

The Mobilization Index: A Strategic Mobilization Tool

By DR. STEVE SHADRACH

Steve Shadrach founded the collegiate ministries Student Mobilization and the Traveling Teams, the Center for Mission Mobilization (now named Via), as well as the resource ministries of Support Raising Solutions and Campus Ministry Today. He was also the Director of Mobilization for the U.S. Center for World Mission, overseeing the Perspectives on the World Christian Movement worldwide. He has written numerous books, including *The Fuel and the Flame* and *The God Ask*. He and his wife Carol have five children, 10 grandchildren, and live in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

I'll bet you've never heard someone say, "If we keep sending more missionaries to that country, we'll be hurting them more than helping!" How could that be? More is always better, right?—No!

If we continue sending missionaries and resources to a country with a large population of Christians, it could reinforce the perception that they are (and always will be?) a needy mission *field*, when in fact, it is way past due for them to transform into a radical new missions *force*.

Some countries don't need more missionaries, they need mobilizers—humble, cross-cultural believers who will serve the Body of Christ there. If you have a leadership role in a ministry that sends workers to other countries, consider whether each specific country (or people group) needs more missionaries ... or more mobilizers. Imagine the multiplying impact your ministry can have by sending mobilizers to partner with the national believers.

LATINOS AND ARABS: A DIVINE CONNECTION?

Sociologists tell about the incredible similarities between Latinos and Arabs in language, appearance, culture, and customs. In this volatile age, when many Muslim countries are closed to Americans and Europeans, there is often an openness, even a curiosity, between Arabs and Latinos. Perhaps the key to reaching the Middle East is flooding those nations with Great Commission workers from Brazil, Peru, Costa Rica, and other Latin countries. As Via has pioneered personal-support-raising training for missionaries in Latin America (ViaGenerosity.org), we also are seeing that their local churches, friends, and family members can fund their own missionaries and not be reliant on foreign support.

Today, 80% of the evangelical church resides in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.¹ So we at Via (formerly the Center for Mission Mobilization) kept asking ourselves, “What if there was a tool that could identify strategic countries with large populations of evangelical Christians who possess other favorable factors that could help them be effective in engaging, equipping, and connecting their believers to raise up and send workers to the unreached?”

That question resulted in the development of the Via Mobilization Index™ (ViaMobilizationIndex.org).



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For over 12 years, Via has been working with respected missiologists and researchers from various countries to pull together a wide range of demographics for 118 countries, including the 57 countries that have 1 million or more evangelical Christians. This Index has been presented at the Global Mobilization Consultation, Missio Nexus, EMQ, and included in Radical's Stratus project.

1 CMM (Center for Mission Mobilization) staff researchers did the math based upon Operation World's populations of evangelicals and sending numbers (<https://operationworld.org>).

Information is powerful. Since 1964, *Operation World* has been informing and inspiring Christians around the world to join God in praying for the nations.² For decades, the *Joshua Project* has helped awaken the Church by defining the unfinished task of the Great Commission among the unreached.³ Both of these excellent resources (and others like them) have contributed to mobilizing laborers, guiding mission strategies, and awakening countless hearts to God's global purpose.

One of the main purposes of Via's Index is to aid mission agencies and ministries globally to be the most strategic and effective in the placing of their personnel. We developed “deeper dives” country profiles, much like *Operation World*, to highlight the strategic opportunities each of these countries have to send missionaries to the unreached. Go to ViaMobilizationIndex.org to see the latest version. You can search through different countries and

2 Mandryk, Jason. 2010 *Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation*. Downers Grove: IVP.

3 www.joshuaproject.net



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regional profiles, but you can also sort and weigh all the various data points in order to make informed strategic decisions based on your mission vision, resources, and opportunities.

The Via Mobilization Index™ builds upon the strategic research of others, revealing countries' mission-sending potentials and where the Church is the ripest for mobilization. You can utilize the user friendly "Sort and Compare" function as you search through these various sub-indices and others that make up the Index:

- **Number of Evangelicals versus Missionaries:** The Index utilizes *Operation World* for two critical pieces of data: number of evangelicals and number of missionaries sent. While these numbers were published in 2010, they are the best researched and trustworthy to date. When credible current information becomes available, we update these figures with new cited research after careful consideration.
- **Regional Access to UPGs:** We evaluated the physical distance or regional proximity from a country to high numbers of Unreached People Groups with data from the Joshua Project.⁴
- **Cultural Bridges to UPGs:** To determine this, we use Geert Hofstede's research into the six dimensions of national culture.
- **Prosperity:** While generosity is not dependent on financial prosperity, research shows a correlation between the Legatum Prosperity Index™ and the country's number of cross-cultural missionaries sent externally and their ability to fund them. Legatum determines overall prosperity through what they call the "nine pillars" of prosperity that consider factors such as economic quality, education, health, and governance.⁵
- **Religious Freedom:** Religious restrictions can potentially play a significant role in a nation's ability to mobilize and send out workers to the unreached. The Pew Forum has researched government

restrictions and social hostilities and how they interfere with religious beliefs and practices.⁶

If these statistics are even close to accurate, life cannot go on as usual, knowing billions of these precious souls will live and die, never even having the chance to hear of Jesus and His forgiveness.

