

# Improving the lives of migrants through systemic change

**The Atlantic Philanthropies  
strategic approach to grantmaking  
in the area of migration in Ireland**

Discussion Paper



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This discussion paper has been produced as part of an independent evaluation of The Atlantic Philanthropies Migration Programme. Over 35 years, Atlantic has made grants totaling \$8 billion to advance opportunity, equity and human dignity. Further information about Atlantic and the evaluation is provided at the end of this document.

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## Strategic field building for policy change

Atlantic's grantmaking from 2004 to 2014 in the migration field in the Republic of Ireland represents an effort to strategically build a field to facilitate policy and systemic change resulting in improved outcomes in the lives of migrants. The Atlantic approach involved providing long-term, multi-annual core funding to its grantees, building capacity and advocacy capability and funding collaborative and complementary efforts between and across organisations.

## Grantee reflections on Atlantic's approach

- Atlantic's approach helped build capacity among grantees. There was broad consensus that Atlantic's approach — to focus on strategic thinking and planning — had helped grantees understand their own business model and think carefully about the key users and audiences for their services and work.
- Grantees systematically collected data about service users to develop an evidence base. Grantees made significant investments in infrastructures for gathering data and developed knowledge about how to collect data on the users of their services.
- Multi-annual core funding provided stability. Such core funding transformed the experience of many grantees, allowing planning and focussing of resources on the advocacy work of pursuing long-term goals for policy and systematic change.

## Background

### The socioeconomic context in 2001-08

When The Atlantic Philanthropies began developing its migration strategy in 2001, Ireland was in the midst of an economic boom which attracted economic migrants; the number of people claiming asylum was rising rapidly.

However, the legal framework regulating migration at this time was sparse, with a growing perception that relevant legislation was no longer fit for the purpose. There were issues associated with the in-flow of migrants that the government and the civil society sector had not yet considered, such as those of integration, residence rights and security of residency.

The onset of the global financial crisis meant that, by 2008, Ireland moved rapidly from enjoying the benefits of the economic boom to enforcing austerity measures. Migrants who had entered Ireland in the boom years were suddenly faced with reduced opportunities and little support. A negative narrative emerged around the challenges associated with migration in Ireland.

## Organisations working in migration in Ireland in 2001

Service provision and advocacy, as well as other activities related to migration, were quite limited in 2001. The Irish Refugee Council (IRC) was the main organisation in Ireland working on migration-related issues. The IRC was complemented by just a handful of other actors engaged with migration challenges.

As it developed its approach leading up to 2003, Atlantic observed that capacity was starting to increase in the nongovernmental organisation (NGO) sector in direct response to a growing need for both service provision and an appropriate legal framework for the arrival of growing numbers of migrants. This was particularly exemplified by two NGOs.

The first, the Immigrant Council of Ireland, was mainly concerned with addressing the need for more robust legislation around issues of residency, citizenship, access to the country, work permits and integration. The second, the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, concentrated on vulnerable migrants, workers' rights and exploitation in the workplace. While there was a marked difference in focus between the two organisations, their work was complementary. The Immigrant Council of Ireland was more legally focused in its approach, for instance seeking to influence legislation on residency and citizenship. The Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, meanwhile, concentrated on providing services to the most vulnerable migrants, such as supporting workers' rights issues and addressing workplace exploitation.

## Where to start? Establishing a research base and mapping the field

Atlantic analysed and mapped the field to identify what existed and what was missing, including what capacity was needed to achieve its strategic aims. This included research by external partners; assessment of the barriers to influencing emerging legislation; investigation of what type of capacity was available on the local, national and European Union (EU) level; and examining other national contexts through learning tours and exchanges on funder networks.

The findings from this analysis and mapping highlighted what appeared to be a relatively weak field. Existing NGOs were perceived as not having enough traction on migrant issues. The available research and evidence was not authoritative and sometimes was conflicting. Approaches that had been shown to be ineffective were being repeatedly used. Overall, NGOs were too distant from decision-making processes, not working strategically or in collaboration with each other, and were focussed on problems rather than solutions. There was an overarching need to connect the local and national situation to the international context relating to migration.

Based on this, Atlantic made a strategic decision that the best way to achieve its overall objective was to use a field-building approach to advocacy grantmaking. This would focus on long-term, sustainable development of advocacy capacity among a diverse range and geographic spread of actors as a means to achieving systemic reform.

