

Challenges with opportunities in managing trans-border migration

- Since trans-border migration involves shorter distances and more localized movements, it is essential for local governments such as town councils, Alcaldes and Chairpersons, to be involved in the discussion towards the management of transborder migration. This will facilitate the discussion related to labor market identification, standards for commerce and trade (both formal and informal), and access to services.
- As with other forms of migration management, it must be approached from a rights-based migrant-centric approach. However, taking into account that communities on both sides of the border have familial, language and ethnic similarities it must also include a culture dimension.
- Access to education should be inherent in a transborder management strategy, primarily since the English-based education is attractive to the neighboring Spanish-speaking communities in Guatemala, and the diversity of career options in Mexico is attractive to Belizean students.
- Considering that there is already a local pass (pase local) in place, there is opportunity to adopt a more structured transborder pass for communities near Guatemala and Mexico.

A.7 Labor Migration

Labor migration refers to the movement of persons from their usual place of residence to another primarily with the intent of obtaining employment. Since international migratory movements are generally associated with work, most migrant receiving countries have addressed it in their migration laws (IOM, 2011). Belize has ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families which provides the country with a framework for responding to the situation of labor migration. Labor migration which occurs internally is often overlooked. Labor migration from Belize to other countries is currently unregulated and informal.

While there are no formal labor migration programs in Belize, the agriculture industries recruit large numbers of seasonal migrants. The majority of seasonal migrants enter Belize on their own but a few are recruited. Once in Belize, the employer request and process work permits on their behalf. In most instances, the corresponding fees are paid by the employer. The limitations of such mechanism are that the worker cannot change jobs nor can they extend their work permit without the permission of the employer who originally applies on their behalf. The concern from a migration management perspective is that migrant workers who may be at risk of exploitation may not have much mobility options, security or reporting system in place. In cases where the employer pays for work permits, the migrant worker often has to repay expenses incurred, therefore, when the situation is not good, they may have no choice but to remain there (Acuna, 2011). Overall, the fact that this system is available is of great benefit to the employer since they can easily recruit workers in times of natural disasters and in times of labor shortage.

The Government of Belize, through the Labor Department and Immigration Department has established a Work Permit Committee who vets work permit applications. Upon approval, the Immigration Department issues the necessary documentation. A work permit allows the migrant worker to register for social security and other employment benefits that may be available to them.

A.7.1 Labor Migration: Seasonal and Temporary Workers

A total of 3,534 temporary workers³ were actively insured with the Social Security of Belize in 2012. The majority (63.4%) were between the ages of 20- 39 years of age. The top three countries of origin of temporary workers were Guatemala (57.6%), Honduras (21.6%) and to a lesser extent El Salvador (8.8%). Men far outnumbered women temporary workers with 2,923 and 611, respectively.

Table 10: ACTIVE INSURED TEMPORARY WORKERS BY NATIONALITY AND SEX, 2012

| Country of Origin | Sex | | Total |
|--------------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| | Female | Male | |
| Guatemala | 259 | 1775 | 2034 |
| Honduras | 175 | 587 | 762 |
| El Salvador | 45 | 266 | 311 |
| United States of America | 28 | 32 | 60 |
| Nicaragua | 20 | 39 | 59 |
| India | 8 | 40 | 48 |
| Mexico | 8 | 34 | 42 |
| China | 7 | 19 | 26 |
| Philippines | 15 | 8 | 23 |
| Great Britain | 5 | 14 | 19 |
| All others | 41 | 109 | 150 |
| TOTAL | 611 | 2923 | 3534 |

Source: Social Security Board of Belize

The number of active insured temporary workers includes migrant workers who have permanent residence as well as those holding a dependents permit or a conditional migratory status such as in the case of students. A review of the characteristics of the actively insured temporary workers reveals that 3,141 held a temporary work permit.

**Table 11: Temporary Employment Permits Issued- Top Ten Countries
2008-mid 2010**

| Country of Origin | 2008 | 2009 | Mid 2010 | Total |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Guatemala | 321 | 393 | 284 | 998 |
| China | 145 | 368 | 251 | 764 |
| USA | 255 | 228 | 171 | 654 |
| Honduras | 163 | 160 | 132 | 455 |
| Salvador | 110 | 163 | 100 | 373 |
| Nicaragua | 50 | 98 | 37 | 185 |
| Indian | 30 | 91 | 62 | 183 |
| Canada | 68 | 54 | 36 | 158 |
| Nigeria | 35 | 45 | 67 | 147 |
| Mexico | 40 | 45 | 41 | 126 |
| Totals | 3225 | 3654 | 1181 | 4043 |

³ Temporary workers refer to those persons whose Social Security Card is valid for less than or equal to 12 months.

