

## **Building Capacity to Promote Freer Global Mobility**

### **Notes from a CGD-Open Philanthropy Project Workshop**

On July 7, 2015, the Center for Global Development and the Open Philanthropy Project brought together approximately 20 researchers, activists, and non-profit and private sector leaders to identify and assess potential opportunities to allow increased global mobility. We were specifically focused on isolating organizational forms, new and existing, that could help accomplish this goal.

These notes represent a subjective synthesis of events from the organizers' point of view. Viewpoints should not be attributed to specific attendees.

#### **Thematic Overview of the Discussion**

The conversation covered a wide range of topics, with a broad focus on opportunities to encourage freer mobility. Participants were asked to avoid focusing too much on current immigration policy, and to think broadly about what types of institutions would help build a movement towards freer global mobility. Although not every participant actively works on mobility issues, there was general consensus that the current activities to achieve this global goal are limited and that more could be done. Participants generated a number of suggestions about activities and organizations that could attempt to further the goal of freer mobility, but there was no attempt to reach consensus about a single "best way forward." This note attempts to distill overarching themes from the discussion, as well as noting particular observations or opportunities that stood out to the organizers.

#### *Level of Implementation*

Participants discussed the level where the implementation of organizational activities could take place, including micro-level implementation at the community/city level, and macro-level implementation at the international organization level.

Communities and Cities – Civic Engagement: Since migrants become a part of communities that they emigrate to, participants discussed how communities and cities could become more involved in migration and mobility issues. For example, in Canada, communities can monetarily sponsor refugee families through the [Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program](#), which has existed since the 1980s. There was broad interest in this program from participants, with particular interest in the way it engages the general public with refugee integration.

International Efforts: The other side of the spectrum from community-level engagement would be international action. For example, during the international organizations presentation (discussed in more depth below), participants noted that a technical organization could assist governing bodies in making labor agreements that make both parties comfortable. Additionally, transnational advocates (e.g., non-governmental organizations) could focus on developing capacity to draw attention to migration news in a way that turns events into political crises.

#### *Grassroots vs. Elites*

There was an extended discussion on if proponents of freer mobility should focus on grassroots activities or target elites. Those who advocated for grassroots activities noted that some of the most successful movements have had students, activists, faith leaders, and community organizers at the forefront of their efforts. Others, drawing on research by Martin Gilens and others, stated that elite opinion drives policy outcomes and accordingly should be the target of efforts to promote mobility.

Additionally, there was an emphasis on the various ways to get students involved. Participants, alluding to the examples of early civil rights organizing and, more recently, the Federalist Society and Students for Liberty, noted that on-campus clubs can broaden into national movements, especially when students are supported by external funders or donors.

#### *Potential Activities for Pro-Mobility Organizations*

Through these various discussions, participants suggested various activities that different pro-mobility organizations could take on. These included:

- Journalism and reporting about mobility issues
- Story-telling about individual migrants
- Conducting and disseminating empirical research about the impacts of migration
- Grassroots outreach to develop an engaged base of activists
- "Summer camps" or support for migration-related clubs to engage college students
- Developing and promoting workable policy proposals that address an acknowledged shortcoming of the immigration system (e.g., by proposing executive actions to improve the H-2A agricultural guest worker visa system)
- Experimenting with novel organizational forms for facilitating migration (e.g. the Red Campesina program discussed below)
- More radical activities, like accompanying irregular migrants across borders to ensure safe passage, or encouraging employers to publicly acknowledge that they hire unauthorized migrants. One participant noted that the American Friends Service Committee openly employed undocumented immigrants in the late 1980s and argued for a religious exemption to the requirement that they verify the legal status of their employees, but lost at the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit.

#### **Presentations and Breakouts**

As part of the workshop agenda, four participants suggested four potential organizations that could be part of a movement for freer global mobility. They included an international organization that would facilitate and implement labor agreements between countries; a student network that would focus on mobility activism; an employer exchange network that would allow communities of origin and employers to meet and exchange labor under standardized contracts; and a policy lab to bridge the divide between academic research and policy entrepreneurship in mobility work.

#### *International Organizations*

An individual said that the current system of labor mobility is too "soft", as it does not provide any mechanism for reducing barriers to mobility. However, a binding obligation through a multilateral organization (such as the World Trade Organization) would be too "hard" because developed nations have no incentive to accept the terms of such an obligation. Therefore, an ideal scheme would operate in the middle of the two; for example, an organization providing a fee service to help pairs of countries build and implement international labor agreements.

Some felt that this would be a helpful organization, because it could help fund research and disperse factual information about migration, and it would facilitate healthy international cooperation (vs. unilateral activities by receiving countries). However, some questioned whether it would address the underlying political constraints that receiving countries face, i.e., popular preferences against admitting more migrants for social, economic, or political reasons.

The breakout session focused on this topic used the presenter's suggestion as a jumping off point to discuss organizational components of an international institution that could promote freer labor mobility. Discussants suggested that current organizations are mostly focused on industry and employers, so an organization like the one the presenter suggested could provide unique services between international labor markets, such as skill certification and labor protection monitoring and enforcement. The organization would need to carefully consider the states it would target to provide its services, since many receiving countries might not be interested.

