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Perceived and Pursued Opportunities from Mass Deportation Threats: The Case of Haitian Migrant-Serving Nonprofit Organizations in the Dominican Republic

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Abstract: The threat of deportation is a common experience shared by migrants around the world. Migrant-serving nonprofit organizations must also contend with these threats. While there is considerable research on how nonprofits serve migrants, there is a lack of research that explores what mass deportation threats may mean for nonprofits actors and their work. In order to address this gap, this study explores the case of the Dominican Republic where there was widespread fear that mass removals would occur after the closing of the National Regularization Plan for Foreigners on June 17, 2015. Using semi-structured interviews with 20 nonprofit actors from Haitian-migrant serving organizations, a qualitative content analysis reveals three main themes that capture how nonprofits perceived and pursued opportunities from the threat of deportation. They include the opportunity to grow, the opportunity to advocate, and the opportunity to learn and educate. This research is important for shedding light on the organizational resilience of migrant-serving nonprofits in the Dominican Republic and offers insight into how policies might be developed to support nonprofits as they address migration policies in their work.

Keywords: organizational resilience; Dominican Republic; deportations; Dominican-Haitian relations; nonprofit organizations; Haitian migrants

As migration crises increase around the world (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2023), the government of the Dominican Republic continues to concern the international human rights community for unlawful deportations and other human rights abuses against Haitian migrants (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2023). Over the last decade, there has been significant uproar for its migration policies and enforcement (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2013). For example, there was global protest after the September 2013

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Constitutional Court Ruling that took away citizenship from approximately 200,000 Dominican-Haitians (Semple 2013). Negative media attention has continued over repatriations and fears of mass removals following the Dominican government's subsequent implementation of the measures it took to provide pathways to citizenship to those that qualify via Law 169-14 and regularize the statuses of those born outside the Dominican Republic through the National Regularization Plan for Foreigners (Brodzinsky 2015).

The threat of deportation is a common experience for undocumented immigrants across the globe. However, not only are individuals and families are affected by deportation threats (United Nations Human Rights Council 2018), but migrant-serving nonprofit organizations are likely also impacted. Yet, there is minimal research that considers what mass deportation threats mean for them and, specifically, what opportunities, if any, they might perceive and pursue that stem from this adversity. Framing threats as opportunities, and capitalizing on them, is a resilient response that can move an organization forward in the face of challenges (Shepherd and Williams 2023). Therefore, understanding how nonprofits perceive deportation threats is important for developing insight into how migrant-serving organizations might not only survive but thrive in a migration crisis.

Using in-depth interviews with 20 Haitian migrant-serving organization actors from 17 different nonprofits in the Dominican Republic, this paper describes the perceived opportunities that arose from deportation threats and how these actors took advantage of these opportunities to further their organization's work. The purpose is to offer policy possibilities grounded in the views of nonprofit organizations that have persevered in serving their migrant communities during turbulent and risky times.

To begin, a review is presented of past literature on the resilience of organizations in response to adversity with particular attention given to the ways that nonprofits respond in migration crises. Next, the qualitative methods of this study are described, followed by the study's results that reveal three overarching themes, including an opportunity to grow, an opportunity to advocate, and an opportunity learn and educate. Lastly, a conclusion is offered that takes into consideration this study's findings that guide prospects for policies for migrant-serving, nonprofit organizations.

1 Literature Review

The roles that nonprofit organizations play in supporting migrants at the individual, community, and institutional levels are well-documented (Muraleedharan and Bryer 2020; Roth and Grace 2018; Sorrell-Medina 2022). For example, Marzana et al. (2020)

and Martinez-Damia et al. (2024) found that community-based organizations mediate between migrants and the host society. In Santiago, Chile, specifically, organizations facilitate the community participation of Peruvian migrants and, in turn, strengthen their ability to be resilient against social injustices that they encounter (Marzana et al. 2020).

Garkisch, Heidingsfelder, and Beckmann's (2017) systematic literature review of 101 articles on nonprofits and migration published from 2002 to 2016 found that the main forms of nonprofit engagement include providing basic services, capacity development, advocacy, and research. Missing from their analysis are studies conducted in the Global South, which is likely due, at least in part, to the authors' inclusion of articles published only in English. Therefore, the present research in the Caribbean makes a unique contribution with regard to geographic focus.

In a study on Latino immigrant-serving organizations in South Carolina, there are several structural barriers that get in between nonprofits and the immigrants that they serve such as spatial access, lack of transportation, and immigrant law enforcement check points. Some organizations believe that their ability to provide services will be threatened, if they advocate for changes in immigration policy. In response to these obstacles, organizations employ outreach liaisons, rely on informal networks, and partner with other organizations (Roth and Grace 2018). Martinez-Damia et al. (2024) found that organizations in Italy used the similar coping strategy of networking, in order to sustain their work.

