

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CIRCULAR MIGRATION PROGRAMS BETWEEN GUATEMALA AND CANADA: Analysis of the Impact on Living Conditions, Migration Intentions, Barriers and Opportunities

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CIRCULAR MIGRATION PROGRAMS BETWEEN GUATEMALA AND CANADA: Analysis of the Impact on Living Conditions, Migration Intentions, Barriers and Opportunities

This article introduces **Canadian employers, industry stakeholders and government authorities** to the challenges, bottlenecks and opportunities for hiring Guatemalan workers under Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program.

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INTRODUCTION AND STUDY OBJECTIVES

International migration is an extremely complex reality, of interest to both origin and destination countries. It is a phenomenon that can be seen from different, even contrasting, perspectives, ranging from security and control to its effects on production, employment and development. In this article, we summarize key elements of a study relevant to Canadian employers that addressed a type of migration that has generated growing interest in recent years: circular migration.¹ This refers to the transfer of migrants from a country of origin to one of destination with the aim of working in a certain activity for a limited period of time (usually between three and 10 months).

Canada has two main circular migration programs: the long-standing *Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SWAP)* and the *Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP)* (Table 1). These worker programs are important labor sources for many Canadian employers who depend on workers to fill often physically demanding and seasonal positions that many Canadian citizens are unwilling to perform. While there is growing interest in these programs to fill labor gaps, there is also interest in their capacity to improve worker livelihoods, slow irregular migration and contribute towards mutually beneficial international relationships. This document will focus on the TFWP as it is the only Canadian program available to Guatemalan workers.

This study is focused on Guatemala, a country that has high percentages of irregular migration to the U.S., high poverty rates and low participation in TFWP. This has generated interest in the capacity to expand labor recruitment from Guatemala as a strategy to improve local livelihoods while slowing irregular migration.

Specifically, the study had two primary objectives:



- **Identify bottlenecks limiting the demand and participation of Guatemalan workers in migrant labor programs.**
- **Assess the capacity of the TFWP in Guatemala to foster greater rootedness in their communities of origin, improve livelihoods and generate socioeconomic opportunities in Guatemala.**

Study results point to key bottlenecks for Guatemala including: a complex TFWP application process, higher recruitment costs, processing delays, and recruitment strategies that favor long-standing labor networks in Mexico. Conversely, Guatemalan workers have a reputation for being hardworking, trustworthy and highly productive. In addition, results suggest circular migration has the potential to both reduce irregular migration and improve the living conditions of migrants and their families.

¹ This research brief is part of a broader study on migrant labor conducted in Guatemala, the U.S. and Canada. The full report can be found at: www.accioncontraelhambre.org.gt/migracion-circular-2023/

METHODOLOGY

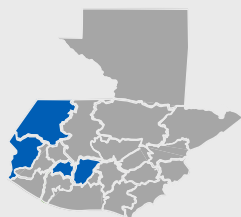


This study used semi-structured interviews and quantitative surveys in Guatemala, Canada and the U.S.

This approach allowed the research team to compare findings by gathering information from multiple sources and perspectives. Researchers conducted interviews with industry stakeholders and employers of TFWP workers (for example, owners of nurseries, agricultural businesses and industry organizations) as well as labor recruiters and Guatemalan community leaders and workers. Respondents were identified via public sources (e.g., web sites) and referral.



The Canadian survey was distributed by various industry organizations and recruitment agencies to their members². In Guatemala, 11 communities with a high percentage of circular migrants and 11 communities with low circular migration were selected for survey distribution. Sites were comparable in population, proximity to roads, agriculture and geographical area. Both interviews and surveys were conducted in:



4 DEPARTAMENTS
IN GUATEMALA



- Chimaltenango
- Huehuetenango
- San Marcos
- Sololá

Responses for the four study components included:

- (1) Survey of Guatemalan community members (1,367 respondents).
- (2) Interviews with Guatemalan stakeholders, community leaders and migrant workers (60 respondents).
- (3) Interviews with stakeholders and employers located in Canada and the U.S. (25 respondents).
- (4) Survey of employers of migrant workers (166 respondents from the U.S. and Canada).

² Surveys distributed in the U.S. employed a database, published by the U.S. Department of Labor, consisting of employers and contractors hiring H-2 labor as cited in the full report.



