

Editorial Introduction: Agriculture Labor Migration in an (Un)changing World

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The function and the importance of contemporary agriculture lie in different definitions. Globally it is food security. Sustainable agricultural practices contribute significantly to meeting the nutritional needs of burgeoning global populations (Pawlak and Kołodziejczak, 2020). According to Farooq et al, (2019), smallholder farming systems, often prevalent in rural areas, serve as vital contributors to food security by diversifying crop production and enhancing dietary diversity. Moreover, studies (e.g. Viana et al., 2022), highlight the pivotal role of technological advancements in agriculture, such as improved crop varieties and irrigation techniques, in bolstering food production and accessibility. Another global aspect is environmental sustainability. The environmental dimensions of agriculture have garnered increasing scholarly attention, reflecting growing concerns over climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource degradation. Academic investigations underscore the imperative of transitioning towards sustainable agricultural practices to mitigate environmental impacts while ensuring long-term food security. Studies such as those by Pretty et al. (2006) emphasize the potential of agroecological approaches, including organic farming and agroforestry, in enhancing resource efficiency, conserving biodiversity, and mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, sustainable land management practices can help mitigate soil erosion, enhance soil fertility, and safeguard water resources, thereby fostering environmental resilience.

Locally there are two effects. Agriculture is still a central player in the local economy. It serves as an economic base in the rural communities, exerting substantial impacts on local economies and pivotal role of agriculture in generating employment

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opportunities, income generation, and fostering rural livelihoods (Loizou et al., 2019). Research by Greenberg and Kurlander (2023) indicates that small-scale agriculture not only supports the livelihoods of farmers but also spurs downstream economic activities through linkages with agro-processing industries and markets. Furthermore, agricultural diversification, as elucidated by Stacherzak & Heldak (2019) can bolster local economies by mitigating risks associated with monoculture and enhancing resilience to market fluctuations. Another aspect is that agriculture is one of the main tools for preserving natural resources, especially water sources, biodiversity, different types of landscapes, flora and fauna for future generations.

The rural landscape is significant as a guardian of the historical story, both local and general-state and national (Amit-Cohen and Sofer, 2016). The rural landscape preserves local and national heritage and as such it is a space of connection between the people and the place, and the historical story and national values (Ashworth, 2016). Buildings, fences, roads with historical stories and even nature are part of the local heritage fabric. As such, the rural space is an attractive destination for tourism and education (Kim et al., 2021).

As climate crises deepen, we are expected to witness increased migration and refugees within and between countries (Omobowale et al., 2019). This is due to resource depletion (primarily water and fertile land) and governmental instability that may exacerbate it. This occurs as the world population grows, altering consumption patterns locally and globally. consequently, an increase in labor migration, both in terms of supply and demand, is anticipated, which is presumed to further intensify internal tensions in recipient countries (Schmitt and Abay, 2023).

In 2021, the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2021) estimated the number of labor migrants in the world at 160 million men and women. Most of the migrants (60.6%) moved to European countries (except for eastern Europe), North America and Arab states (Rakotonarivo, 2021). According to the ILO data, labor migrants account for 41.4% of the labor force in Arab states, 20% in North America and 18.4% in northern, southern and western Europe. In total, labor migrants comprise slightly less than 5% of the global labor force. In terms of country of origin, Asian and Pacific states contribute about a third of global labor migrants, followed in descending order by Europe and central Asia, the Americas, and Arab states. Despite the growing percentage of women among migrant workers in recent decades, men are still the majority – 59% men versus 41.5% women in 2019.

It is customary to distinguish between high-skilled and low-skilled labor migration. The perceived level of skill has an impact at various levels. High-skilled labor migration is usually undertaken by individuals attracted by the promise of high salaries and rights that are equal, or almost equal, to those of the destination country's citizens. Labor migration perceived as low-skilled, on the other hand, is usually organized in programs initiated by the destination countries. Such temporary low-skilled migration programs (TMPs) are low-paying, and the workers' rights are significantly lower than those of the local citizens. In practice, these programs

are inherently injurious, exposing the work migrants to exploitation, violation of human and workers' rights, and even human trafficking.