Nonprofit organizations have a long history of coping with different adversities, including immigration crises. In fact, the nonprofit sector was first recognized to be resilient over 20 years ago (Salamon 2003). Organizations are believed to have resilience when they are able "to anticipate, respond to, recover from, and learn from adversity" (Hepfer and Lawrence 2022, p. 8). In essence, resilience is a capacity that involves social processes (Kahn et al. 2018) and social dynamics of intersubjective interpretation and meaning making (Hepfer and Lawrence 2022) that are necessary for organizations to persevere through a crisis. Thus, attending to nonprofit actors' perceptions of adverse events is key to understanding organizational actions in response to them.

A capability-based perspective put forth by Duchek (2020) involves three, overlapping stages in organizational resilience. The first stage is anticipation, which entails an organization's ability to perceive unexpected changes and take preemptive measures. The second stage, coping, entails managing effectively amidst unexpected events by accepting the issue with which the organization is confronted and having the capacity to create and employ solutions. Adaptation is the third phase, which refers to an organization's ability to use reflection and learning to make accommodations that promote organizational advancement in the face of crises. This process may include learning from their failures as well as from other organizations.

What is key is that they integrate what they have learned into their organization's domain of knowledge.

Conz and Magnani (2020) consider organizational resilience to have dynamic and temporal aspects. Based on their analysis of 66 previous studies published between 2000 and 2017, they propose that organizations take absorptive and/or adaptive paths to overcome shocking events. Along the lines of Duchek (2020) capabilities framework, they identify fundamental capabilities of each path. The absorptive path requires redundancy, robustness, and agility, which facilitate the ability of organizations to survive and persevere through an event. Resourcefulness, adaptability, and flexibility are critical for the adaptive path and allow for organizations to change as needed, in order to sustain themselves (Conz and Magnani 2020).

According to Hepfer and Lawrence's (2022) synthesis of management research published from 1980 to 2019, organizational resilience can be functional, operational, or strategic. Functional resilience is when an organization's specific functions are able to respond effectively to adverse events. Operational resilience is concerned with an organization's overall ability to continue operating in the face of adversity, while strategic resilience is an organization's ability to overcome adversity to continue with its mission. Using this conceptual framework helps to identify how a crisis may threaten an organization.

Based on Su and Junge's (2023) literature review of 127 publications on organizational resilience, the adverse events that organizations encounter can be understood in terms of three different criteria, including emergence (i.e., speed at which the adversity becomes felt), novelty (i.e., uniqueness of the adversity), and severity (i.e., harshness of the adversity). These dimensions matter for the action-based decisions that organizations make when confronted with a crisis. For example, a migration crisis that gradually grows may allow time for an organization to perceive warning signs of potential mass deportations.

Chand, Calderon, and Hawes's (2022) research specifically elevates in importance the role that nonprofits play in the implementation of deportation-related policies. In particular, they examine the effect of the presence of immigrant-serving organizations in the United States on the level of cooperation of county sheriff offices with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Their analysis of 295 immigrant-serving organizations across a sample of 120 counties of 630 total revealed a relationship between sheriff office cooperation with ICE and the existence of immigrant-serving organizations but only when taking into account the type of organization. Specifically, sheriff office cooperation with ICE was found to be less likely in counties with immigrant-serving organizations that offer pro bono legal assistance in removal hearings. In a similar way, removal happens less in areas where there are more attorneys that provide pro bono legal aid to immigrants (Chand, Calderon, and Hawes 2022). This research is among the small, yet growing,

body of work that expands an understanding of nonprofits and deportation policies (for additional studies, see Hadj Abdou and Rosenberger 2019; Oztig 2022). However, there remains a gap in literature that considers the meanings that migrant-serving organization actors give to deportation policies and, specifically, to threats of mass deportation.

2 Research Methods

This study uses qualitative data from semi-structured interviews (King and Horrocks 2010) with 20 nonprofit actors of migrant-serving organizations in the Dominican Republic. The author recruited participants using purposive and snowball sampling methods (Patton 1990) through online searches for development-oriented nonprofit organizations and offered a $25 master card gift card as an incentive to participate. Snowball sampling involved asking participants for recommendations for potential additional participants, which allowed the author to benefit from their networks. For prospective participants to be eligible for the study, they needed to be an organizational staff member of a Haitian migrant-serving organization and 18 years of age or older.