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BACKGROUND: CANADIAN MIGRANT LABOR PROGRAMS

Canada has two main work permit programs, namely the long-standing Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SWAP) and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) (Table 1). SWAP began as a bilateral agreement, originally with Jamaica in 1966, and later expanded to other Caribbean countries and Mexico and was designated for agricultural employers within certain commodity groups. In the early 2000's Canada implemented the TFWP with three separate agricultural labor streams as a pilot project. These separate programs include the Agricultural Labor Stream, Stream for Low-wage Positions, and the Stream for High-wage Positions. These work permit programs were designed to provide a more flexible labor source that included employers outside of the agricultural industry and allows for hiring from any country.

TFWP allows for periods of up to three years, which are popular with employers with year-round labor needs, such as greenhouses and ranching operations. The TFWP programs do not have dedicated government recruiters, like SWAP, in origin countries. TFWP recruited 82,150 workers in 2021, of which approximately 13,000 were recruited from Guatemala.

Table 1. Types of Temporary Worker Programs Available in Canada

Types of work permits	Highlights
SWAP	Refers to bilateral agreements between Canada and Caribbean countries and Mexico, it is not available for Guatemala. It involves governments in the selection of workers and has more agile migration procedures.
TFWP Ag-Stream	Corresponds to temporary agricultural workers within a specific list of crops. It allows permits of up to 2 years and does not require working with government recruiters.
TFWP low-wage	Work permits are designated for occupations outside of government-defined agricultural commodities or other industries. Low-wage designation are for jobs that pay hourly wages lower than the provincial average (hence 'low-wage'). It allows permits of up to 2 years and does not require working with government recruiters. There are caps on the number of foreign workers that can be hired.
TFWP high-wage	Designated for skilled workers who earn hourly wages higher than the provincial average and are awarded for periods up to 3 years.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. Employers face multiple challenges in participating in the TFWP, including a complicated, lengthy, uncertain and costly application and hiring process

Employers described the TFWP as a complicated, expensive, uncertain and increasingly burdensome process. Specific challenges described include:

- A complicated process with new rules and requirements that keep employers uncertain whether they are complying with all the programmatic rules.
- Lengthy work permit application process taking as long as 240 days.
- High participation costs due to a complicated process requiring employment of outside work permit processing and recruitment firms.
- High worker costs associated with providing subsidized housing (can deduct \$30 per week), international travel, and health insurance.

Survey results (Figure 1) closely mirror qualitative data, with complex work permit application, uncertainty of worker availability, application costs, and recruitment costs being the top responses.

Figure 1: Survey data on challenges faced by Canadian employers





2. Employers use external firms to process permit applications in Canada and combinations of formal recruitment firms and internal worker-to-worker procedures to process and identify workers in Guatemala

The role of a recruiter includes identifying suitable workers who meet both employer qualifications and embassy requirements (i.e., no criminal record or history of irregular migration), helping workers navigate the application and embassy interview process, and ensuring workers arrive at their worksite on time. Employers use multiple recruitment methods to process worker permits and identify and recruit workers.

- **Work permit application process:** Most employers (60%) hire external firms to process and navigate the complex work permit application process in Canada. Once employers have been granted work permits they use recruiters to identify and process worker applications.
- **Formal recruitment strategies are dominant:** Formal recruiting companies, or companies providing open and transparent recruitment services to any employer, are often contracted by the firms hired to process work permit applications in Canada. In Guatemala there are three primary formal recruitment companies that help most Canadian employers (or their work permit processing firms) select and process workers. The more structured Canadian recruitment model (compared to the informal recruitment model using internal company personnel who act as recruiters, which is prevalent with U.S. visas) was born from a pilot project between the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and an agricultural labor recruitment organization in Quebec. At the conclusion of the pilot project, several of the employees initiated private recruitment firms with the participating Canadian farm labor organizations. In this way two of these firms process nearly 90 percent of Canadian work permits in Guatemala and have grown to recruitment over 15,000 workers in 2022.
- **Worker selection procedures:** Methods for selecting workers, based on quantitative data, show they were more evenly distributed between using existing workers to identify new workers (worker-to-worker selection) and formal recruiting companies identifying workers (Figure 2). Qualitative data, however, point to most employers using a worker-to-worker model to identify specific workers. In this model, employers ask existing workers to recommend family and friends who are willing to participate in the TFWP and provide their recruiters with these names to vet and process. New employers rely on formal recruiters to identify worker, however, once a trusted worker base is established, the worker-to-worker selection model is implemented. Formal recruiters are only asked to identify workers if employers do not have enough worker-recommended names or are unhappy with their workforce and are looking to expand into other countries or regions.