Table 12 substantiates the view regional labor migrants originate from the Central American northern triangle. The USA also provides a sizable workforce. As it relates to extracontinental countries, China, India and Nigeria had the highest numbers of labor migrants. There are no specific programs to recruit workers or regulate the working conditions of these migrant workers making them vulnerable to labor exploitation. There have been reported cases of Trafficking in Persons among these two groups.

Table 12: INSURABLE WEEKLY EARNINGS OF TEMPORARY WORKERS BY SEX 2012 -%-

| Insurable Earnings | Female | Male | Total |
|---------------------|--------|------|-------|
| \$70 or less | 15.1 | 11.2 | 11.9 |
| \$70.00 - \$109.99 | 21.9 | 12.6 | 14.2 |
| \$110.00 - \$139.99 | 11.9 | 13.3 | 13.1 |
| \$140.00-\$179.99 | 18.3 | 20.4 | 20 |
| \$180.00-\$219.99 | 8.8 | 15.1 | 14 |
| \$220.00-\$259.00 | 5.1 | 9.5 | 8.7 |
| \$260.00 - \$299.99 | 1.6 | 4.2 | 3.7 |
| \$300.00 and over | 15.2 | 9.9 | 10.8 |
| 65 years and over* | 2 | 3.9 | 3.5 |

*Noncontributory

Source: Social Security Board Belize, 2013

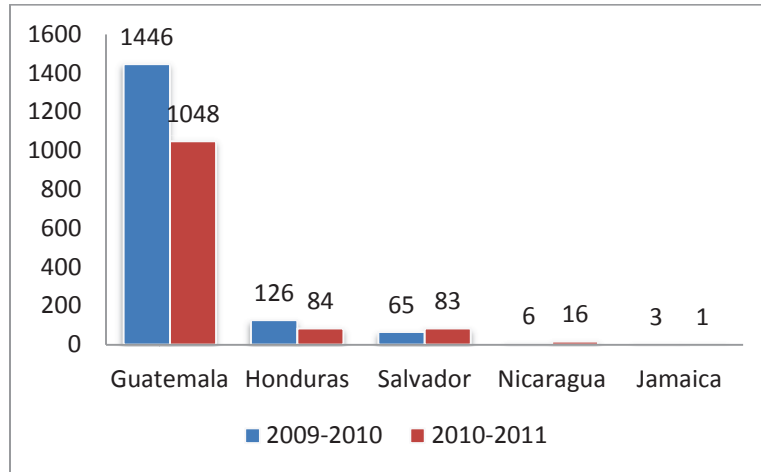
As it relates to income, temporary workers obtain a wide range of earnings as is illustrated in Table 13. The majority earn less than \$179.99 Belize dollars weekly. Females earned substantially less than their male counterparts. Majority (21.9%) of females earned between \$70 - \$109.99 while the majority of men earned between \$140 - \$179.99 weekly.

A recent study conducted on Labor Migrants in Belize discovered that a significant number of them moved to Belize as single persons. However, once having established themselves in the country, they start their families. It also revealed that 28% of the 300 participants indicated having migrated to Belize with their entire family or they later came to join them (Acuna, 2012).

A.7.2 Labor Migration: Economic Activity

The top five industries employing labor migrants were Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry (78.8%). In this sector, men accounted for 83.2% of the migrant workforce. Wholesale, Retail, Repair employed 5.7%. 5.5% worked in Hotels and Restaurants, Manufacturing (5.3%) and Construction (3.9%). Female migrant workers were employed in Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry; Hotels and Restaurant; Wholesale and Retail, Repairs; Private Household with Employed Persons and Health and social work (SSB, 2013). This is supported by the IOM study on labor migrants in Belize, which revealed that 50% of respondents worked in the agriculture sector, tourism (17%), domestic work (17%) and construction (16 %) (Acuna, 2011). The study clearly revealed gender segregation in the various sectors. Domestic work, for example, was exclusively performed by women and the construction sector by men. In agriculture, especially in the banana and citrus fruit industries, women worked in packing sheds performing tasks such as processing and packing fruit, men on the other hand worked in the field performing tasks such as crop maintenance and others requiring strenuous manual labor. In the tourism industry, women mainly did waitressing and housekeeping. In the citrus industry, men harvested fruit.