The author explained to participants that the interviews are intended to understand their community work experiences in the Dominican Republic, specifically as they navigated a challenging migration policy context when Law 169-14 and the National Regularization Plan for Foreigners were being implemented and when there were immense concerns for deportations. Therefore, the timing of these interviews was during an important migration policy moment. Prior to beginning interviews, the author obtained informed consent from the participants, which entailed discussing that their identities would be kept confidential and that their participation was voluntary. The author's Institutional Review Board approved this study. The interviews, conducted by the author, lasted on average 1 h and took place in person or over the phone from December 2015 to July 2016. Topics covered included the efforts participants' organizations make to serve Dominicans and Haitians, views on how local Dominican-Haitian relations shape participants' organizational endeavors, perceptions on deportations, and perspectives on what the 2013 Constitutional Court ruling and related policies meant for their organizations' work. Depending on the language preference of the participant, the interview was conducted in either English or Spanish.

The sample included 15 women and 5 men from 17 different organizations across multiple regions of the country. The organizations were relatively small in size with between two and approximately 20 employed staff members. The organizations focused on a variety of issues, including educational, housing, food security, health,

and advocacy. For example, they operated schools and educational programs, ran medical missions, engaged in health care accompaniment, coordinated legal services, provided social aid, and supported community development projects. There were nine Americans, six Dominicans, three Europeans, one Dominican-Haitian, and one Haitian. The job titles of the participants ranged from coordinator to director, which allowed for a variety of perspectives from staff with different levels of organizational viewpoints.

At the time that interviews were conducted, the author had lived in the Dominican Republic for over four years. During her first two years in the country, she was a United States Peace Corps volunteer and supported ecotourism projects sponsored by two non-profit organizations. In the other two years, she managed a university's study-abroad, service-learning program that involved collaborating with many non-profit organizations as service sites for students, including organizations that served the Haitian migrant community. Additionally, the author spent two months conducting her dissertation research with an education-focused non-profit organization. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Spanish for Social and Community Services and became fluent in the language during the time she spent volunteering, working, and researching in the Dominican Republic. These experiences made her well-prepared to conduct this study and enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

The author transcribed the interviews in Spanish and some interviews in English, while a paid professional transcriber and research assistant transcribed the rest of the English interviews. As the sole analyzer of the data, the author engaged in content analysis (Krippendorff 2004) to focus on how participants perceived threats of deportations and their responses to them. Her approach entailed first a deductive analysis to highlight sections of interviews where deportations were the topic of dialogue. Then, she inductively labeled these sections of interviews with codes that emerged from the data. Lastly, she grouped these codes into themes and subthemes, which are the main findings of this research.

3 Findings

Undocumented Haitian migrants in the Dominican Republic faced a June 17th, 2015 deadline to submit their documents as part of the Regularization Plan that was later extended to August 1st. A widespread fear was that mass deportations would follow after the deadline passed, despite the Dominican government's assurance that such action would not be the case (Open Justice Society Initiative 2015). The Haitian migrant-serving nonprofit actors in the Dominican Republic that were interviewed as part of this study found themselves in a mediating position (Martinez-Damia

et al. 2024) between Haitian migrants and a host country permeated with anti-Haitian sentiment. Yet, in the midst of this context of uncertainty, they perceived and pursued opportunities to enhance their organization and its impact. Therefore, they demonstrated significant organizational resilience. This section draws from discussions about their work during this period and describes three main themes and related subthemes, including 1) an opportunity to grow (developing organizational networks and expanding organizational activities); 2) an opportunity to advocate (stepping into new advocacy roles and building on advocacy work); and 3) an opportunity to learn and educate (gaining a grassroot understanding and creating new educational initiatives).

4 An Opportunity to Grow

4.1 Developing Organizational Networks

The desire to continue to serve the Haitian-migrant population in the face of deportation threats motivated organizations to engage in self-analysis to see how they could be supportive and resilient. As a result, many saw the need to extend their reach through partnering with other organizations, which meant an opportunity for organizational growth. One participant recounted how his organization broadened their objectives to include creating a humanitarian crisis response plan in collaboration with other organizations:

> One of the things that I should tell you is that before closing, like a month or two before, and after it closed, the fear was that there would be deportations. So, there was a moment that began…we were working, but our orientation work, assessment, and economic support began to decline, and we started to strengthen strategic plans for responding to a possible humanitarian crisis that we expected would happen before deportations. So, we had meetings in the Dominican Republic and meetings in Haiti. We called for a work plan, and we identified routes where they would possibly deport people. We had placed promotors and organizations at each of those places, in the whole process to identify and have information in time. We sought allies for support, including people who could give us food, water, because we knew that on the Haitian side, they didn't have the infrastructure to receive so many people, but quickly, the process passed, and the deportations didn't begin as we had expected. (Translated from Spanish by the author.)