Figure 2: Methods for identification and hiring of employees.



The advantages of the worker-to-worker selection model are that it allows employers to ensure a trustworthy, productive and committed workforce while also rewarding employees in good standing. Part of this model establishes strong inter-worker networks to reduce cases of workers abandoning contract periods or not returning at the conclusion of the work permit period. Individuals who recommend other workers bear some responsibility for recruiting quality workers who complete contracts. For workers, the opportunity to recommend family and friends allow them to share employment opportunities within their social networks.

The disadvantage of this model is it establishes closed recruitment networks where some communities have high participation rates, while others have little to none. The system establishes tight social networks often within families, and outside individuals, even within participating communities, have difficulty learning about or accessing worker permits. This leads to confusion and misinformation about how to access work permit programs or how these programs function. Additionally, resentment from community members unable to access and prosper from employment opportunities is common.

3. Challenges for recruiting Guatemalan workers include employers with strong geographic ties to other countries, delays in processing work permits and illegal recruitment fees caused by high demand, lack of transparency and worker selection procedures

- **The worker-to-worker selection model leads to strong geographic ties:** The worker-to-worker selection model leads to strong geographic ties to specific countries or regions, with Mexico being the dominant source. Employers develop relationships, sometimes spanning multiple generations, with workers from communities in these countries. This establishes trust and a reluctance for employers to branch into other countries, such as Guatemala.
- **Delays in work permit processing times:** Employers described long work permit processing times in Guatemala compared with other countries, particularly Mexico. This is due to delays, sometimes as long as one year, for Guatemalan passports and longer Canadian embassy processing times (1-to-2-week delay while passports are mailed to the embassy in Mexico, the only embassy equipped to stamp passports in the region).

- **Illegal recruitment fees:** A side effect of the worker-to-worker selection model is illegal fees charged by recruiting workers to access worker permits. Work permit programs, by Canadian law, have no access fees, however recruiting workers (those empowered by employers) take advantage of their position, the high work permit demand and limited information about how these programs function to charge access fees. Illegal fees range from \$340CAD to as much as \$4,275CAD, however fees over \$2,500CAD are infrequent. Employers appear to have limited knowledge of this problem as most workers understand this is illegal and would result in termination should employers become aware. Similarly, recruited workers understood disclosure could lead to being excluded from participation, possibly impacting their entire family network or community. **It is important to note that illegal recruitment fees increase the overall work permit transaction costs and generate a higher potential for workers to withdraw from employer contracts or to overstay their work permits.** While illegal recruitment fees have been documented in Guatemala, they likely occur in other countries whose employers rely on worker-to-worker selection model.

Formal recruitment companies appear to reduce occurrences, or at least lower the fees charged, especially when compared to U.S. visas which reportedly face more frequent and higher illegal fees. Formal recruiters control recruitment fees through:

- Establishing relationships with community leadership from which they recruit and warn that fees are illegal and could close the door for new permits in the community.
- Knowledge of scenarios ripe for illegal fees being charged.
- Encourage workers to disclose cases of access fees.



"When we see one worker recommending 10 or more people, you can bet they are charging, and we warn employers"

- Recruiter

- **Recruitment Scams:** Closely related to illegal recruitment fees are scams related to individuals requesting payment for worker permits that do not exist. Scammers claim to represent established recruiters or employers; however, workers have limited capacities to verify such claims. The scams negatively affect the individuals who are deceived and generate mistrust in communities regarding work permits. Overall, these scams decrease the value of temporary work permits as an alternative to irregular migration.



4. TFWP work permit costs are shared by employers and workers

- **Costs covered by employers:** Canadian employers provided the roundtrip transportation cost to Canada, work related travel costs within Canada, health insurance and subsidized housing costs (employers can deduct \$30CAD per week for housing).
- **Costs paid by workers:** For the Canadian TFWP (Ag-Stream and Low-wage) workers are responsible for all work permit related application costs.
 - Work permit application (\$155CAD)
 - Biometric information (fingerprints and picture) (\$85CAD)
 - Complete medical examination by a certified doctor (about \$133CAD)
 - Total administrative cost (about \$373CAD)
- **Additional cost borne by some workers:**
 - *Travel essentials:* Many first-time applicants have expenses related to clothing and luggage for trips. Climates can be drastically different depending on where workers are going and the type of work they are performing (cost varies).



