

НАСЕЛЕНИЕ И КРИЗИСЫ

COVID-19 AND INTERNATIONAL LABOR MIGRATION IN AGRICULTURE

Ph. Martin

University of California – Davis, USA.

E-mail: plmartin@ucdavis.edu

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Abstract. Two thirds of the 272 million international migrants in 2019 were employed in the destination country. Demographic and economic inequalities between countries, combined with globalization that reduced barriers to migrants, were expected to continue to increase the number of international migrant workers. Covid-19 closed many national borders to non-essential travelers, with limited exceptions. Seasonal farm workers were one of the notable exceptions, suggesting that many governments do not expect local workers to fill seasonal farm jobs despite record-high unemployment rates. For agriculture, the longer term effects of the pandemic include faster mechanization, more guest workers, and rising imports. Responses are likely to vary by commodity and be shaped by government policies. This article provides a review of the distribution and activities of the world's 164 million international migrant workers in 2017, including the 111 million in high-income countries. The analysis focuses on the North American migrant worker and the differences between their integration in the agricultural industries. American agricultural systems are integrating in the sense that Canadian blueberries, Mexican avocados and U.S. meat trade freely, but the farm workforces in each country are increasingly Mexican.

Keywords: Covid-19, international migration, migrant worker, agriculture, food system.

Introduction

Table 1 shows that the number of international migrants more than tripled between 1970 and 2019, from 84 million to 272 million, and that the migrant share of the world's population rose from 2.3 percent to 3.5 percent. Over 60 percent of the world's international migrants are in Asia (84 million migrants) and Europe (82 million), but migrants are a much larger share of Europe's 740 million people, 11 percent, than of Asia's 4.6 billion people, 1.8 percent. Migrant shares of regional populations were highest in Oceania, with eight million or 21 percent migrants among 38 million people, and North America (Canada and US), with 59 million migrants among 370 million people, making migrants 16 percent of residents.

Table 1

International Migrants, 1970-2019

Year	Number of migrants	Migrants as a % of the world's population
1970	84,460,125	2.3
1975	90,368,010	2.2
1980	101,983,149	2.3
1985	113,206,691	2.3
1990	153,011,473	2.9

End of table 1

Year	Number of migrants	Migrants as a % of the world's population
1995	161,316,895	2.8
2000	173,588,441	2.8
2005	191,615,574	2.9
2010	220,781,909	3.2
2015	248,861,296	3.4
2019	271,642,105	3.5

Migrants move to opportunity. Two-thirds or 176 million international migrants are in the high-income countries, and another third are in middle-income developing countries such as Costa Rica, Turkey, or South Africa. There were 13 million migrants or five percent of the total stock of migrants in low-income countries.

The ILO estimated there were 164 million migrant workers among 258 million international migrants in 2017, which means that 70 percent of international migrants 15 and older were employed or looking for work in the country to which they moved. The ILO estimated 150 million migrant workers in 2013, suggesting an average increase of 3.5 million international migrant workers a year between 2013 and 2017.

Men were 58 percent of international migrant workers in 2017. The share of men 15 and older who were in the labor force was 75 percent for both migrants and natives in destination countries, but the share of international migrant women in the labor force, 64 percent, was higher than for native women, 48 percent. One reason for the higher labor force participation of international migrant women is that many are employed in health, child, and elderly care in industrial countries, and as domestic workers in middle-income developing countries.

Table 2 shows that over 111 million migrant workers, 68 percent, were in the high-income countries with a sixth of the world's 3.5 billion workers. Migrants were almost 20 percent of workers in high-income countries, but less than five percent of workers in low-income countries.

By region, 24 percent of migrant workers in 2017 were in Europe, 23 percent were in North America, and 14 percent were in the Arab states. Almost 41 percent of all workers in the Arab states were migrants, followed by 21 percent of all workers in North America and 18 percent of all workers in Europe.

Table 2

International Migrant Workers in 2017

Migrant workers by income level of countries, 2017	Low-income	Lower middle-income	Upper middle-income	High-income	All
Total workers	292.6	1216.7	1,355.9	599.5	3,464.7
Total workers in %	8.4	35.1	39.1	17.3	100
Labour force participation rate for total population	75.0	57.4	65.0	60.3	62.0
Migrant population aged 15+	8.1	27.7	43.6	154.6	234.0
Migrant population aged 15+ in %	3.5	11.8	18.6	66.1	100

End of table 2

Migrant workers by income level of countries, 2017	Low-income	Lower middle-income	Upper middle-income	High-income	All
Migrants as a proportion of population aged 15+	2.1	1.3	2.1	15.5	4.2
Migrant workers	5.6	16.6	30.5	111.2	163.8
Migrant workers in %	3.4	10.1	18.6	67.9	100.0
Labour force participation rate for migrant population	68.5	59.9	69.9	71.9	70.0
Migrant workers as a proportion of all workers	1.9	1.4	2.2	18.5	4.7

Note: Numbers are given in millions for the following categories: total workers, migrant population aged 15+ and migrant workers; workers and migrant workers include both the employed and unemployed, the labour force participation rate is the ratio of workers (employed plus unemployed) to working age population (population aged 15+).