This participant explained that their increased networking resulted in relationships that made the crisis planning process possible. In other similar ways, participants identified how their organizational network expanded to include individuals and other organizations with more experience in certain types of areas. For example, one participant shared:

> We invited a guy from an institution called, X, (name withheld for confidentiality purposes), maybe you know him. He says, "I've been in this country for 24 years, I'm a Haitian national, but I've studied here, I've formed my family here." I mean, he is perfectly familiar, that guy was invited here to speak to the kids and tell them, well, there is a universal right that is the right to education and that every adolescent boy and girl has a right to that. He told them, "One way you all can protect yourselves is by being in school here because you have a right to education." (Translated from Spanish by the author.)

This insight reveals how the organization did not necessarily feel comfortable depending on their own knowledge and abilities and, therefore, reached out for expertise. Thus, they expanded their capacity to make an impact in their communities. Like this participant's nonprofit, the majority of organizations that were part of this research were not equipped originally to address the legal and human rights issues that arose from this migration crisis as their missions were mostly oriented toward providing basic, non-legal services. Yet, many wanted to help in any way that they could, especially with the regularization plan deadline looming and potential for increase in raids and deportations. However, doing so often meant that they would have to rely on the strengths of other institutions, in order to enhance their ability to be effective and be resilient.

Engaging in joint action with other organizations thus became a central way to extend their resources to places where they did not typically work but knew were in need of support. For example, one participant, a leader of a nonprofit that focuses on housing for migrants, explained how she sought to collaborate with an organization that works on the Dominican-Haitian border to design and construct temporary housing:

> I have been talking to an organization helping on the border. They're a fantastic organization, their director is very involved and I have offered my assistance to him if we need to build temporary housing out there. So, that's another way that I talk to people about partnership, it's really based on like projects and if they need something and I can provide it to them, then I'm going to one hundred percent do that.

Later in the interview, she explained her attempt to partner in more detail:

> Well, I mean there are a lot of refugees now on the border. X (organization's name not disclosed for confidentiality purposes) has a lot of information that they've been posting about that recently. I talked to the director before Christmas, but I haven't heard back from him yet because I wanted to offer. You know…whenever I can offer design assistance, and what I mean is, like I can go to my university and be like, "I have a project where we can design temporary housing for Haitians on the border. I need nine weeks" and they're like, "This is awesome," because it's a real-life project, and they can do everything at the university. So, that's why I offer my design assistance to situations like that because it's an opportunity for my students to be involved in something that's life changing and to have an impact on the country.

This participant works with university students, who study architecture in the United States and make trips to the Dominican Republic to gain practice implementing their housing design skills. Her organization focuses on housing in bateys, which are communities that were historically home to Haitian agricultural workers. She saw collaboration as a way that she could expand the reach of her organization to the border and give her students an opportunity for personal and professional growth, given the needs created in the region by the migration crisis.

4.2 Expanding Organizational Activities

Growth was experienced at both the individual and organizational level as participants and their organizations resiliently stepped into roles that they never had performed before and expanded the ways that they typically engaged activities. What these actions often required was using local knowledge, involving community members, and building their organizational networks. As one participant explained,

> I feel like there's a lot of active community members that can be involved and we can support the opportunity to talk to lawyers and make that connection to be with community members who have questions about documentation. And we support that effort…I've been talking to people and they're interested. There needs to be support even if it's not a program but that like, an initiative by having community members who are very knowledgeable and here to provide that network.

This participant discussed how members of her organization's board wanted to delve deeply and immediately into providing documentation support. However, she did not feel that her organization had the capacity to carry out this work. She mentioned that she had a small team and would rather be indirectly involved by creating a support network, providing access to information, and making referrals to lawyers who might be able to take on cases pro bono.

One participant described how their funding capabilities loosened to include supplementing the costs that community members experienced when travelling to obtain their documents. She explained:

> In fact, just last week or the week before, I had a young person come and say, "I'm going to the capitol to sort out some documents and I need money just to get there." They know that we operate within a set of guidelines and within a set of rules. We've always had medical funds to help people with medical emergencies, for example. So, they know that we're here and available for them. But I think they also know, and quite rightly, that as foreigners, we don't have the expertise to unravel a system for them and that they do actually need to go to those people who are very well informed and know what exactly needs to be presented and to whom, and in what form because they seem to be quite pedantic about the form here of a letter or document. So, we

> are not in the immediate loop, but if somebody were to come to us and say I need to go and get this sorted and I can't afford to do it, that's probably where we would come in.

