



How Leaders Can Take a Stand for Global Diversity

Senior executives are almost always more conservative politically than society at large. But as a group, they make a hard left on the issue of migration. As Tuoyo Ebigbeyi, the COO of American Tower Corporation Nigeria, explained to us, “While there is certainly no shortage of talented, brilliant Nigerians, I believe there will be a net-positive multiplier effect to the broader economy by enhancing our perspectives through migration.”

Fully 72% of 850 executives we surveyed agree with Ebigbeyi: they also believe that migration strengthens their countries. Unfortunately, only about 50% of their fellow citizens favor open immigration.

This relationship holds true even in the two countries most open to migration among those represented in our survey. In Canada, 69% of executives favor open migration policies compared to 61% in society at large. Similarly, in Germany, 70% of executives support open migration policies versus 64% of citizens overall, and 22% of executives favor of fully open borders as opposed to only 8% overall.

What makes this particularly striking is that the executives we surveyed tend to be more conservative politically than their compatriots. They are 24% more likely to self-identify as “center-right” or “right” than society at large—stances typically associated with support for more restrictive migration policies.

What do these executives know? Almost all of them (95%) know that global diversity—that is, working with people from different countries and cultures—is an issue of strategic importance to their companies. This view squares with our research into the effects of global diversity on corporate innovation and business results. We found that companies with globally diverse workforces are 26% more likely to realize clear gains from the creative processes of their product and innovation teams and two times more likely to be innovation leaders than those with less diverse workforces. More broadly, the global movement of talent spreads ideas and helps countries attract capital. Economists peg the value of mobile talent to the global economy at \$2.3 trillion annually. That’s nearly the GDP of India.

The moral case and the business case for talent migration are both strong. Yet migration remains a highly politicized and polarizing issue. How can leaders embrace and support global talent migration without becoming lightning rods for political controversy? Here are some ideas:

Lead by example. In 2015, in the face of skilled labor shortages, Kremer Machine Systems, a German specialist in industrial assembly, began hiring Syrian refugees. Though the firm had to invest at first to overcome language barriers, cultural differences, and improve the skills of the refugees it hired, the company found that those investments usually paid off in six months or less.

Rise to the occasion. In the wake of the war in Ukraine, civil society organizations, foundations, and corporate leaders in Europe sprang into action. Under the umbrella organization [Alliance4Ukraine](#), NGOs, corporates, and startups came together to form an effective public-private ecosystem of funding partners, political support (including the German chancellor), and execution players. One of these players, a job-matching platform called [Imagine Foundation](#), has managed to assemble a broad coalition of more than 800 corporate partners to form a hiring network for refugees from the war in Ukraine as well as those fleeing armed conflict and political oppression elsewhere.

Make successes public. GetYourGuide, the Berlin-based travel platform that reached unicorn status in 2019 and is now accelerating out of the pandemic, attributes much of its success to its ability to hire and leverage the talents of a global workforce. Just ask [Tao Tao](#), the company’s COO and cofounder. He is an enthusiastic advocate of open migration who often speaks publicly about its benefits for his company and Germany and the urgent need to embrace it at a policy level. His words carry weight because GetYourGuide is growing fast—and in no small part thanks to its high level of global diversity. Some of the ideas Tao champions, such as a points-based visa program for skilled talent, have found their way into the coalition agreement of the next German government.

Build a coalition of like-minded leaders. Chobani, the dairy produce manufacturer founded by Hamdi Ulukaya, a Turkish-born immigrant to the US, stands out for hiring 300 refugees (15% of the company’s workforce). But Ulukaya, who is arguably one of the most outspoken corporate leaders on migration, leverages the company’s efforts by enlisting other companies in the quest for global diversity. In September, he launched the Tent Coalition for Afghan Refugees, which brought together Amazon, Uber, UPS, Pfizer, Tyson Foods, and two dozen other companies to provide relocation services, training, and jobs for Afghans who fled their country in the wake of US withdrawal.

None of the ideas above will produce an overnight change in how societies at large—and policy makers in particular—feel about global migration. But in tandem with the voices and support of the many organizations and citizens already in favor of more open borders, they can nudge politicians to reexamine immigration laws. The benefits of global diversity are created in large part by business. It’s time for business leaders to act—for the benefit of global talent, local citizens, and our societies.