Within the country profiles, we also highlight how God has uniquely and strategically positioned that nation in His plan to see every tribe, tongue, and nation reached by His people as quickly as possible. But why the hurry? It's because we are faced with the greatest dilemma in the history of our now over eight billion world population. Jesus issued the Great Commission almost 2,000 years ago. Numerous countries have been sending out foreign mission teams for well over 200 years. Yet, with all our modern technology, travel, and entrepreneurship, four out of 10 people in the world are still cut off from the Gospel! Dr. Todd Johnson of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity released a disturbing research statistic: "86% of all non-Christians will never meet a Christ follower."⁷ Since reading that, I have not been sleeping well.

If these statistics are even close to accurate, life cannot go on as usual, knowing billions of these precious souls will live and die, never even having the chance to hear of Jesus and His forgiveness. Indeed, we celebrate the significant Gospel advances over the years, but if we are to genuinely address this overwhelming need, a new approach is required. It is time to think outside the box. For the last 50 years, we've been diligently studying and documenting where all the Unreached People Groups of the world are. Maybe now it's time to discover another major category of peoples—those huge swaths of believers across the planet yet to be mobilized but have some of the greatest mission sending potential!

⁴ Based on Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and utilizing the Country Comparison Tool. <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison-tool>.

⁵ "What is Prosperity" The Legatum Centre for National Prosperity, <https://www.prosperity.com/about-prosperity/what-prosperity>.

⁶ Based on the 2021 Religious Freedom & Restrictions report, Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/religion/religious-freedom-restrictions/>.

⁷ From Dr. Todd Johnson's research at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon Conwell Seminary.

As an example, the 13 English-speaking countries in Africa have more than 130 million evangelicals. But research shows they are sending less than 5,000 cross-cultural workers.⁸ That's only one missionary for every 26,000 evangelicals, showing a significant mobilization gap. Instead of sending more missionaries into these Christian countries, what if we instead launched mobilization teams throughout that region, with a seemingly modest goal of raising up just one cross-cultural worker for every 1,000 evangelicals? Astonishingly, that would increase their missionary sending from 5,000 to 130,000 cross-cultural goers—the greatest missionary force in all of history!

Countries that haven't had decades of experience in sending missionaries often welcome seasoned partners who can offer resources to help educate Christians on the biblical basis of missions and the dire spiritual needs of the unreached. They also may want assistance as they develop recruiting strategies, training programs, and member care structures for their own church planters within their own people group and missionaries to Unreached People Groups. While this Index can aid in the researching, planning, and discernment process, it is not intended to be the final arbiter of God's will, dictating the location of your ministry assignments. Ultimately, prayer and the leading of the Holy Spirit take precedence over research and statistics.

Peruse and evaluate the Index to see if it can be a tool you and other mobilizers and ministry leaders can use to fuel prayer, encourage a greater commitment to the unreached from all believers, inform leaders about the current state of sending, and to help guide the placement of future missionaries and mobilizers.

The goal of the Via Mobilization Index™ is simple: to see an increase in global mobilization that leads to more laborers being sent to the unreached to proclaim Christ until every tribe, tongue, and nation has heard. We believe that each of the nations on the

Index has been commissioned by God to raise up and send out laborers for God's harvest. It's not a ranking of which countries are most important or which can send the most missionaries. Acts 1:8 applies to the Body of Christ in every country, so each nation on the Index has its own unique opportunities, challenges, missions, and sending potential as they seek to raise up and launch workers.

Application: Peruse and evaluate the Index to see if it can be a tool you and other mobilizers and ministry leaders can use to fuel prayer, encourage a greater commitment to the unreached from all believers, inform leaders about the current state of sending, and to help guide the placement of future missionaries and mobilizers. Paul asks in Romans 10:14–15a, *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him, of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?* Let's work together as a global Body of Christ to mobilize, train, and send more missionaries across the world to fulfill the Great Commission.



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For questions or more information, you may contact us at mobindex@vianations.org. Visit ViaNations.org to find mobilization resources for churches, students, families, and mission agencies. MF

⁸ CMM staff researchers did the math based upon Operation World's populations of evangelicals and sending numbers (<https://operationworld.org>).

