



Department of Sociology
The Chinese University of Hong Kong



Sociology@CUHK Webinar Series

Explaining Involuntary Immobility Using the Gallup World Poll

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Sociological research has made many important contributions to research on inequality, but much of this has examined within-country inequality, while larger inequalities, in terms of resources, security, and rights, for instance, exist between countries. Subsequently, international migration has been identified as one of the most powerful ways to reduce these inequalities, but access to migration is not equally distributed across countries and social positions. Meanwhile, international migration scholarship has focused primarily on mobility, but migrating internationally is relatively rare. While many choose to stay in their country of birth voluntarily, others wish to move but are constrained from doing so. This article focuses on the “involuntarily immobile” by examining factors that distinguish those “planning” to move internationally from those tangibly preparing to migrate, a group that is more likely to actually migrate. This is the first study to examine individual- and country-level predictors of involuntary immobility at a global scale, contributing a novel understanding of what prevents people from fulfilling their migration aspirations. Using globally representative data from the Gallup World Poll from 2011 to 2015, we find that the involuntarily immobile have lower levels of income and education, are more likely to be without employment, and are younger and less healthy. The effect size of income is especially large. At the country level, while immigration policy and distance from desired destinations show no clear relationship to immobility on average, these contextual factors may exacerbate income and educational disadvantage. We find that networks play an important role in decreasing involuntary immobility via co-nationals living abroad as well as colonial linkages, but these factors do not necessarily increase migration aspirations. We suggest that low-income people in low-GDP countries experience an “immobility trap,” with high aspirations to migrate and low capability of doing so, generating an important global inequality.



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Professor Maggio received his Ph.D. in Sociology from the Graduate Center, City University of New York. His primary research interests are around race and immigration using quantitative methods. His dissertation examined the impact of recent racial demographic changes at the local level on voting outcomes, immigration attitudes, and perceptions of racism. More recent work has addressed racial hierarchy in immigration attitudes and public opinion on “open borders,” with cross-national comparisons to come. He is currently working on projects on barriers to migration, heterogeneity in migration aspirations among lower income countries, racial discrimination in student visa applications, and colorism in immigration attitudes. Along with Professor Sarah Iverson, he is working on a book project that examines cable news coverage of the U.S.-Mexico border in the pre- and post-Trump eras and its impact on public opinion toward immigration.

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