5. Worker characteristics sought by employers include a reliable, positive and collegial workforce with agricultural field experience and a willingness to work

Almost without exception, employers hiring Guatemalans describe a workforce that has a positive attitude, gets along well with others and is highly productive (Table 2). As one employer notes, *“They come ready to work.”* Other employers note Guatemalans have lower employment abandonment rates. However, there is some evidence that abandonment rates might be connected to disagreeable work conditions (i.e., work in inclement weather) or employers with unreasonable production expectations. While these conditions were rare, they arose from a combination of workers unprepared for their new work environments and cases of supervisors pushing excessive production rates. Employers look to minimize these challenges, as they invest large sums in recruiting and transporting workers and want to ensure a trustworthy labor force willing and ready to complete contracts.

Table 2: Desired worker characteristics

Preference	Description
<i>Confidence they will remain until the end of the contract</i>	A significant percentage of employers consider this a key characteristic.
<i>Strong commitment to hard work</i>	Employers are looking for labor with a strong commitment to hard work. This often means hiring workers from rural regions with an agricultural tradition where physical strength and endurance are central characteristics.
<i>Positive attitude</i>	Employers are looking for workers with a positive attitude toward physical work and an interest in learning new skills.
<i>Reliability</i>	Because many workers are expected to perform tasks independently, employers look for people who can be trusted to remain productive without constant supervision.
<i>Ability to get along with others</i>	Many workers are accommodated in shared housing offered by employers. Workers' ability to have positive interactions with each other both on and off the job is key, as is maintaining a clean home and avoiding excessive alcohol consumption.
<i>Fieldwork experience</i>	Most employers prefer to train their workers. However, they also look for workers with extensive experience in agriculture, as an indicator of physical strength, endurance and willingness to perform manual labor.



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“what I really look for are people with the right attitude and confidence. They are coming to a new place where they don’t speak the language. I need people that have the confidence to handle that and have the right attitude.”

- Employer

“I look for people that can get along with others. They are going to be living with other guys. They need to have a personality where they can get along [...] honestly, I can teach them the job but the personality and attitude you can’t.”

- Employer



6. There is a strong preference for hiring men as most positions require physical strength and stamina and separate housing requirements discourage hiring both genders

Most employers have a strong preference for recruiting men, primarily for two reasons:

- Women require additional investments in separate housing (60% of survey respondents), as government regulations stipulate that shared housing is unallowable.
- Most jobs filled by temporary workers require physical strength and stamina, which employers feel women lack (60% of survey respondents).

However, certain industries (for example, strawberry production) had preferences for women due to a perceived greater hand dexterity and productivity compared to men. In these cases, employers hire only women, and no men, due to the need for separate housing.

7. Numerous factors contribute to workers abandoning employment during the work permit period, including combinations of insufficient working hours, short permit periods and high illegal permit access fees

Migrant workers abandoning work permits is a concern for governments, employers and recruiters. Understanding of factors influencing visa abandonment is limited due to the highly sensitive nature of the issue. Interviews suggest the percentage of permit abandonment is between two and seven percent. In the case of workers abandoning work permits, three scenarios were identified:

- Workers who never report to the job (very rare).
- Workers who leave their position during their contract period.
- Workers who complete their employment contracts but fail to return home.

All situations affect employers differently and are likely to have different causes and consequences (Table 3).

Table 3: Causes for worker abandoning work permits

Lower wages than other nearby employment opportunities
The worker considers working hours insufficient or excessive
Worker paying high illegal fees to access work permits combined with short-term permits that don't allow workers to pay debts and earn additional income
Short work permit periods that limit opportunity to earn income
High family financial needs due to previous financial debts/responsibilities combined with short work permit stays
Belief that re-obtaining the work permit in the subsequent year is unlikely
Negative relationship with employer due to poor treatment/conditions, disagreement about work expectations, not having the required skills

8. Several emerging strategies to overcome recruitment challenges in Guatemala are being implemented, including free recruitment services by the Guatemalan government, a recruiter registry aimed at reducing fraudulent recruiters, tax incentives to reduce worker travel expenses and expedited passport procedures