Low-skilled migrants are assigned to fields of work that citizens of the target state do not wish to perform because the work is low-paying and it is "3D" – dirty, dangerous and demeaning. Agriculture, the focus of this article, falls into this category. Other prominent examples include construction work and jobs at shipyards and factories (Hargreaves et al., 2019). For example, one of the consequences of the nature of low-skilled employment is that a relatively high percentage of migrant workers suffer physical and mental health problems that stem from their work. A survey published in 2019 found that nearly half (47%) of migrants will suffer from at least one work-related illness, and 22% will be injured at work at least once (Hargreaves et al., 2019). Following poor infrastructure, several articles have described the correlation between explosive conditions and poor physical and mental health (Preibisch & Otero, 2014; Caxaj et al., 2022).

As mentioned, highly skilled labor migrants are perceived as desirable, and their migration is organized in an authorized manner. As such, in 2015, 44% of the countries declared a diplomatic interest in attracting skilled migrants (Czaika et al., 2017). Low-skilled labor migrants are perceived as desirable only for a certain period and are often included in temporary migration programs initiated by the destination country. Temporary Labor migration programs (TMPs) are a vital component of migration regimes in destination countries of labor migration. These programs encompass different regulations. Labor migrants, especially those in TMP, are defined by their temporariness and movement between spaces, from country of origin to the destination country and (sometimes) back. In the destination country, during their proposed temporary stay, they are exposed to conditions not encountered in permanent living situations, such as separation from family. Upon return to their country of origin, they grapple with the long-term implications of their work in the destination country. TMPs are characterized by an inherent structural vulnerability that exposes migrant workers arriving through them to exploitation and violation of human and labor rights, which sometimes may be considered human trafficking (Shamir, 2012, 2021; Niezna et al., 2021; Kurlander, 2022).

Agricultural labor migration is characterized by a longstanding and intricate exploitation of its workforce. This exploitation is facilitated, among other factors, by the predominance of undocumented migrant workers (Beltran, 2018 ;Sivis, 2021) or migrants under short-term migration programs, commonly referred to as 'seasonal migration' (Wong et al., 2021). In the United States, Canada, and Europe, a seasonal, temporary labor migration program is the standard method of employing agricultural labor migrants (Beltran, 2018; Fiałkowska & Matuszczyk, 2021). For example, in Australia the TMP is called a "working holiday visa". It is valid for up to a yearlong for agriculture and other low-skill sectors, with some opportunity for one additional annual extension (Howe & Reilly, 2015). That is the case for most, but not all, seasonal, temporary labor migration programs (Ruhs, 2006).

In this special issue of *Geography Research Forum* we investigate various aspects of agricultural labor migration while highlighting two main domains: 1. Rights of migrants in the agricultural sector and 2. TMPs in the agricultural sector. All six articles provide complex and fascinating answers to these two questions, revealing that while the injuries to agricultural migrant workers are long-known and familiar to fatigue, the methods used to address them are relatively innovative.

Ben-Ozer's article introduces us to the worker-driven social responsibility (WSR) paradigm, which has emerged from the foundational principles of the FFP. WSR bridges non-traditional labor unions and the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Its primary aim is to enhance the working conditions of marginalized workers across supply chains and eliminate various manifestations of exploitation. She discusses three variations of WSR projects: the Fair Food Program, Milk with Dignity, and the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh. Babineau and Stephens' article also focuses on the Milk with Dignity program. Another program discussed by Schenner, is the Rural Solution Program (RSP). All programs so far, except for Ben Ozer's comparative example on Bangladesh, are in the USA. Besides the USA, the special issue discusses two migration programs in Mexico and Israel. Hernández introduces us to the Visiting Border Worker's Card Program on the Mexico-Guatemala border. The last two articles discuss the Israeli TMP in a specific time (Avieli) and its changing through time (Kurlander, Shoham, and Kaminer). The articles demonstrate in various ways and in different contexts the complexity of different power structures and the strategies they generate for the migrants to confront them.

The special issue opens with an article by Natasha Montes Hernández, Johanna Schenner, Maria Barron Pérez and Rafael Pérez that investigates labor migration along Mexico's southern border, focusing on the Visiting Border Worker's Card Program. It examines the Mexico-Guatemala border region's general characteristics and changes in policies regarding documented labor migration, drawing from bibliographic and statistical sources. Additionally, it delves into the labor conditions migrants face in Mexico, often under precarious circumstances. In their work, the authors recognize these challenges as crucial for understanding the securitization and promotion of documented migration in this border area.