## Strategic Field Building for Policy Change

The complexity of trying to influence a specific, large-scale policy issue such as migration by catalysing and sustaining systemic change can contribute to the building of an entire field of capability and the generation of new knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Kramer wrote in his essay “Catalytic Philanthropy”, that creating systemic change depends on a ‘sustained campaign to increase the capacity and coordination of an entire field, together with greater public awareness and ... stronger government policies’.<sup>2</sup> Field building from this perspective is ‘a product of foundations’ search for solutions to social challenges. Foundations have both helped stimulate work in new fields and supported existing fields’.<sup>3</sup>

In essence, philanthropists and other funding organisations build and support a field by coordinating the efforts of a range of diverse actors engaged in different activities pursuing a common goal over an extended period of time.<sup>4</sup>

Funders may also engage in field building in order to shape policy change and to contribute to wider systemic change. From that perspective, the role of advocacy is important because strategic field building can represent one approach to advocacy grantmaking.

## Field Building in Advocacy Grantmaking

Beer et al. provide a definition of this approach: ‘Grant making and auxiliary activities ... designed to build the stability and long-term adaptive capacity of a field of advocacy and policy organisations that can shape and respond to a shifting policy environment’.<sup>5</sup>

Beer adds that when aiming to build a field in relation to advocacy, the grantmaker acts as ‘a long-term resource base, capacity-builder and connector for a field of advocacy organisations that work on similar policy issues. Rather than shaping their grantmaking to achieve a specific policy goal, field builders aim to change the capacity and patterns of interaction among a field of advocacy organisations over the long term’.

The approach outlined in this quotation was the strategic grantmaking approach chosen by Atlantic when building the migration field in Ireland.

## What Atlantic Funded

Atlantic’s grantmaking from 2004 to 2014 in the migration field in the Republic of Ireland represented an effort to strategically build a field for achieving systematic and societal change that improved access to justice and services for migrants in Ireland. The Atlantic approach involved providing long-term, multi-annual core funding to its grantees, building capacity and advocacy capability, and funding collaborative and complementary efforts between and across organisations.

This approach unfolded in two phases: building and stabilising field capacity then sustaining it.

## Phase 1: Building and stabilising capacity

In the first phase Atlantic aimed to build the capacity of organisations operating in the field of migration (both in relation to asylum and economic migration) to ensure that the rights of migrants were enshrined, protected and promoted. In this phase Atlantic focused on:<sup>6</sup>

- Strengthening the perceived legitimacy of organisations and increasing the trust they held with key stakeholders
- Developing an authoritative evidence base about the demographic profile of migrants, as well as the wider phenomena of migration
- Identifying achievable goals for grantees
- Identifying winning policy arguments and common interests between migrant groups and organisations
- Using multiple points of entry to decision-makers and mobilising strategic partners

In addition, as Atlantic's migration work in Ireland progressed it became clear that changes in Irish immigration policy were inherently connected to the EU migration framework. As such, Atlantic and its grantees recognised that they would also need to work at the European level, connecting it to the national level and creating synergies between the two.

## Phase 2: Sustaining capacity in the longer term

The second phase aimed to sustain the capacity that had been built and stabilised in the first phase. Atlantic aimed to build lasting collaborations among grantees, as well as between grantees and policymakers. Furthermore, Atlantic was actively engaged in a long-term discussion with its grantees about the change of the funding landscape at the end of the foundation's grantmaking. This allowed further capacity building among grantees to tap into other funding sources where possible.

## Grantee Strategies

Grantees' advocacy strategies to change policy and practice included:

- Using the law strategically (i.e., using current laws to protect migrants' rights and access to services)
- Engaging in strategic litigation (i.e., taking cases through the courts in order to change the law)
- Using insider and outsider advocacy approaches: developing relationships with civil servants to jointly develop pragmatic solutions and policy responses; and using direct action, mobilising strategic partners and securing public attention for issues using media and messaging skills when the insider strategies were not effective

Employing these strategies, by the end of Atlantic's funding programme its grantee partners had impacted the migration policy landscape, as well as strengthened their organisational leadership and capabilities. Programme impacts included policy gains that provide a markedly different context for migrants now entering Ireland.

## Guiding Principles to Atlantic's Grantmaking Approach

Atlantic's field-building approach to grantmaking can be characterised by the following:



**Providing multi-annual core funding.** Multi-annual core funding, and the long-term relationships with Atlantic that followed from this, facilitated the growth of the work of grantees. It provided stability and opportunities for grantees to focus on externally achieving their strategic objectives, and internally on professionalization and organisational change.