- **New recruitment options:** Over the past two years, efforts have been made in Guatemala to address the increase in irregular migration by opening access to legal migration pathways through the TFWP. In the past few years, the Guatemalan government, supported by the U.S. government, has formalized an internal recruitment service (Programa de Migración Laboral del Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social de Guatemala - MINTRAB). While this free service has a growing presence with U.S. visas, it has not gained much traction with the Canadian TFWP, likely due to the presence of strong formal recruitment companies. Additionally, the MINTRAB's previous struggles to provide labor in a timely manner have caused uncertainty among some employers.
- **Recruiter registry:** In 2023, all recruiters operating in Guatemala must register with the Guatemalan government. This is an effort to reduce fraudulent recruitment scams by publishing a list of authorized recruiters for workers and employers to access. These lists, vetted by the Guatemalan government, will help both employers and workers identify and access contact information of reputable recruiters and avoid bad actors. The published list is available at:

<https://www.mintrabajo.gob.gt/index.php/servicios/sistema-de-reclutadores>



- **Overcoming higher travel costs:** Recognizing that travel costs to Canada are high, the Guatemalan government has reduced taxes for airline tickets and waived the country's exit tax for permitted workers over the next five years.
- **Expedited Guatemalan passport services:** Delays have improved dramatically over the past year. Workers participating in TFWP are eligible for expedited passport times of approximately one month. However, not all recruiters seemed to be aware or have access these expedited procedures.



9. TFWP permits have the capacity to significantly improve livelihoods in both the short and long term compared to both nonemigrants and irregular migrants

According to the study's survey data, the top two reasons why Guatemalans migrate are to improve livelihoods (90% of responses) and look for better employment (36% of responses). Their employment in Canada generates remittances (between \$1,000 CAD to \$2,500 CAD per month) that are a key source of income for the workers and their families as well as their communities and country as whole. There is strong evidence that the TFWP has a much higher potential to improve the quality of life of families than irregular migration (Table 4). In addition, results suggest TFWP permits have a greater capacity for long-term livelihood impacts on families and communities through investment of remittances in land, microenterprises and education.

Table 4: Key differences in remittances between households of circular migrants and irregular migrants

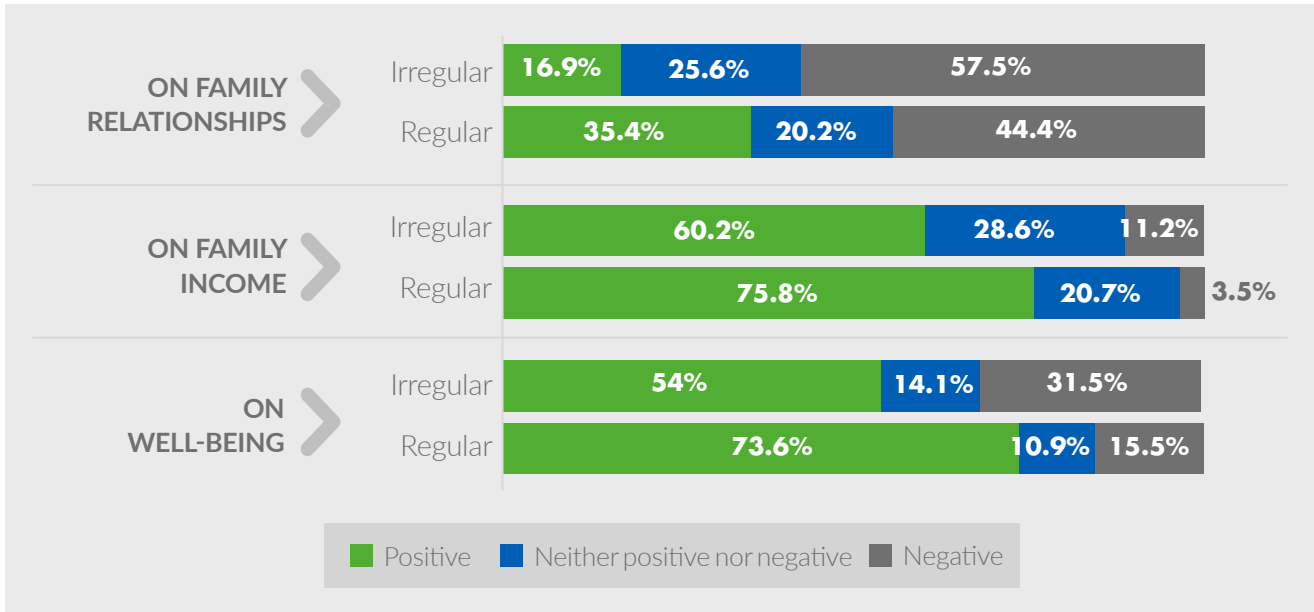
A higher percentage of regular migrants send remittances to their families compared to irregular migrants (96.5% versus 87.5%, respectively).
Households of regular migrants are 26% more likely to have received remittances in the last 5 years than those of irregular migrants.
The average monthly remittances received is higher for regular migrant households.
Remittances received by households of regular migrants are more frequently used to make investments and those investing are more decisive in their financing.
Investments in the purchase of tools or equipment for agriculture are much more frequent in the households of regular migrants.
The use of remittances for investment purposes tends to increase with the number of years remittances were received. This is more pronounced in regular migrant families.