As this participant mentioned, her organization became sensitive to the pressing monetary needs of community members and became more flexible with their funding guidelines. Additionally, this participant noted how there were times where she would offer to give her own money when she felt constrained by her organization's funding policies. She described how she was once approached to help pay a bribe related to the documentation process, but she felt like she had to draw the line there. Therefore, her organization, like the others included in this study, shifted in ways that they could to be supportive, but there were limits.

When there was increased fear that there would be a raid in the community, participants noted that some families went back to Haiti of their own accord. They also noted that there would be a lack in attendance at organizational activities, including school. Regarding mass deportations, one participant said:

> There wasn't really any big deportations from what I know. There's like a few raids where they took a few families, but then there was a lot of people who left voluntarily because they thought that they were going to get deported.

Participants described how voluntary deportation was provoked out of worry, so migrants would often take their belongings to Haiti before losing them in a raid or while being deported. The anxiety-level was so high for the supervisor of one of the participants that she allowed community members to reside in the organization's building until the deadline passed. Once they saw that mass deportations were not happening, families returned to their homes.

Even if participants did not always think that mass removals would occur, they came to take seriously the fear that community members had about being deported to Haiti. One organization even relocated to Haiti with many of its constituents out of the concern that life would never get easier for Haitian migrants in the Dominican Republic. However, this case was an outlier. The common organizational response to the threats stemming from the migration crisis was not flight but to fight, and learning how to effectively and appropriately serve their communities during this period was often a first step.

5 An Opportunity to Advocate

5.1 Stepping into New Advocacy Roles

Most of the organizations that were part of this study were mainly service providers. They did little, if any, advocating for policy change, and interacting with government

officials was not typically part of their work prior to the implementation of Law 169-14 and the Regularization Plan. However, they perceived an opportunity to advocate and were resilient in this work. One participant revealed how she advocated for the non-deportation of children by negotiating an agreement with government officials:

> We have worked with officials on not deporting children. We accompany them because they can't do that, but you know that many times they do. Not everyone complies with things and, in that moment, we achieved reaching an agreement with the military, with migration officials, so that this type of thing does not happen. (Translated from Spanish by the author.)

This particular participant, like others, recognized the uncomfortable, and sometimes dangerous, advocacy work that they engage in and how they even receive threats. She continued to describe her resilience, in spite of threats and difficult interactions that she has to navigate:

> You do it because it is in your blood because you don't tolerate abuse. One has to confront the military…I have had to, in certain circumstances, confront prosecutors and sit with a group of powerful people, and doing so runs a risk. (Translated from Spanish by the author.)

By stating that she does not "tolerate abuse," she alluded to a moral grounding upon which she found it necessary to step into a new advocacy role.

Although several participants said that there were no raids or deportations in the communities where they worked, others shared that they knew of deportations happening. In one case, one of the participants described that there was military presence in her community and a situation occurred in which one of the organization's workers was repatriated illegally even after showing proper identification. She narrated:

> The military officers…they told him that it doesn't matter if you have your cédula (ID), that you're Haitian, you live in the batey (Haitian immigrant community), you're black, and you speak Creole…We knew his name already. We knew that he had his documents. We knew that he was illegally deported. We already had all of this type of information, and so it was easier for us to act pretty quickly. And I think, unfortunately, for community members who don't work with the organization, it ends up being a slower, more drawn-out process.

Dealing directly with legal aspects of migration issues, particularly with deportations, was not something her organization was used to doing. Yet, she recognized the important role that nonprofits could play in advocating on behalf of their communities noting that individuals, who did not have the backing of an organization, were at a disadvantage. Even though this participant had firsthand knowledge of deportations, she shared that she had not anticipated there to be mass removals because the Dominican Republic needs Haitian workers. Some other participants revealed similar beliefs and, in fact, were confused by many of the media reports of mass deportation threats, since there was relative calmness in their communities.

5.2 Building on Advocacy Work

For participants that were already engaged in advocacy work, they saw that they had more advocating to do. Therefore, they used their knowledge and resources to mobilize in ways that would benefit the cause, which included engaging in protests and demonstrations, raising awareness among their communities, and supporting their constituents in the documentation process. One participant discussed how she stayed with a group of migrants that were attempting to submit their documents at the immigration office until midnight on the day of the deadline. She recounted:

> It was the last day. I stayed because there were thousands of people that had not been able to enter. There were a lot, a lot, a lot of people, and listen, migration, what they did…the police, the guard, they put two white trucks and wanted to deport them. Look, I don't know if they wanted to deport them, but at 12 at night, all of the people had to leave. No one could stay there. They… didn't deport them, but they made threats to, you know, drive everyone away. (Translated from Spanish by the author.)