**Focussing on impact rather than activities and processes.** Provided grantees could show how their work could contribute to the objective of improving access to services and justice for migrants, Atlantic was somewhat flexible about the methods employed and allowed grantees to have some freedom to change and adapt plans. This allowed grantees, for example, to include additional activities during the course of the grant and adapt to a changing environment.



**Focussing on capacity building, leadership and professionalization.** Atlantic wanted to help professionalise the sector by providing capacity-building opportunities and helping grantee organisations develop the credibility, expertise and evidence necessary to achieve sustainable change. It supported individuals at all levels within grantee organisations – from front-line staff to board level.



**Building an evidence base from the bottom up.** Atlantic consciously supported grantees with direct contact with migrants to tap into the potential to more systematically collect information on the nature of the issues migrants faced in order to start to develop an evidence base to inform advocacy.



**Achieving systemic impact and sustainability through funding advocacy, but still valuing service provision.** Atlantic focused its work in Ireland on funding advocacy. This was part of a strategy to achieve long term-impact by influencing legislation and its use in day-to-day practice. However, Atlantic also valued service provision as a route through which migrant voices could feed directly into grantees work and wider conversations about policy and practice.



**Mentoring and approachability.** In the spirit of a being a “funder plus”<sup>7</sup> — supporting grantees above and beyond the provision of grants — Atlantic encouraged grantees to be open with the foundation about issues and challenges, and worked with them to identify solutions.



## Grantee Reflections on Atlantic's Approach

This section summarises grantees' views of how the approach worked in practice.

### Atlantic's approach helped build capacity among grantees

There was broad agreement that **Atlantic had invested in the development of key staff within grantee organisations as thought leaders**. Grantees reported that the Atlantic approach of focusing on strategic planning and thinking had helped grantees to understand their own business model and think carefully about the key users and audiences for their services and work. Grantees felt **Atlantic had placed emphasis on the development of professionalised internal governance structures** which helped to create an internal organisational culture that had clarified staff roles and was sustainable.

A highly valued element of Atlantic's approach was **advice and mentoring offered by Atlantic staff on an informal and as-needed basis**. Grantees felt that the expertise of staff within Atlantic was made available to them and described a collaborative and constructive relationship in which grantees felt able to approach Atlantic to discuss challenges and possible changes.

**Risks to capacity building:** Staff turnover poses a risk to continuity of efforts. Funders and grantees need to ensure adequate succession planning to facilitate and support the next generation of leaders. Grantees were concerned about securing future funding from sources other than Atlantic to sustain the capacity developed.

### Grantees systematically collected data about service users to develop an evidence base

During the period in which they were supported by Atlantic, grantees made **significant investments in infrastructures for gathering data** and developed knowledge about how to collect data on the users of their services. These data were reframed as an evidence base on which campaigns and publications could be built. The **evidence base was developed in partnership with other practitioners and organisations**, which further led to sharing and learning from others' best practices.

### Multi-annual core funding provided stability

Multi-annual funding had transformed the experience of many grantees, allowing planning and focussing resources on the advocacy work pursuing long-term goals for policy and systematic change over time.

**Risks from providing multi-annual funding:** Despite planning for the end of Atlantic support, grantees had concerns about the extent to which they would be in a stronger position than other organisations that had not benefited from such funding arrangements.

### Atlantic's approach enabled collaboration

**Atlantic facilitated shared learning among organisations** and grantees that felt they were increasingly supporting each other. The opportunity to learn from grantees working at the EU level and internationally was noted as particularly useful.



**Risks to building collaboration within a field:** One possible downside to the concept of field building is that it could create artificial boundaries which could inhibit collaboration between organisations working on related areas that are considered to sit within different fields. While Atlantic supported grantees working at the EU level, the focus was on Ireland. Grantees identified the potential for increasing knowledge exchange between these levels of operation.

### **Grantees capitalised on Atlantic's name and reputation**

In some contexts **Atlantic acted as an advocate for the grantees** in their external relationships, promoting the advocacy approach with others and sharing widely the work of grantees. Atlantic was thought to serve as an imprimatur of quality, which grantees' could use to their advantage.

### **Atlantic's impact-focused approach helped grantees achieve realistic goals**

The **focus on outcomes and impact enabled flexibility and responsiveness in grantees' approaches**. Grantees were held to account for achieving desired outcomes which encouraged grantees to select clear and achievable goals in the short, medium and long term.