#### *Student Network*

Glen Weyl, Microsoft Research, provided an overview of opportunities to target college students to eventually influence migration schemes. He noted that college students are at an age where they can begin to form their identities around specific causes but are still able to take risks. He suggested a few activities students could engage in to raise the profile of potential migrants and the challenges they face, including rescue and accompaniment missions, artistic creations, encouraging employers to openly employ irregular migrants, etc.

While some participants expressed skepticism regarding students' ability to effect change, others noted the significant cultural role that college students appear to play and the fact that many from "elite" universities go on to positions of considerable power and/or influence.

The breakout session that focused on this topic focused on Glen's suggestion of a student network to mobilize around migration issues. They discussed the possibility of various demographics of students who could be interested/involved in a mobility social movement, including economics undergrad students, MBA students, foreign students, and students from religious universities and groups. Participants discussed the importance of having migration discussed more fully in textbooks, especially introductory economics textbooks, to expose students to different ways of thinking about migration. (Participants drew a parallel to free trade, pointing to research from Hainmueller and Hiscox (2006) showing that economics education appears to account for the increased support of free trade amongst college graduates.) Participants also suggested creating a summer institute, perhaps hosted at CGD, that could train students on mobility issues and prepare them for a leadership role in this space.

#### *Employer Exchange Network*

Chuck Barrett, Amanecer, spoke about a current program that he is working on, and its potential for expansion. The program is called "Humanizing the Cycle of Migration," and is a project of a Mexican indigenous communities organization called the "Red Campesina de Pequeños Productores". The program assists communities in Mexico to identify H-2A seasonal agricultural work in the U.S., and then helps those communities to reinvest the money that is made from the seasonal work. The Red Campesina database currently includes roughly 1400 workers, and the program is able charge employers a recruitment fee of roughly \$200/worker. Chuck suggested this program could be scaled-up through an employer exchange network, which would provide a forum by which U.S. employers and Mexican communities of origin could meet and exchange labor under standardized contracts. Additionally, the program could build market share by encouraging large retailers to only do business with sellers that utilize standardized, ethical contracts with their employees.

The breakout session discussed the current model of Red Campesina, identifying various challenges the program faces due to the specificities of the H-2A program, and considering how innovative employer exchange networks could assist employers, employees, and communities of origin. Such networks (perhaps organized online) would make it easier to identify employees for certain agricultural work, and

allow employees to change jobs when needed, and generally streamline the H-2A application process. Online sites might also facilitate and expand the two current union recruitment efforts with H-2A workers.

### *Social Innovation and Policy Lab*

An individual proposed an innovation lab that would pair time-limited academic research and policy entrepreneurs in a forum that would allow them to develop and attempt to enact innovative migration proposals. For example, he suggested that this innovative organization could identify new methods to finance migration to decrease or eliminate the debt load on potential migrants.

In the breakout sessions, participants discussed how to apply social and policy innovation to mobility-related issues. Some suggested they could run small tests on social innovation, but some questioned what the 'widgets' would be for selling to governments or companies keen on trying alternate ideas. Participants discussed the possibility of two branches of such an organization – a programmatic side that would test potential innovations, and a communications/policy side that would highlight the positive experiences of such tests. Others stated that it should also include a coalition-building arm. Participants agreed that such an organization should remain small, and that innovation would come before alternate advocacy options.

Participants also discussed potential innovations that such an organization could develop/assess, including the Canadian experiment with job-matching for refugees; granting greater visa options/accessibility following disasters; and government efforts to encourage temporary rural to urban migration. Other activities could include finding underused migration opportunities within existing rules, proposing tweaks to improve existing programs (e.g., the H-2A program), and identifying policymakers who are willing to experiment.

### *Public Opinion*

This group suggested that public opinion consists of both the "mind side" and the "heart side". An organization could address the mind side by funding journalists to break down myths about mobility or by disseminating information and research about the degree of global inequality. On the heart side, activities such as storytelling and videos could highlight stories in the media to change public opinion through a personal connection to those who have experienced migration or mobility first hand. Additionally, the group discussed the idea of a Speaker Bureau as an organized method for highlighting stories in a variety of fora that could reach policymakers. Participants noted the recent rapid evolution of public opinion on gay marriage and suggested that advocates for freer mobility attempt to learn from the LGBTQ movement. Others noted the role of landmark books in leading a shift in opinion (e.g. *Towards Liquor Control*, at the end of Prohibition, and *The New Jim Crow* more recently), and suggested trying to fund such work around mobility.

### *Existing Organizations*

This breakout session focused on discussing how existing organizations and interest groups that work on immigration policy could expand their work to focus more on promoting freer mobility. Representatives of business groups that traditionally make economic arguments for freer mobility reported that such arguments had limited persuasiveness, while representatives of immigrants' rights groups reported that they had also struggled to attract support using family reunification messages. These participants also noted that their stakeholders had other priorities and did not place the highest emphasis on allowing freer mobility. Accordingly, many participants felt that it was necessary to identify and mobilize a new interest group that supports freer immigration. One proposal for such an interest group was elected

officials in cities or states, who often would like more immigration and might appeal to the national government for greater autonomy over future flows.