She believed that if she had not been at the immigration office to bear witness and advocate for her migrant community members on their behalf, they would have been deported. Her testimony is that there were many inhumane deportations, and she gathered with pastors and community leaders to discuss ways to stop them.

Another participant had worked long-term for a social change organization that was led by Dominican-Haitians, so she had a history of engaging in advocacy. She expressed frustration that her organization was not consulted by the government when developing migration policies. In the quote below, she notes how the migration crisis brought on by the Constitutional Court ruling added new advocacy work for her organization. She detailed:

> So, that is our situation. When we that all was set with the 2010 constitution, of course we were still going to work on human rights but to benefit the people that were registering that the state didn't recognize…and the second thing, to make people, who do not have residency, aware how to declare their children, so that they don't remain stateless. But after the Constitutional Court ruling, another component was added to our work, which was that we had to keep fighting to verify people on the list and insist to the Central Electoral Board that not everyone is on the list…they are Haitian descendants, and not everyone is registered. So, we have to go and officially try to resolve that…so that is the situation, the new situation that we have now. (Translated from Spanish by author.)

This participant also explained the supposed remedies to the 2013 Constitutional Court ruling. The first was Law 169–14, which created two groups of potential citizens. One group, "Group A," included those individuals who were recorded in the Civil Registry. Those on this list would have their citizenship restored. The second

group, "Group B," consisted of individuals who were born in the Dominican Republic but did not have documentation. Individuals on this list could apply for naturalization after two years. The second remedy was the Regularization Plan, which provided a way for undocumented individuals born outside the Dominican Republic to obtain documentation (Open Justice Society Initiative 2015). Evident was how the kind of advocacy work that this participant described called for her organization to have a solid understanding of migration policy. She discussed how her nonprofit accompanied migrants to get their paperwork in order and submitted to the proper offices. Therefore, she developed considerable experiential knowledge of the documentation process through her advocacy.

6 An Opportunity to Learn and Educate

6.1 Gaining a Grassroot Understanding

Having access to Haitian migrant communities put the participants in the position to have an on-the-ground understanding of the local effects of migration policies and practices. Given that this migration crisis and the government's response were unprecedented, organizations understood that getting educated about the crisis would support their resilience. Accordingly, they took time to read up on what was happening, learn how other organizations were managing, and listen to the stories of community members about how they were being affected.

Participants recognized the complexity of the situation and the general lack of awareness of what was needed to be done. One participant acknowledged how these conditions created chaos:

> If I am educated and don't understand these things, just think of how in the dark…you know? A lot of people didn't understand regularization until the last minute when they felt so much threat of deportation that they started rushing to the office. And it was a complete mess in the last month of trying to get through the line.

Public confusion about and unfamiliarity with the regularization process thus led to delayed action, which made supporting constituents a hectic endeavor. This participant shared how she accompanied individuals in obtaining their documents and was a firsthand witness to the disorder at government offices that made her work challenging and frustrating. Yet, she learned to navigate the system as best as she could.

This same participant had a history of helping parents obtain birth certificates for their children. Therefore, providing this service was not an unusual task for her nonprofit. However, during the implementation of the regularization plan, she and

other participants described that they became familiar with the various illegitimate ways people could obtain documents. She stated:

> We've paid for a few students to go back to Haiti to look for their birth certificates. I know while the regularization thing was happening, there was a black market for like birth certificates and IDs and stuff …and some people bought falsified documents.

Obtaining falsified documents appeared to be viewed as necessary when individuals were faced with financial and bureaucratic barriers that seemed insurmountable. The fact that some organizations gained this insider knowledge likely suggests the high level of trust that community members put in them.

Another participant, who works with street children from Haiti, recounted a story that demonstrates the trust held for her organization, which allowed her to gain a grassroots understanding into the experiences and realities of the communities that she serves:

> There is a case now that I'll tell you about really quickly. A child went to Haiti with his mom. His mom came back to submit her papers for the regularization plan, but I don't understand why she didn't also include her child. Seriously, I don't understand. If she submits her papers as part of the plan, then it's easier to include her son. So she…maybe this is what she thought…she thought to leave her son in Haiti with family members, but the boy tells me that he can't be there…that there is nothing there. There is no food. There is nothing. So, the boy came in the process that I told you before through the fields. He didn't go to his house first. He arrived here, and he had lost almost 15 pounds in the months that he was there. I asked him, "Does your mom know that you're here?" "No …" Here we gave him food. We took him for a medical consultation. He bathed here. So, that means they have a lot of trust in our institution. (Translated from Spanish by the author.)