Source: ILO, 2018¹.

Covid-19 and Migrant Exceptions

Many governments ordered non-essential businesses to close in March 2020, and closed their borders to non-essential travelers as Covid-19 spread around the world. Agriculture was considered an essential industry, which means that farm and food system workers were expected to report to work despite general stay-at-home orders. Similarly, most governments made exceptions for truckers and others moving food and other items from farmers to supermarkets and over national borders [Moroz, Shrestha, Testaverde 2020].

Food system workers include higher-than-average shares of migrant workers in occupations that range from farm worker to food preparation worker. Many migrant restaurant workers lost their jobs as non-essential businesses closed, but most farm workers kept their jobs as crop production ramped up in spring 2020 in the Northern Hemisphere.

Most governments have special programs that allow farmers to employ foreign workers to fill seasonal jobs². Despite record-high unemployment rates, governments opened otherwise closed borders to seasonal farm workers, prompting farmers in some countries to charter planes to transport workers over closed borders that the migrant workers they wanted to hire would have to cross, as with German farmers who arranged charter flights for Romanian workers³.

Many governments tried to persuade local jobless workers to accept seasonal farm jobs. The results were mixed. British labor recruiter Concordia reported that only 10 percent of the 1,000 British workers who responded to the “Pick for Britain” campaign in April 2020

¹ ILO. 2018. Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers – Results and Methodology [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_652106/lang--en/index.htm

² Martin Ph. 2016. Migrant Workers in Commercial Agriculture. ILO [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/publications/WCMS_538710/lang--en/index.htm

³ Alderman L., Eddy M., Tsang A. 2020. Migrant Farmworkers Whose Harvests Feed Europe Are Blocked at Borders. New York Times. March 27. [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/27/business/coronavirus-farm-labor-europe.html?searchResultPosition=1>

went to work on farms; the others cited the short duration of the job, difficulties getting from their homes to farms with jobs, and the need to care for children. Many British farmers said they preferred experienced Bulgarians and Romanians to jobless local workers⁴.

Germany similarly created a web site (<https://www.daslandhilft.de/>) to link jobless nonfarm workers with seasonal farm jobs, and provided economic incentives for jobless local workers to accept seasonal farm jobs. Furloughed workers who accepted farm jobs could continue to receive the 80 percent of their regular pay while working up to 115 days in a seasonal farm job without paying social security taxes on their farm earnings. However, most local workers did not start or stay in seasonal farm jobs⁵.

A million people are employed in Italian agriculture. In 2020, some 150,000 Eastern European migrants could not travel to Italy to fill farm jobs, prompting efforts to attract jobless Italians into farm work. Some farmers reported that five or more Italians applied for each seasonal job available, but that many did not report to work or soon quit. A \$1.1 billion farm support government proposal in May 2020 included legalization for unauthorized farm workers, which critics said would not add to the seasonal farm workforce since the unauthorized workers who would benefit were already in Italy⁶.

Figure 1 shows that the US food system accounts for 11 percent of US jobs, many of which are seasonal or part time and most of which are in sectors that process, sell, and serve consumers, including 60 percent in food service and eating and drinking places [Martin, 2020]. Hired workers account for 1.5 million or almost 60 percent of average employment in farming. However, since many farm jobs are seasonal, some 2.5 million unique workers are employed sometime during the year for wages on US farms.

Most of the hired farm workers in the US were born in Mexico, and about half are not authorized to work in the US, which limits their access to government Covid-19 relief programs. There were fears that Covid-19 could spread rapidly among hired farm workers, many of whom live in crowded housing, but during the first three months of the pandemic there were few reports of farm workers contracting Covid-19 [Beatty et al., 2020]. By contrast, there were well-publicized outbreaks of Covid-19 among meatpacking plant workers, often refugees and other legal immigrants who work in close proximity on “disassembly” lines⁷. Meat and poultry processing employed an average 520,000 workers in 2018 for average weekly wages of \$800, and larger meatpackers often had to raise wages and offer bonuses to persuade meatpacking workers to continue reporting to work.

