parcels to their own homes (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2020a). In addition, this study further revealed a deliberate inclusion of undeserving and ineligible beneficiaries. According to Gondwe (2021), a staggering R200 millions of taxpayers' money intended for the poor was lost through corruption to over 170,000 public servants who unlawfully applied for and received temporary relief grants in 2021.

While participants in this study did not report any serious anomalies in terms of bribery and corruption on the part of SASSA and its officials, the FGD participants pointed to the negative attitudes of SASSA workers and officials—rudeness and incompetence—and the lack of recreational and other facilities for children in SASSA branch waiting rooms and toilets. In addition, participants cited several instances of people demanding a bribe of R50 to jump the queue while waiting to be served. One head of a household had the following to say:

SASSA centres have become a battleground and a survival zone for all. If it is not the rude SASSA officials who are rude to us foreigners and ask us why we come here, it is the many people who get up early in the morning to get a front place in the queue and later sell their seats (Male head of household).

Other participants, notably white beneficiaries of the DG and OAG, expressed concerns of being stigmatised and discriminated against by their South African counterparts because they are poor, white and immigrants. White respondents of foreign origin who participated in this study reported shameful experiences and humiliation at the hands of other black applicants who questioned whether they are truly poor and deserving of social assistance. A white male participating migrant reported being on the receiving end of the following discriminatory statement:

You poor Europeans, what are you doing here at SASSA? Social grants are meant for us blacks who were driven into poverty by you. You whites benefitted enormously from the apartheid government, so you should not be here fighting us for grants! Instead, you should go back to where you came from (FGD participant).

In contrast to the many studies that report positively on the benefits gained from social grants by households, statements such as the above reflect how social assistance recipients and applicants are shamed, embarrassed, and stigmatised, and often end up abandoning their application efforts. This shameful experience of white migrants is consistent with the notion that being poor and receiving cash transfers to which one has not contributed, compromise one's dignity and lowers one's self-esteem (Roelen, 2019). In social protection, shame and poverty are inextricably linked, as a number of studies in developing countries have shown that poverty causes or reinforces shame and feelings of inferiority (see, e.g., Handa et al., 2018; Roelen, 2019; Wright et al., 2015).

### **6. The need for ubuntu in the provision of social grants**

The current South African social assistance system is associated with insurmountable challenges, barriers, and problems that deter applicants and beneficiaries from accessing and receiving social grants. In addition, this system is squarely based within the institutional and policy framework that excludes asylum seekers from the social protection system. This paper argues that there is an urgent need to incorporate the “ubuntu value” in the provision of social assistance to international migrants in South Africa. The concept of “ubuntu” is loosely translated as “humanness” (Metz, 2014). It is an African philosophy based on the understanding that a person exists through support, compassion, kindness, and help from others (Cobbah, 1987). Ubuntu is a humanitarian principle and practice based on human dignity. Being a dignity-based approach, ubuntu captures the right to economic resources and embraces people's human rights, dignity, equality and freedom (Mkabela, 2005; Nyahunda et al., 2022).

Seen from a human-rights-based approach, Kavuro (2018) argues that the ubuntu value system should supersede all other laws and set a precedent for migrants to enjoy social and economic rights, inalienable to humanity in South Africa. The implication of the ubuntu principle is that the provision of social grants to poor migrants should not only be viewed within the policy and institutional frameworks, but rather be premised on the humanitarian principle, and grounded in the “African ubuntu value system”. From the perspective of ubuntu, deserving asylum seekers should not be deterred from accessing a basic necessity of life, such as the social grants, provided that they meet the means-test requirements. This can be achieved if the Minister of Social Development uses the prerogative power and executive authority vested in the ministerial position to extend social assistance to poor and vulnerable migrants who face challenges of access and asylum seekers who are excluded from social protection systems by the SASSA legislation. In essence, based on the principle of ubuntu and humanitarian grounds, all the needy, including vulnerable migrants, should be afforded social support, including food transfers and social grants to live a dignified life.

### **7. Conclusion and recommendations**

The South African social protection system is on par with that of the developing world in terms of expenditure and coverage of social assistance. Technically, the social assistance pillar is meant for poor South African citizens and permanent residents. However, following legal battles with the DSD and successful litigation by civil society organisations, the South African government promulgated changes in the social protection policy that now accommodate refugees in the social grants system, and include asylum seekers and migrants with dispensation permits in the allocation of temporary cash-based emergency funds. These changes were effected, as mandated by the South African Constitution, in particular Section 2 of the Bill of Rights that guarantees many rights—including social and economic rights—to all who live within the borders of South Africa. The changes were also informed by the international instruments, declarations, treaties, conventions, and protocols, that the South African government has signed, acceded to, and ratified.

