

# **Recruiting Migrant Workers in Guatemala: The Roles of a Diversifying Industry in Managing International Labour Migration**

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## **Abstract**

Recent developments in international migration governance show a growing interest in issues surrounding the recruitment of migrant workers. Both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Compact for Migration recognize that it is crucial to address recruitment processes as part of promoting a safe, orderly and regular migration. It has been demonstrated that the profit-driven practices of recruitment intermediaries often contribute to the precarization of migrant workers. However, there remains a dearth of analyses about the heterogeneity of these actors and their objectives.

Drawing upon the concept of the migration industry, this paper explores the recruitment of Guatemalans selected to temporarily work in Canada. Over the last decade, they have become one of the main sources of the workforce for the agricultural sector but the recruitment process in Guatemala still operates below the radar of public interest. Who are the recruiters and what goals do they pursue? What are their functions in the management of labour migration and under which regulatory and normative frameworks do they operate? This research is based on fieldwork conducted in 2019 and 2020 in Guatemala where sixty interviews were conducted with current and former migrants, recruiters, aid organizations and representatives from Guatemalan and Canadian governments. The data collection was complemented by five interviews with Canadian employers.

We first found that the recruitment industry in Guatemala is primarily managed by one agency; however, its monopoly is increasingly challenged by a plurality of actors who are emerging as new recruiters (government, aid organizations, migrants, employers). We show that their activities are not solely motivated by financial gain. Second, we demonstrate that recruitment intermediaries hold a hybrid position in migration systems by simultaneously facilitating and stalling international mobility of Guatemalans. This paper contributes to the reflection about what defines the migration industry and how it operates in the Americas. It stresses the prominent role played by recruitment intermediaries in the governance of labour migration and their key position in implementing the Global Compact for Migration.

## **Biography**

**Mylène Coderre** is a PhD Candidate at the School of International Development and Global Studies, University of Ottawa. Her academic work focuses on international labour migration, temporary migration policies, and the roles of the migration industry and non-state actors in determining migration pathways. Her doctoral research analyzes how the recruitment industry shapes the (im)mobility of Guatemalan temporary workers in Canada. Since 2018, she is the

research coordinator for the five-year project *Pathways into and out of irregularity for migrants in Canada*, led by Dr. Delphine Nakache (Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa) and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. She is also a student member of the Research Collective on Migration and Racism (COMIR) at the University of Ottawa and of the On the Move Partnership, a multi-year research project on employment-related geographical mobility in the Canadian context. She is recipient of the Ontario Graduate Scholarship and of the doctoral research scholarship from the Fonds de recherche du Québec Société et Culture.