Relatively few jobless US workers sought seasonal farm jobs for several reasons. First, most jobless workers are in cities and lack links to the labor contractors and crew bosses who match most farm workers with jobs; nonfarm workers would also have to find temporary housing in agricultural areas. Second, unemployment benefits may exceed agricultural

⁴ O’Carroll L. Horowitz J., Groves S., Tareen S. 2020. British workers reject fruit-picking jobs as Romanians flown in. *Guardian*. April 17. [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/apr/17/british-workers-reject-fruit-picking-jobs-as-romanians-flown-in-coronavirus>

⁵ Melissa E. 2020. Farm Workers Airlifted Into Germany Provide Solutions and Pose New Risks. May 18. *New York Times* [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/18/world/europe/coronavirus-german-farms-migrant-workers-airlift.html>

⁶ Horowitz J. 2020. For Some Italians, the Future of Work Looks Like the Past. *New York Times* [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/24/world/europe/italy-farms-coronavirus.html?searchResultPosition=1>

⁷ Groves S., Tareen S. 2020. Worker shortage concerns loom in immigrant-heavy meatpacking. *Washington Post*. [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/worker-shortage-concerns-loom-in-immigrant-heavy-meatpacking/2020/05/25/0ebb5bde-9f02-11ea-be06-af5514ee0385_story.html

earnings. A laid-off California worker who was earning \$3,000 a month would receive \$350 a week in unemployment benefits, plus \$600 a week in federal pandemic unemployment benefits through July 31, 2020, making benefits of \$950 a week more than the \$500 a week average earnings of employees of labor contractors⁸.

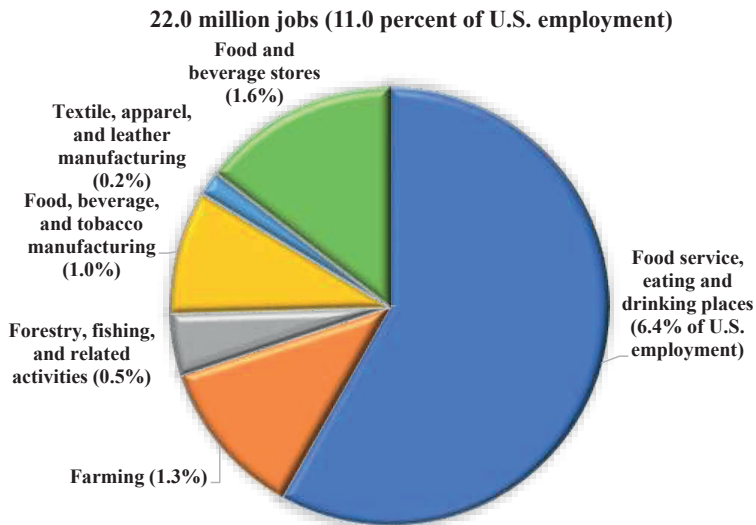


Fig. 1. Employment in the US Food System, 2018

Instead of hiring jobless workers in the US, more farm employers requested certification to employ H-2A foreign workers in 2020 [Rural Migration News 2020]. The H-2A program allows farm employers to recruit and employ foreign workers to fill farm jobs that last up to 10 months. The US Department of Labor (DOL) certified 257,666 jobs to be filled with H-2A workers in FY19, and the US Department of State (DOS) issued almost 205,000 H-2A visas, over 90 percent Mexicans (some H-2A visa holders fill two farm jobs while in the US).

The number of US farm jobs that were certified to be filled with H-2A workers remained below 100,000 until 2014, doubled to over 200,000 in 2017, and has continued to increase despite Covid-19. As part of the immigration exceptions for agriculture, the US DOS granted visas to H-2A workers without the in-person interviews that are normally required. Two-thirds of H-2A visas are issued in Monterrey, Mexico, where US consular officers issue up to 2,000 H-2A visas a day.

Conclusions

The Covid-19 pandemic is widely expected to transform labor markets, substituting machines for workers in many services to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus. Even after stay-at-home orders are lifted, there are predictions of less employment in the food and beverage industry as take-out meals and consumption at home replace restaurant meals and drinking in bars.

Agriculture has always been a slightly different industry, and was treated differently during the Covid-19 pandemic. Farming was considered an essential business, with farm

⁸ Rural Migration News. 2020a. Labor, Virus, H-1B. Vol 26. No 2. [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: <https://migration.ucdavis.edu/rmn/more.php?id=2413>

workers expected to report to work. Governments unable to persuade jobless local workers to fill seasonal farm jobs instead made exceptions to closed borders for foreign farm workers.