During the interviews, participants often discussed cases of individuals facing challenges during the regularization process. What became clear was that the social connections that they had with the community were key for them to obtain insight that would inform their approaches to providing assistance.

Not all participants, however, believed that their community members felt like they could seek out legal support from their organization. They attributed this issue to community members either not thinking that the organization had the capacity to help in that way or not feeling comfortable enough to discuss their documentation status openly with members of the organization. In these instances where less information was available via community members, organizations relied more on what they read in the news and heard from other organizations.

6.2 Creating New Educational Initiatives

As organizations grasped the situation and learned how they could make an impact, they took the lead in educating their communities about their rights and the actions

that they needed to take to avoid potentially being deported. Therefore, several organizations provided new educational initiatives that were legal in nature. For example, one participant discussed how they channeled a significant amount of time and resources toward supporting families in the documentation process, including running educational campaigns about the requirements. Her organization ran a school, so these educational campaigns were not entirely beyond the scope of the nonprofit's educational mission. However, the substance of the educational activities was new.

Participants noted how they experienced increased inquiries from individuals and organizations outside the Dominican Republic to learn about what was occurring, conduct research, and see how they could support Haitian migrant families. Often foreign groups, typically students, would express a desire to collaborate with a Haitian community. Several of the participants shared that their organizations work in mixed communities with Haitians, Dominican-Haitians, and Dominicans, so they did not exclusively serve Haitian migrants and their descendants. Therefore, they tried to open up interests to the idea of supporting initiatives that benefited mixed communities by explaining to outsiders that they take an issues-based approach. For example, one participant explained how they center projects on the common problem of poverty:

> So, we know like in these communities there is a lot of poverty, and these kinds of problems that they have, it can happen to anyone. I actually don't see the difference between this family is Haitian and this family is Dominican…we just see them all as a community.

While not seeing a difference between Haitian and Dominican families can be viewed to be a superficial perspective that does not account for disadvantages of being undocumented nor the discrimination that Dominican-Haitians and Haitian migrants face (Wooding and Moseley-Williams 2004), participants that took this type of viewpoint recognized how this approach could promote cohesion amongst the different groups as well as provide outsiders with a more nuanced understanding of Dominican-Haitian relations and the solidarity that often exists.

Another participant whose work involves bringing together international student groups to collaborate with local communities on development projects described how he considered mass deportation in and of itself to be a learning opportunity. He regularly took students to the Dominican-Haitian border on educational trips to see the bi-national market, which was several hours away from his organization. When asked if he changed any of his strategies out of consideration for potential deportations, he responded:

> I thought the opportunity for something to actually happen, the chances were very slim. The other thing is, my thinking was it wouldn't be a violent situation and it might be one…even

> though it might be quite traumatic, it might be one we could learn from because it's quite clear that we are headed in that same direction. You know, it's quite clear that in this political process now that there's a tremendous dislike for Hispanic people in the US, legal and illegal. "Round them up, build a wall, ship them off." So, I thought, well if they do witness something, maybe it's a learning process that people are human beings. They're not cattle to be loaded up and hauled off. They're human beings just trying to live.

This participant thought students could make connections between migration issues in the Dominican Republic and the United States by bearing witness to deportations. Although he explained that his intentions to expose his students to the "traumatic" event of removals were educational, there was no acknowledgement of how doing so might be wrong or, at least, questionable.

7 Conclusions

While there has been a long history of migration issues in the Dominican Republic (Wooding and Moseley-Williams 2004), the period leading up to the June 17th, 2015 deadline was different for several reasons. First, the policy initiatives were unprecedented, so participants pointed out that the learning curve to understanding what was happening and what they could do was steep. Second, there was a deadline to submit documentation that participants and their community members interpreted marked a date after which mass deportations would potentially begin. Third, participants reported instances of repatriations and increased local knowledge of actual raids taking place. And fourth, there was considerable international media coverage that portrayed the Dominican Republic in a negative light. According to participants, while the media outlets brought attention to the issue, they also produced additional fear.

Considering the emergence, novelty, and severity of the migration crisis is important to do when analyzing organizational resilience (Su and Junge 2023). Participants seemed to suggest that the migration crisis felt like it emerged as an eruption of chaos as the deadline to submit paperwork in the Regularization Plan got closer. As previously noted, the government's policy initiatives were innovative, so the adversity that the participants' experienced was novel. The illegal removals, fear-driven voluntary self-deportations, and overall threat of mass deportations that participants reported are evidence of harsh adverse events.