Despite having a comprehensive social protection system, underpinned by progressive legislation, the findings of this study revealed that institutional challenges act in tandem with the lack of proper refugee identification documents and poor communication, to deter migrant applicants from accessing social grants and prohibit or delay beneficiaries from receiving social grant benefits in South Africa. In light of these challenges, obstacles, delays and prohibitions, this study recommends that the Minister of Social Development espouses the virtue of the “Ubuntu value” and the “humanitarian principle” and consider the following:

- **Scaling up social grants to include more beneficiaries from vulnerable migrant groups.** Scaling up a programme means increasing or expanding it in size—either horizontally, by extending support to more clients and beneficiaries, or vertically by providing more support to already existing beneficiaries (Devereux & Nzabamwita, 2018). In **horizontal scaling up**, social grants should be extended to poor and vulnerable migrant groups, such as pregnant and lactating women, the elderly, and people with sickness, ill health and disabilities as well as labour-constrained individuals from the population of asylum-seekers and migrants with short-term dispensation permits. In **vertical scaling up**, the amounts of social grants should be increased. The value of the CSG is below the national food poverty line of R585 (World Bank, 2020), and its value is often diluted by the high cost of application and bank charges. Therefore, the paltry amount of R480 given to care-givers must be raised, not only to compensate the level of inflation, but at least to bring it close to the cost of the food basket of an average household in South Africa.
- **Relaxing documentation regulations for application of social grants.** The requirements of most of the formal documentation—including birth certificates for children—disqualify many applicants who would otherwise be entitled to social assistance. Therefore, to ease this constraint, SASSA should consider processing migrant applications under alternative documents, such as accepting police sworn-in affidavits, or written letters and statements from reputable referees, provided that these references contain sufficient and verifiable information of the applicant (e.g., name, age, employment status and income level).
- **Removing the bottleneck in the social assistance management and delivery system.** For social grants to be delivered effectively and efficiently, the system capacity must be increased and strengthened. The three enablers of the pillar of social assistance are human resources (HR), infrastructure, and technology (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2020b). The South African government must consider allocating more resources, and providing increased budgets for social grants, building proper infrastructure, and updating the systems with the latest technology. In addition, the DSD should invest in appropriate HR, that is, trained welfare officers who are aware of the circumstances of migrants and refugees, and employ translators and interpreters of the most dominant and widely spoken languages in the South African migrant communities (e.g., French, Swahili, and Portuguese; Deacon et al., 2015).
- **Combining income means-testing with other targeting methods.** To reduce the risks of excluding eligible and including ineligible applicants—inclusion and exclusion errors caused by the sophisticated means-test—the government should consider and implement alternative targeting methods. There are numerous cost-effective approaches to determine eligibility for social assistance, especially people in the migrant communities who might conceal their income generated from the informal sector. The discussion of these methods falls beyond the scope of this paper. However, SASSA should consider using one of the following methods on its own or in combination with the income means-testing: a proxy means-test that uses observable indicators of poverty; community-based targeting, where community members decide on who is eligible; categorical targeting, where benefits are given to people based on certain categories; and self-targeting, where the really needy people self-select.

## 8. Limitations of the study and future research directions

While conducting this study, two prominent issues emerged. One is the problem of limited time and resources, and another is the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the national lockdown in South Africa. The implication of these challenges is that the study had to rely heavily on secondary data and confine data collection to a small sample that, in a statistical sense, is not representative enough of migrants in the whole country. Lockdown regulations in particular, made it impossible to access officials from the South African government to discuss all these pertinent

issues with them—the effect of migration on the country’s social protection system, and the financing and scaling up of social protection programmes to accommodate migrants. In view of these considerations, this study suggests the following future research focus and priorities:

- An investigation of the macro-economic impact of scaling up social grants to migrants and determine if this will attract more welfare migrants to the country, thus putting further strain on the over-stretched South African social protection system.
- An investigation into how the South African economy can be stimulated and migrants empowered, so that social grants are not treated as substitutes to employment, but instead used as short-term measures to uplift migrants from immediate destitution, until they become self-sufficient and able to provide for themselves and their families.

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#### Author details

Jonas Nzabamwita<sup>1</sup>  
E-mail: [nzabojonas@gmail.com](mailto:nzabojonas@gmail.com)  
Mulugeta Dinbabo<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> South African Research Chair in Industrial Development (SARChI-ID), University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, 2006, South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Social Development, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa.

#### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

#### Authors’ details

##### (1) Jonas Nzabamwita

DSI-NRF South African Research Chair in Industrial Development (SARChI-ID), University of Johannesburg, 31 Henley Road, Auckland Park, Johannesburg 2006, South Africa. Email: [nzabojonas@gmail.com](mailto:nzabojonas@gmail.com).

##### (2) Mulugeta F. Dinbabo

Institute for Social Development, University of the Western Cape, Robert Sobukwe Road, Bellville 7535, Cape Town, South Africa.

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