

Global Trust Fellowship

Research Proposal Summary: Global Coordination of Temporary Migration

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An important issue in the context of global migration is the relevant welfare prism through which immigration policies are being shaped. A global prism of welfare includes overall welfare of all stakeholders, including host countries, source countries, the migrants themselves and other involved third parties. A challenging question is whether and how to induce policymakers in host countries to consider the welfare of others in their intrastate policymaking, that traditionally tends to ignore the negative externalities of local policies on foreigners outside their territory as well as within it. This question becomes particularly perplexing in the context of immigration law, in which setting boundaries and fences unilaterally backed by mechanisms of admission and exclusion of foreigners, is considered a fundamental power of the sovereign state.

Addressing that question in the context of work migration requires drawing a relevant distinction between high-skilled and low-skilled workers. States sometimes encourage high-skilled workers to remain for longer terms or permanently given the investment in their local training and the high return they deliver for that. High-skilled migrants possess, therefore, much higher bargaining power and long-term exit opportunities compared to low-skilled workers. These factors provide high skilled workers with a stronger ‘voice’ and influential position in both home and host countries. In the case of low-skilled workers, on the other hand, a tension arises between the high local demand for such work migration and the resistance toward the immersion of those required workers into the hosting community. Relying on the global large supply of low-skilled workers and the low investment in their training, host states, therefore, tend to adopt guest worker programs to fill gaps in labor markets while regulating the length of stay and prohibiting long-term settlement. Thus, the actual mobility and exit opportunities of low-skilled migrants are limited and accordingly their bargaining power is weaker.

Nevertheless, the underlying principle of the role of exit opportunities in improving individuals’ position and bargaining power is not necessarily the exit itself – but having alternatives. Having multiple entry opportunities in a competitive market of host countries could also create alternatives for low-skilled workers. Imagine, for example, a global coordination body that consolidates simultaneously the overall demand and supply from multiple host countries and source countries. Candidates from multiple source countries, after passing initial screening, could be matched with multiple potential host countries that offer their terms for guest worker programs. Such sorting and matching mechanism could reduce risks and provide wider accessibility with lower operational costs. Another key advantage of a global coordinating body is its neutrality and responsibility towards both sending and receiving countries and their communities. Thus, it has the potential to improve the balance between inherently imbalanced powers. But the viability of such coordination depends upon the consent and cooperation of

involved states. Cooperation could be achieved if states would gain substantial benefits from the suggested overarching coordination.

My research goal for the GlobalTrust project is therefore to explore whether a global coordination body has the potential of making all involved stakeholders better off comparing to the current state of guest worker programs. My inquiry is comprised of three stages of analysis. I first discuss dominant institutional problems that characterize contemporary guest worker programs. Secondly, I examine how a global coordination body might mitigate some of these identified problems, for example by allowing host states to improve screening and enforcement and lessen their risks in those programs so that they can decrease the use of more aggressive and less efficient mechanisms. I address this inquiry from an institutional perspective looking also at the design of existing global bodies, that succeed in securing states' effective cooperation by providing them with valuable information, coordination or monitoring services. And third, I explain how global coordination can also be effective in other contexts of temporary migration, for example the current challenge of massive demand for asylum and refuge in the EU. Coordination around allocating quotas between countries and securing temporariness through institutional enforcement mechanisms can be critical for capably addressing such challenges.