Although participants expressed some skepticism about the likelihood that mass deportations would occur, they perceived and capitalized on new opportunities (Shepherd and Williams 2023) that emerged from the threat of removals. They included the opportunities to grow, to advocate, and to learn and educate. Organizations that grew did so by community building and networking, which is illustrative

of Duchek (2020) adaptive phase. Organizational advocacy included navigating confrontations with government officials and mobilizing to ensure that their communities were not left behind as a result of migration policies. In mobilizing, many organizations took an adaptive path and exhibited their flexibility to step into new roles (Conz and Magnani 2020). The nonprofits that took advantage of the opportunity to learn studied the situation, often by listening to the testimonies of their community members, so that they could be better prepared to advocate and serve. As Duchek (2020) notes, this organizational learning is crucial for being resilient. They also used their privileged vantage point to educate others about the crisis.

As organizations experienced adversity stemming from this migration crisis, they demonstrated their organizational resilience in functional, operational, and strategic ways (Hepfer and Lawrence 2022). Functionally, for example, organizations with the purpose of providing education used their organizational capacity to take advantage of the opportunity to grow by expanding their organizational activities and providing community education about the regularization plan. Organizations that might have felt that their existence was in jeopardy, given that they served primarily Haitian migrants, were operationally resilient by using opportunities to partner with other organizations and advocate for their communities. All of the organizations were able to continue to make a positive impact, which is reflective of the kind of strategic resilience that Hepfer and Lawrence (2022) say organizations have when they are able to continue to work towards their mission in the face of adversity.

The themes and subthemes that emerged in this study are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Some overlap between them can be seen, for example, when considering how nonprofits that grew by expanding their organizational activities by taking on new advocacy roles were only able to do so by developing their networks and creating new educational initiatives. Therefore, the distinct opportunities, and how organizations took advantage of them in different ways, can be understood in a comprehensive manner.

While this study advances the literature on nonprofit organizations, migration crises, deportation threats, and organizational resilience by offering an understanding of the opportunities for nonprofit organizations that emerged from mass deportation threats and how they took advantage of them, there are some limitations to consider. One is that this study does not give insight into how organizations might have changed their activities over the long-term, due to the opportunities of which they took advantage. Future research should analyze how these organizational shifts in response to adversity might have contributed to cultural or structural changes in organizations. Another constraint is that this study considers the perspectives of a relatively small sample of nonprofit actors. There are likely hundreds, if not thousands, of other viewpoints on this issue, so it is important to note that the findings are

particular to the group of participants of this study. Using survey methods in future studies would allow for more voices on this issue to be captured. Moreover, the majority of participants were not from the Dominican Republic or Haiti. Future research should therefore consider integrating more Dominican, Dominican-Haitian, and Haitian perspectives. Also, this study did not include an analysis that took into account differences between organizations. Although doing so could have provided more nuanced findings, the author does not believe the major themes that emerged would have varied much, if at all. However, there is the possibility that unique insights would have emerged had she focused her analysis on differences across organizations engaged in distinct activities or according to the racial/ethnic composition of organizational actors. Lastly, another limitation is that the study did not include the process of "member checking" (Birt et al. 2016), which entails verifying transcripts, data analysis, and results with participants. Had the research involved the participants in this way, the study's level of trustworthiness would have been higher.

There are several policy recommendations that can be drawn from the participants' perspectives. Two relating to the opportunity to grow entails providing funding at the network-level and directing resources to coalitions of organizations (Young 2023). Clearly, organizations saw their effectiveness to address the migration crisis enhance when they partnered with other organizations with different strengths. Therefore, funding policies would likely have a stronger impact, if they provided support for collaborative initiatives run by networks of nonprofits. Moreover, the Dominican government should seek to partner with networks of nonprofits in documentation programs, given their expansive efforts (Sorrell-Medina 2022).

With regard to the opportunity to advocate, many organizations engaged in significant advocacy work for the very first time in response to the migration crisis. Policies that support nonprofit organizations in developing advocacy skills would thus be helpful. As seen in the interviews, there was a need for legal assistance during the implementation of the regularization plan. Some organizations developed their networks and stepped into new advocacy roles, in order to address this need. Therefore, nonprofits and their community members would benefit from state funding for initiatives that provide affordable and pro bono legal aid (Chand et al. 2021).

In terms of the educational opportunity that was revealed in this study, policies at the organizational-level should promote educational programming in conjunction with universities and initiatives that allow for nonprofit actors to learn about migration crises. Nonprofit staff, for example, should not be expected to educate themselves about migration issues on their own time but, rather, educational programs should be built into their work day to embed this learning as part of the organizational culture (Young 2023). Additionally, there should be capacity building and professional development opportunities for organizational staff to improve

their skills in communication, planning, evaluation, and coordination, which may contribute to their organization's resilience and ability to develop trust with their communities.

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