10. Workers voiced a strong preference for migrating with worker permits due to lower costs and travel risks and greater earning potential and family wellbeing compared to irregular migration

Workers voiced a strong preference for migrating with the TFWP over irregular migration. The primary reasons are that work permits:

- Require a much smaller investment, with approximately \$1,320CAD for permit costs versus \$19,800CAD to pay a human trafficker (coyote).
- Allow for a quicker, easier and less risky travel process (often air travel) compared to the high-risk illegal route requiring hiring human traffickers and traveling through Mexico and across the U.S. border.
- Generate greater remittances for families (76%), allow workers to maintain family ties by returning each year (35%) and result in a greater sense of wellbeing among workers (74%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Impact of migration by well-being, family income, and family relationships



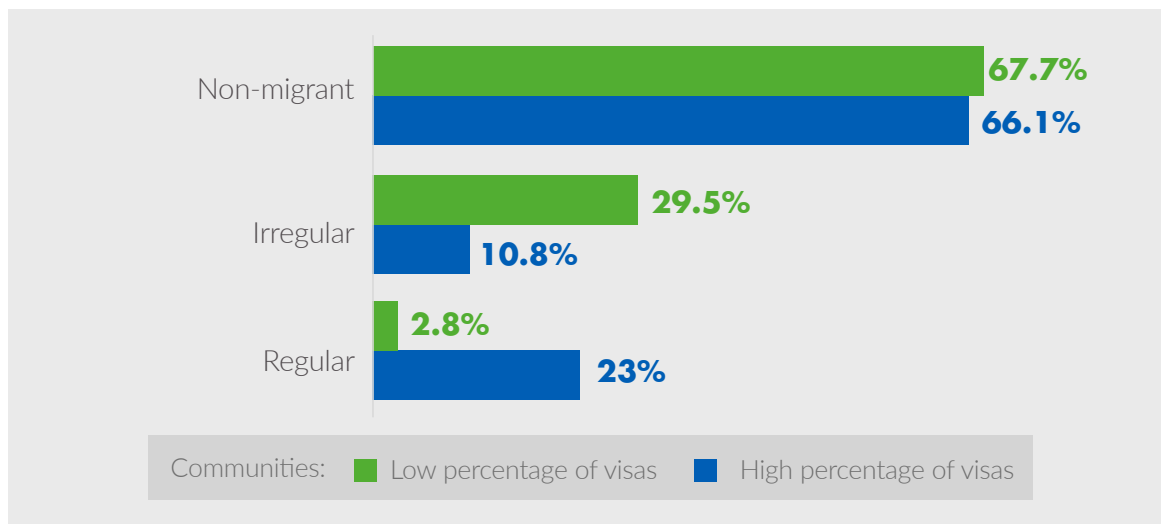
11. The availability of TFWP permits do not increase migratory intentions of nonparticipating community members, but it does reduce the total number of irregular migrants

Interview results suggest that the availability of worker permits affects both migratory intentions and the strategies of migration. Specifically:

- The availability of TFWP permits (when they are perceived as real and not as scams), causes people to postpone irregular migration while waiting for a permit (if the permit does not arrive, they will migrate irregularly).
- The presence of worker permits contributes to increased local employment as remittances are invested in local projects (more frequently than by irregular migrants), which generates employment and reduces migratory intentions of neighbors.

Statistical data indicates that the availability of work permits does not increase migratory intent within communities. The study also found that the number of families with at least one migrant in the U.S. is similar for both communities with high percentages of visas (34%) and low percentages of visas (32%), which was not statistically significant. However, in comparing how the migration is distributed between irregular versus regular migrants, it was observed that communities with a high percentage of temporary work permits had drastically lower percentages of family members as irregular migrants (11%) (Figure 4). Communities with low percentages of permits, by comparison, had 29% migrating irregularly. In short, **the availability of work permits does not increase the migratory intention, but it does drastically reduce the number of irregular migrants** (in percentage terms, it reduces irregular migration by 63%).