The second article by Johanna Schenner introduces the Rural Solution Program (RSP) as a specific MSI (Multistakeholder Initiative), which examines whether MSIs effectively address employment conflicts in agriculture. By using a framework that includes institutional theory and regulatory space theory, Schenner's article asks for a better understanding of how new forms of voluntarism may impact employment dynamics in agriculture. Her findings reveal that RSP can play a key role in highlighting dynamics, but it does not address deeper issues. Schenner suggests that it is because political, historical, economic and social dynamics shape the experience of farmworkers in the US, contributing to their likelihood of seeing their employment conditions violated.

Kathryn Babineau and Maya Stephens' article examines the effectiveness of complaint hotlines within private regulatory initiatives (PRI), focusing on those run by worker-centered PRIs. By doing that, Babineau and Stephens are filling the literature gap on worker-led PRIs. The article analyzes call records from the initiative Milk with Dignity (MD) Program, a worker-led PRI in the Northeastern U.S. dairy sector. Unlike other PRI hotlines, the MD Program's hotline is well-utilized due to improved worker engagement and infrastructure, suggesting potential for worker-led programs to address common challenges in PRI grievance mechanisms. Babineau and Stephens indicate that the MD program acknowledged significant technical difficulties associated with hotline utilization and effectively tackled access-related barriers by enhancing worker involvement and the hotline's infrastructure.

Yonat Ben-Ozer's article outlines worker-driven social responsibility (WSR) as a mechanism bridging alternative labor unions and corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices, aiming to enhance the working conditions of vulnerable workers across supply chains. It proposes an assessment of the applicability of WSR in various settings, scrutinizing three existing WSR initiatives to delineate two prevalent models and highlight structural factors influencing the feasibility of implementing WSR in diverse environments. Ben-Ozer's argument contends that WSR stands a higher chance of success within local supply chains, mainly when overseen by indigenous alternative labor organizations. Moreover, while stringent regulations and extensive state involvement may present significant challenges, collaboration with governmental bodies could potentially be viable with modifications to the approach. Notably, Ben-Ozer's article raises skepticism regarding the viability of establishing WSR within temporary migration frameworks, citing a need for precedents in such conditions.

The article by Yahel Kurlander, Shachar Shoham, and Matan Kaminer outlines the historical utilization of Thai migrant workers in Israel since the 1980s, culminating in establishing an institutionalized and regulated migration framework. This framework involves delegating responsibilities for migrant recruitment, placement, and discipline. The authors contend that these policy evolutions and the increasing presence of Thai laborers in Israel have significantly influenced employment dynamics. Despite their substantial contributions to the Israeli rural landscape, the migrants have encountered obstacles in attaining equal rights and political representation locally and nationally. The authors argue that prevailing perceptions depict these workers as temporary, disposable, and economically advantageous.

The article that concludes the special issue is by Nir Avieli, who discusses the phenomenon of Israelis accusing Thai migrant workers of eating dogs. Despite lack of evidence supporting these accusations and the cultural taboo against eating dog meat in Thailand, Israelis persist in their claims. Through ethnographic research in Israel's rural areas and critical media analysis, the author argues that the dog-eating myth serves to marginalize Thai migrant workers within the Israeli social hierarchy, justifying their exploitation as a cheap labor force. This myth, rooted in

the symbolic significance of dogs in Israeli society, exemplifies the broader power dynamics at play in the treatment of migrant workers.

In conclusion, this special issue has comprehensively explored labor migration in the agricultural sector. The articles within this issue have delved into innovative approaches and examined the effectiveness of different programs. Through diverse case studies spanning the USA, Mexico, and Israel, the complexities of power structures and the strategies employed by migrants to navigate them have been examined. Furthermore, the articles in this issue underscore the challenges faced by migrant workers these days, especially precarious labor conditions. Further research is needed to continue and promote the rights well-being and security of migrant workers globally. As the special issue descends to print, Israel is still engaged in the Hamas - Israel War. Israeli agriculture has suffered a very severe blow due to the absence of migrant workers due to the war. This blow reflects the close connection between agricultural resilience and migration. It is evidence of the need for further research and action on behalf of migrants for the benefit of all.

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