## **Conclusion**

Between 2004 and 2014, The Atlantic Philanthropies made grants to strategically build a field for achieving systemic and social change to improve the lives of immigrants in Ireland. The approach involved long-term and multi-annual funding of nonprofit organisations to build and stabilise their capacity and to engage in collaborative and complementary efforts.

The evaluation found that there was a more robust and professional network of organisations, working to achieve a common goal of improving the lives of migrants in Ireland in 2014 than in 2004. Grantees found that the Atlantic approach supported them to operate more strategically, collaborate and cooperate more and improve their leadership and strategic planning. Grantees said that during the grant period core funding meant they were able to better plan and focus their resources on their long-term goals.

## Endnotes

1. Petrovich, J. *Building and Supporting Sustainable Fields: Views from Philanthropy: A Study for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*, 2013, p. 2.
2. Kramer, M. "Catalytic Philanthropy," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Fall 2009; pp. 30-35, 2009, p. 34.
3. Petrovich (ibid).
4. Petrovich (ibid). See also Bridgespan Group, *The Strong Field Framework. A Guide and Toolkit for Funders and Nonprofits Committed to Large-Scale Impact*. Boston, MA: 2009.
5. Beer T., Ingargiola P.S., Beer M.F. *Advocacy & Public Policy Grantmaking: Matching Process to Purpose*. Denver, CO: Colorado Trust, 2012, p. 12.
6. Interview with member of staff from Atlantic, 2013.
7. The 'funding plus' approach stems from the idea that investing in the capacity and means of the grantees increases impact. A study of funding plus in the United Kingdom highlights three elements from existing literature: strategic giving (focusing on the priorities of the grantee's entire organisation); partnering to develop capable management; and willingness to fund core operating costs. Source: Cairns, B., Burkeman, S., Harker, A., and Buckley, E. (2011) *Beyond money – a study of funding plus in the UK*. London. Institute for Voluntary Action Research.

## About this discussion paper and the evaluation of The Atlantic Philanthropies Migration Programme

### Atlantic Philanthropies Migration Programme

Over 35 years, Atlantic has made grants totaling \$8 billion to advance opportunity, equity and human rights. A limited-life foundation, Atlantic completed its grantmaking in 2016, and will cease operations by 2020.

The Atlantic Philanthropies Migration Programme is a central delivery mechanism for their Reconciliation and Human Rights strategy in the Republic of Ireland. At the heart of the strategy is the fundamental objective of improving access to justice and services for migrants. Atlantic has provided 46 grants to 18 organisations (or initiatives) working domestically in the Republic of Ireland and at the European Union level since 2004.

## **RAND Europe's evaluation**

Atlantic commissioned RAND Europe to undertake an evaluation of their Migration Programme. The overarching aims of the evaluation were to:

- Undertake a programme-level review of the work supported by Atlantic up to the end of 2012
- Monitor ongoing progress, developments and impacts up to the end of 2014
- Identify any emerging issues, challenges or opportunities that may be on the horizon for the programme

Full details of the methodology for the research can be found in the final evaluation report available at [www.rand.org/t/rr484](http://www.rand.org/t/rr484).

## **About this discussion paper**

As part of the evaluation of the Migration Programme a series of case studies and this discussion paper have been developed to highlight innovative practice, showcase promising practices and identify lessons relevant to other organisations and grantmakers working in the migration field.

The information in this discussion document was based on a targeted review of literature on strategic field building, interviews with members of staff from The Atlantic Philanthropies, a review of documentation produced by Atlantic describing their approach, and analysis of feedback given during a workshop with Atlantic grantees held in Dublin in October 2014. The workshop involved the 11 organisations in receipt of grants under the Atlantic Migration Programme as of October 2014. The event was facilitated by researchers from RAND. Grantees had read a draft of this discussion paper in advance. At the workshop, in groups of four or five people, grantees were asked to provide feedback on the paper and reflect on Atlantic's approach. Each group was facilitated by a RAND researcher who took notes on the discussion. Following the group discussions, grantees came together for a plenary session. After the workshop concluded, notes from the break-out groups and plenary session were transcribed, and subject to a descriptive analysis to identify the key themes. The points included are those on which there was consensus among grantees.

More information underpinning the key messages included in this paper can be obtained in the final evaluation report.

## **Contact information**

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