



Preface

The Center for Global Development (CGD) is a think tank and policy group focused on the ways that the policies and actions of the rich world spur or impede the pace of development in the poor world. Aid, debt relief, more open markets for developing country exports: these are universally seen as “development” issues, and they generate, if not consensus, then at least a fully shared framework within which debate takes place.

The cross-border movement of people is a different kettle of fish. In an increasingly integrated and liberalized economy, with more open capital and goods and services markets, the highly restricted and heavily regulated markets for global labor are an oddity. Moreover, with huge differentials incomes for equally productive people simply because of where they live; with international and internal migration offering individuals one of the few nearly sure-fire ways to escape poverty, with migrant remittances from rich to poor countries exceeding foreign aid; and with rich countries designing immigration policies to selectively attract the poor world’s most talented and motivated people—with all this it

is obvious that international migration and global labor mobility truly are “development” issues.

Even so, it was and is controversial for the Center for Global Development to foster work on international migration for three reasons. First, many in the development community did not, and do not, regard the movement of people as “development.” For them, development takes place *within* countries or nation-states. The movement of people across borders—no matter their success in a new setting—is a symptom of failed development, not a contribution to sustained transformation of the third world.

Second, the politics of labor and migration policy in rich countries are so hugely contentious that it is reasonable to wonder whether smart new analysis of the issue from a development perspective could lead to better policies. Anti-immigration sentiment is rising in the United States and Europe. “Globalists” and rich world development advocates, who might otherwise support greater labor mobility for unskilled workers, hesitate given the potential negative effects on wages and income inequality in the receiving countries. And there is understandable ambivalence about the possible risk to poor countries of the so-called brain drain.

Third, the movement of unskilled or semi-skilled labor across borders from poor countries to rich countries disproportionately benefits three groups: those from the poor countries who move to higher wages; the richer part of the rich country population who benefit from lower wages for labor intensive services and whose wages are not threatened; and potentially labor intensive industries located in rich countries. This makes for an odd political coalition. Development advocates may have joined with people of faith to support debt relief, but a “development friendly” coalition of Oxfam and meatpacking plants in the Midwest is harder to envision.

The topic is too big to be ignored, however. From CGD’s beginnings I resolved to exploit our advantages of analytic strength and political independence to put international migration and labor mobility more firmly on the global development agenda—even recognizing the limits of our potential influence on practical policy change. Our work on migration and labor mobility includes:

—The Commitment to Development Index, which ranks rich countries in terms of their policies and practices that affect development, “rewards” those countries with more open immigration policies for unskilled labor and for students.

—*Give Us Your Best and Brightest*, by senior fellow Devesh Kapur and his coauthor John McHale. Published last year, the book documents the growing competition of OECD countries for global talent, discusses how impli-

cations for poor countries differ depending on their circumstances, and proposes policies for the United States and other rich countries that respect the rights of talented people to move while also creating incentives for them to continue to contribute to their own country's development.

—An emerging body of work by CGD fellow Michael Clemens on the impact of emigration on developing countries' own prospects. His initial finding that emigration of African health professionals has no measurable effect on sending countries' health indicators is already reshaping the thinking of analysts and development practitioners. His work is also influencing U.S. legislative proposals on the issue.

To this solid body of work, I am delighted that we are now adding *Let Their People Come: Breaking the Gridlock on Global Labor Mobility*, an uncommon and exciting book by non-resident fellow Lant Pritchett. *Let Their People Come* examines the potentials and perils of greater cross-border mobility of unskilled labor—within poor world regions and between rich and poor countries. It is both a scholarly book and a fascinating read—with lessons for anyone interested in development and the global labor market, and for everyone interested in international migration more generally.

Pritchett portrays the cross-border mobility of unskilled workers and their families as occurring in the midst of a clash of “irresistible forces” and “immovable ideas.” The irresistible forces include demographics (especially aging populations in the rich world and the need for young, tax-paying workers to keep the economy running and support retiree pensions) and the widening income gap between rich and poor countries. The immovable ideas are the anti-immigration sentiments of a large segment of rich country voters, who have legitimate concerns about the impact of low-skill migrant workers on public services, possible security risks, implications of the existing low-income workers, and potential cultural impacts.

But Pritchett also documents the tremendous gains to be had from greater labor mobility—gains that far outweigh the risks. All calculations suggest that even a very modest expansion in labor mobility can lead to economic gains for citizens of poor countries that far exceed all foreign aid, all the potential gains to the poor countries from the most optimistic Doha round scenario, and total debt relief. He makes proposals not for a new “global regime”—a politically unattainable goal in the foreseeable future—but for bilateral “deals” between rich and poor countries that set up ingenious arrangements for labor mobility, which would benefit not only those who cross borders to work but those they leave behind in sending countries, and those they join in the receiving countries.

Perhaps no other domain of the international system reveals that the world is not flat more profoundly than international migration and global labor mobility. The world is flat for goods, downhill for capital, but a steep uphill climb for workers—especially unskilled workers with the misfortune of not having been born with the right nationality. No other circumstance of birth—not race, gender, ethnicity, or parental socioeconomic status—so completely determines life chances as the nation of birth, essentially because of border restrictions on the mobility of labor. I feel certain that *Let Their People Come* will generate a new round of healthy debate on what should be seen as a critical and enduring development topic of this new century.

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