



COVID-19 and international labour migration: Agriculture

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In 2019, two thirds of the 272 million international migrants were in the labor force of the country to which they moved. Demographic and economic inequalities between countries, combined with globalization that had been reducing barriers to migrants, were expected to sustain an ever-increasing migrant workforce. When COVID-19 closed many national borders to non-essential travellers, seasonal farm workers were considered essential in most industrial countries, suggesting that many governments did not expect local workers to fill seasonal farm jobs despite record-high unemployment rates. COVID-19 raised farm labor costs and accelerated the pace to build housing for more foreign workers, or to replace guest workers with machines or substitute imports. This talk will provide 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 and the auto industries. North American auto industries are integrating in the sense that cars assembled by national workforces trade freely in Canada, Mexico and the U.S., while 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.