**Figure 3: NUMBER OF WORK PERMITS ISSUED TO SEASONAL WORKERS IN THE CITRUS INDUSTRY
CROP YEARS 2009-2011**



Source: Citrus Growers Association, 2011

In the 2009-2010 Crop Year a total of 1,664 permits were requested by the Citrus Growers Association. In crop year 2010-2011, there was a reduction to 1,232. Guatemalan seasonal workers continued to account for the majority of seasonal workers in the citrus industry even though there were fewer arrivals during that time. According to the CGA, factors influencing the drop were the economic slump in Belize coupled with a high unemployment (14.9%) in the region. Belizeans who generally prefer not to work in such seasonal and fragile activity now find themselves seeking jobs in the industry thereby reducing the need for migrant workers.

Another industry which relies heavily on labor migrants is the Banana industry. The majority of workers form a stationary stock. "Without immigrant labor, the banana industry would not have attained its current status as a major "vein" of the national economy. Crisis in the banana industry would have a significant detrimental effect, not only on the national economy, but also on the local economy of the Stann Creek District and northern Toledo district. (August, Eirich & Smith, 2005, p.5)." In 2004, the banana farms employed 2280 persons of which 75.3% were from the Central American northern triangle.

Unlike the citrus industry where Guatemalans were the majority, Honduran migrants were more visible in the banana industry, accounting for as much as 45% of all banana workers. Honduran workers are an asset to this sector primarily because they bring experience obtained in the banana industry in their home country. Males far exceeded females, accounting for 77.2% of all banana workers of Central American descent. An overwhelming 66.6% lived on the banana farms in housing provided by the farm owners or housing areas in the nearby communities. While new migrant laborers continue to arrive in the 'banana belt' region on an annual basis the bulk arrived between 1981 and 1991, consistent with the arrival of large numbers of refugees and displaced persons. During 2004, there was a noticeable rise in the number of young, male, labor migrants arriving in the region (August, Eirich & Smith, 2005).

Belize is a member state of CARICOM. The free movement of skilled nationals program is currently underused by CARICOM nationals; this is evident in the low numbers of application for work permits. Between 2006 and 2010 there were only 52 applications for work permits. In 2006 there were only seven applications for temporary working permits from CARICOM nationals. In 2007 the bulk of

applications were received (33). Between the period 2008 to 2010, there were less than five annually. There is a wide variety of occupations ranging from caregivers, missionaries, technicians to administrators.

A.7.3 Labor Migration: Emigrants

Recently, Canadian recruitment agencies have been coming to Belize to enlist Belizean workers. Since there is a shortage of workers for the service industries, particularly in low-paying entry level jobs with companies such as McDonald's-Canada, English speaking Belizean employees have become an attractive option. There are no official agreements between these agencies and the Government of Belize, in terms of monitoring and protection mechanism. It is a widely accepted notion that Canadian companies have a good track record in terms of decent jobs, fair wages and good working conditions. Despite this, Belizeans would benefit more from a structured, formal recruitment system. With a proper monitoring and evaluation system in place, the financial and social impacts of this type of program could be quantified (Labor Department, 2013, ACTYL, 2013).

Challenges and opportunities in managing labor migration

- A clear opportunity exists for Belize to capitalize on the demand for labor migrants by Belizean industries and the demand for Belizean workers by the United States and Canada. Therefore, it is essential that a Labor Migration Strategy be contemplated so that an orderly flow of labor migrants in and out of Belize benefits both receiving and sending countries.
- Cooperation amongst governments of the region and the regional and international systems related to migration could be strengthened so as to promote an orderly and guided labor migration. Paramount among these actions is the establishment of a permanent work program to regulate and regularize labor migration flows in and out of Belize that contributes to the protection of the rights of migrant workers and their families. Such program should favor an orderly migratory flow and include protection measures for migrant workers vulnerable to labor exploitation, labor discrimination and child labor.
- There is need to establish measures sanctioning those who hire irregular labor force, while at the same time, establishing protection measures in favor of workers. When the demand for irregular labor force is high, migrants will take advantage of job availability despite governmental intervention. Therefore, it is important to involve the private sector in the formulation of any labor migration management measures. The private sector are major actors in ensuring that regulation and regularization of the migrant workforce. Stronger relationships between the private sector and governmental agencies could be improved through the acknowledgement of best practices such as simplified processes of hiring, adhering to labor migration authorization, and a certification system that will help businesses incorporate their products into solidarity markets.
- There is opportunity for civil society organizations to monitor labor laws for migrant workers and for the proper functioning of labor migration management mechanisms. This will minimize the vulnerability of the labor laws to being sidestepped by employers and will increase transparency in hiring procedures and work conditions. The involvement of civil society in this process will allow for independent monitoring and intervention, thereby reducing the burden on governmental agencies.