Figure 4: Proportion of families per migratory status in communities with high and low percentage of temporary work visa



RECOMMENDATIONS

While some recommendations may be more within the control or interest of one entity (e.g., government) than another, coordinated action can generate broader and more synergetic impacts than entities working individually.



I. STRENGTHENING THE LABOR RECRUITMENT SYSTEM IN GUATEMALA

- 1. Publish the recruiter registry implemented by the Guatemalan government and include information useful to employers.** Published information may include contact information, certifications and experience with different work permit/visa programs. This can help employers select the most appropriate recruiters for their needs and allow workers to verify the legitimacy of recruiters.
- 2. Support external recruiter certifications to ensure quality recruiters.** This may include IRIS certification from the International Organization for Migration and ISO 9001. This recommendation will help contribute to increasing the quality of recruiters and the service offered to employers.
- 3. Train registered recruiters on the procedures of all available work permits/visa programs.**
- 4. Develop and validate tools, procedures or protocols to select workers who are more responsive to employers' needs and more likely to return after visas have ended .**
- 5. Support Guatemalan government efforts to counter illegal recruitment fees and scams.**



II. DEVELOPING INCENTIVES TO FACILITATE EMPLOYER RECRUITMENT IN GUATEMALA

- 1. Train first-time workers to anticipate Canadian working and living conditions so they can function more effectively abroad.** This includes interpersonal skill training to work and live with other employees, conflict management, labor rights and access to health services, with the aim of qualifying Guatemalan workers for employers.
- 2. Generate tools and implement actions to reduce recruitment costs in Guatemala.** This may include tax reductions, negotiation of wholesale ticket purchases, decentralization of passport application and delivery, and facilitation of virtual paperwork with embassies.
- 3. Support efforts to reduce passport and work permit processing times.** Among possible actions are expediting the obtaining of passports, facilitating virtual procedures, decentralizing locations and / or using secure postal mail.
- 4. Develop linkages between Canadian. employers and Guatemalan recruiters and workers:** Implement a stakeholder-funded project to bring Canadian employers and recruiters to Guatemala to encourage future hiring. This may include:
 - (1)** Promoting Guatemalan workers with visa/work permit processing companies, Canadian recruiters and relevant organizations representing farmers or employers.
 - (2)** Inviting employers to Guatemala to meet recruiters and visit communities.
 - (3)** Subsidizing recruitment fees with certified recruiters.
 - (4)** Subsidizing in-country work permit/visa processing travel expenses of first-time workers.
 - (5)** Offering incentives for the hiring of women.



CONCLUSIONS

Circular migration programs have the capacity to drastically improve local livelihoods in Guatemala when compared to earnings of nonimmigrants and even irregular migrants. Furthermore, temporary work permits can slow undocumented migration as most migrants prefer traveling with work permits. This preference is due to permits allowing workers more opportunities to remain better connected to families and improve their income and wellbeing when compared to irregular migrants. Additionally, employers who recruited workers from Guatemala, described a dependable and productive workforce that possessed many of the characteristics they valued.

However, there are a number of challenges to both increasing Guatemalan participation in these work permit programs and expanding their capacity to improve local livelihoods and reduce irregular migration.

- **First**, employers face several challenges in participating in the TFWP, specifically a difficult and lengthy application process and high participation costs.
- **Second**, employers describe delays in processing workers in Guatemala due to primarily to slow Guatemalan passport procedures.
- **Third**, limited availability of formal recruitment firms in Guatemala discourages both U.S. visa processing firms and employers from recruiting in Guatemala.
- **Fourth**, the worker-to-worker selection process used by many employers can lead to recruiting workers charging illegal access fees.
- **Fifth**, the lack of clarity and understanding on how workers can access worker permits, combined with the scarcity of permits, creates opportunities for unscrupulous individuals to scam workers by charging for nonexistent permits.

These fees and scams decrease the positive livelihood impacts and increase the potential for workers abandoning worker permits in destination countries. In the past year, steps have been taken by the Guatemalan governments to overcome challenges in the passport processing times. Additionally, new recruitment registries and services are emerging to help employers better engage with the Guatemalan workforce and reduce challenges related to illegal fees and scams.



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