Social Integration Effects of Pre-Migration Information Sessions in the Philippines

Researchers:

Toman Barsbai

Victoria S. Licuanan

Andreas Steinmayr

Erwin Tiongson

Dean Yang

Sector(s): Labor Markets

J-PAL office: J-PAL South Asia

Fieldwork: TNS (Kantar)

Location: Philippines

Sample: 1,273 migrants

Target group: Refugees Migrants

Outcome of interest: Employment Social cohesion Soft skills Take-up of program/social service/healthy behavior

Intervention type: Coaching and mentoring Information Social networks Training Soft skills

AEA RCT registration number: AEARCTR-0001389

Data: https://sites.google.com/view/tomanbarsbai/pdos

Partner organization(s): International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), Commission on Filipinos Overseas

Some countries provide pre-departure orientation programs for their citizens who migrate overseas. Researchers conducted a randomized evaluation to investigate whether an expanded and more thorough version of an orientation program in the Philippines improved socioeconomic outcomes and facilitated settlement for migrants upon moving to the United States. The orientation program had no effect on migrants' employment, settlement, and subjective well-being, but led migrants to acquire fewer social network connections. The findings suggest that migrants substituted social network connections, from which they could receive information, with the information provided through the orientation sessions.

Policy issue

From setting up bank accounts to finding a job, newly arrived immigrants often lack full information about how to complete a variety of activities in their new environment. With limited information about their new country, these immigrants may make ill-informed choices about which jobs to seek, where to go for financial support, or how to seek healthcare. As a result, some countries employ pre-departure classes for migrants that impart key information, such as rules about workers' rights and tips for navigating complex bureaucratic systems in destination countries.

However, there is limited research on the impact of these programs. Similar information- provision efforts, such as financial education or health information programs, have produced mixed results. Furthermore, few investigations have attempted to

learn how social networks can be influenced by different interventions. How might pre-departure classes help migrants facilitate settlement and improve socioeconomic outcomes in their new homes?

Context of the evaluation

In 2013, over 10 million people born in the Philippines were permanent, temporary, or undocumented migrants in other countries, while the population of the Philippines was 98.5 million. In 2015, migration from the Philippines to the United States represented over 64 percent of total Filipino permanent migration.

The Philippine government implements several international migration services for its citizens. Filipinos planning to leave the country with a permanent migration visa must first register with the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) and attend one of the CFO's pre-departure orientation seminars (PDOS). Around 40,000 individuals attend a Filipino PDOS for the United States every year. The original PDOS involved a 1.5-hour class focused on travel and immigration procedures, briefly covering issues including cultural differences, settlement, and employment. Following the class, instructors gave each participant a 30-page paper booklet with related information.

Among the study participants for this evaluation, the average age was 33 years old and 55 percent were female. Eighteen percent of participants had a job waiting for them in the United States and 93.5 percent obtained their green cards via family sponsorship, meaning that they already had family in the United States.



Mathias Haut, Shutterstock.com

Details of the intervention

In collaboration with CFO, researchers implemented a randomized evaluation to assess whether providing different PDOS material would have any effect on migrants' social integration and outcomes upon arrival in the United States.

To be eligible for the study, participants had to be 20-50 years old. They could not have spent more than three months in the United States previously or be migrating to the United States as the spouse of a non-Filipino, and they had to plan on departing for the United States within three months. From April to October 2014, across 112 calendar dates, researchers randomly assigned the PDOS session for each date to one of three versions of the class:

- *Original PDOS*: In this group, migrants were provided with the existing, unchanged class and associated material.
- *New PDOS without employment module*: In this group, migrants participated in a newly designed PDOS that provided more detailed and thorough information about preparing for departure, getting settled in the United States, building support networks, managing finances, and maintaining ties with the Philippines.
- *New PDOS with employment module*: In this group, migrants participated in the same newly designed PDOS described above with added information about employment in the United States.

Both new PDOS iterations extended the class length by one hour (from 1.5 to 2.5 hours) and included a revamped, comprehensive 116-page physical handbook.

Migrants who attended either version of the new PDOS were then randomly assigned whether or not to receive an email aimed at facilitating social network connections in the United States. These emails were sent from the CFO one and two months after the migrants arrived in the United States, encouraging them to join local Filipino associations.

TNS, a large international research firm, conducted all surveys in this investigation, including a baseline survey given to migrants on the date of their PDOS before the orientation started in addition to several follow-up surveys. Specifically, TNS conducted phone interviews with migrants and direct interviews with their household members in the Philippines at seven-, fifteen- , and thirty-month intervals after migrants' arrival in the United States.

Results and policy lessons

The new PDOS intervention (with or without the employment module) had no effect on employment, settlement, or subjective well-being of migrants.

However, the new PDOS had a negative impact on the size of migrants' social networks compared to the original PDOS in the short and long term (after seven and thirty months in the United States, respectively). After seven months, migrants who attended the new PDOS made 28 percent fewer friends and reported fewer instances of receiving support from local Filipino associations in their new state. This negative effect on social networks was larger in counties with more Filipinos.

Compared to the original PDOS, the new PDOS (with or without the employment module) did not affect settlement in the United States, measured based on whether migrants acquired bank accounts, Social Security numbers, health insurance, or driver's licenses, in the short and long term. Similarly, neither of the new PDOS interventions impacted employment compared to the original PDOS, even with the new PDOS that included employment-specific information. However, after thirty months in the United States, migrants who attended the new PDOS with the employment module were less likely to have arrived at their current job via social networks. This potentially signals that the employment module improved migrants' job-search knowledge, reducing their reliance on social networks.

Taken together, the results suggest that migrants substituted social network connections, from which they could receive information, with the information provided through the PDOS sessions.

Based on the initial results of the evaluation, the Commission on Filipinos Overseas has scaled up the intervention. The new version of the PDOS has now become the standard PDOS for all permanent migrants from the Philippines to the United States.