The Covid-19 pandemic is adding to rising farm labor costs, which will accelerate the three major labor trends in industrial country agricultural systems: labor-saving mechanization, more guest workers, and more imports of labor-intensive commodities. Mechanizing hand tasks on farms requires a systems perspective, cooperation between biologists and engineers, and trial-and-error innovation. This means examining the entire process from farm to fork, developing uniformly ripening commodities that can be harvested in one pass through the field, and perhaps offering machine and hand harvested commodities at supermarkets in a manner similar to conventional and organic.

The failure of local jobless workers to fill seasonal farm jobs during the pandemic has seemingly persuaded many governments that international migrant workers are the core of the seasonal farm workforce. Most governments require farm employers to try and fail to recruit local workers before they are allowed to employ foreign guest workers, but these recruitment efforts rarely find local workers and have become a go-through-the-efforts exercise. Governments require farmers to pay housing and transportation costs for guest workers, which raises farm labor costs but provides employers with reliable workers who will not abandon their jobs.

Finally, the pandemic could increase trade in labor-intensive commodities. The virus is not spread via food and, with the same production technologies but lower labor costs in developing countries, more fresh fruits and vegetables could be produced in one country and consumed in another. The US already imports half of its fresh fruit, and a third of its fresh vegetables, most from Mexico, and the share of imports in US fruit and vegetable consumption is rising⁹.

Covid-19 introduces new uncertainties for everyone. For agriculture, the longer term effects of the pandemic include faster mechanization, more guest workers, and rising imports. Responses are likely to vary by commodity and be shaped by government policies. For example, if governments subsidize mechanization and open their borders to fresh produce, there are likely to be fewer guest workers. Alternatively, easing farmer access to guest workers and closing borders to imported produce means more international migrant workers.

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Bio note:

Philip Lester Martin, PhD (Economics), Prof., Department of Agriculture and Resource Economics, University of California, Davis, USA.

Contact information: e-mail: martin@primal.ucdavis.edu; ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1547-2137.

⁹ Agustin E., Martin P., Starbridis O. 2019. Farm Labor and Mexico’s Export Produce Industry. Wilson Center [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/farmlabor-and-mexicos-export-produce-industry

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COVID-19 И МЕЖДУНАРОДНАЯ ТРУДОВАЯ МИГРАЦИЯ В СЕЛЬСКОМ ХОЗЯЙСТВЕ

Мартин Ф.

Калифорнийский университет в Дейвисе, США.

E-mail: plmartin@ucdavis.edu

Аннотация. В 2019 г. две трети из 272 млн международных мигрантов были трудоустроены в принимающих странах. Ожидается, что в будущем возрастающее демографическое и экономическое неравенство между странами в сочетании с глобализацией, устранившей многие барьеры для миграции, будут продолжать способствовать росту численности международных трудовых мигрантов. Пандемия Covid-19 привела к закрытию многих национальных границ для тех, чьи перемещения не являются необходимыми, за некоторыми исключениями. Сезонные сельскохозяйственные рабочие были одним из таких исключений. Это свидетельствует о том, что большинство правительств не ожидают, что местные работники будут заполнять сезонные рабочие места в сельском хозяйстве, несмотря на рекордно высокий уровень безработицы. Долгосрочные последствия пандемии для сельского хозяйства включают более быструю механизацию, увеличение количества иностранных рабочих и рост импорта. Ответы на новые вызовы, вероятно, будут зависеть от производимых товаров и будут определяться государственной политикой. В этой статье представлен обзор распределения и деятельности 164 млн международных трудящихся-мигрантов в мире в 2017 г., в том числе 111 млн в странах с высоким уровнем доходов. Особое внимание уделяется трудовым мигрантам в Северной Америке и различиям в их интеграции в сельскохозяйственные отрасли. Американские сельскохозяйственные системы взаимосвязаны в том смысле, что канадская черника, мексиканские авокадо и мясо из США торгуются свободно, но в составе рабочей силы на фермах в каждой из этих американских стран все больше становится доля мексиканцев.

Ключевые слова: Covid-19, международная миграция, трудовой мигрант, сельское хозяйство, продовольственная система.

Сведения об авторе:

Мартин Филип Лестер, доктор экономических наук, профессор Департамента сельского хозяйства и экономики ресурсов Калифорнийского университета в Дейвисе, Дейвис, США.

Контактная информация: e-mail: martin@primal.ucdavis.edu; ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1547-2137.

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