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**Visitors and Residents:
Guatemalan, Salvadoran and
Honduran Workers in Mexico**

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Policy Brief Series

LABOR



Visitors and residents: Guatemalan, Salvadoran and Honduran workers in Mexico



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SUMMARY

The labor status of Central American migrants is characterized by precarious work. This applies to both Guatemalans with temporary work permits who return to their country after a stay in Mexico as well as Guatemalans, Salvadorans and Hondurans living permanently in Mexico. In the case of Guatemalans who migrate to Mexico on a temporary basis, the profile is young men from rural areas with minimal formal education who work in the agricultural sector. In the case of residents, greater diversity is found: Guatemalan women, who outnumber their male counterparts and have higher economic aspirations, work in the service industry and are mainly located in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. Salvadorans, who are better educated, are found in the commercial sector including management positions throughout the country. Honduran workers have low educational backgrounds and are found in the commercial and service sector for the most part in Chiapas.

This report is based on Mexico's Southern Border Migration Survey (Emif Sur) 2004-2013 (*Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Sur de México*) and the housing and population censuses from 2000 and 2010.

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The presence of Guatemalan workers in Mexico is not a recent phenomenon. Since the territory of Chiapas was annexed in 1824 to Mexico, there has been a constant ebb and flow of residents of Guatemalan origin.

In response to economic and historical factors, in 1997 the Mexican government began issuing the Agricultural Visitors Migratory Form (FMVA), which allowed Guatemalans who could prove they had a legitimate job offer to work in Chiapas for up to one year, enjoying the same rights as Mexican workers. In 2008, the FMVA was replaced by the Border Worker Migratory Form (FMVA), which enabled Guatemalan and Belizean nationals to stay for up to a year in Mexico, and was later replaced in 2012 with the current migratory card, Visiting Border Worker Card (TVTF). Around 16,000 Guatemalan workers receive this card every year.

In the case of Salvadorans and Hondurans, it was only around the 1970s that their presence started to become more common. Migrants from these countries didn't begin to settle in Mexico until the beginning of this century, after the US border security was reinforced following the terrorist attacks in 2001.

To date, there is no temporary worker program for Salvadorans and Hondurans in Mexico, which means that citizens of these countries who decide to stay in Mexico to work must make the necessary applications with the immigration department the National Migration Institute (INM) just like any other foreigner or remain without papers.



Visitors: Guatemalans that come and go

The border between Mexico and Guatemala experiences constant activity on a daily basis. In response to the escalation of migratory movements of workers from Central America in Mexico, a survey

MEXICAN GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS FOR GUATEMALAN WORKERS

○ **1997**

Issue of Agricultural Visitors Migratory Form (FMVA)

○ **2008**

Border Worker Migratory Form (FMTF)

○ **2012**

Visiting Border Worker Card (TVTF)

was put in place in 2004, Mexico's Southern Border Migration Survey (Emif Sur).¹ This survey registers only those migratory movements associated with work in Mexico and the United States, documented or otherwise, excluding migratory movements for other purposes.

The Emif Sur survey applies to Guatemalan workers, amongst others, who return home from Mexico via one of the three border towns where 90% of crossings

happen between Mexico and Guatemala: Tecún Umán (San Marcos), El Carmen (San Marcos) and La Mesilla (Huehuetenango), (see Map 1.) It may seem like an odd choice to record only return crossings rather than arrivals; however, given the numbers of Guatemalans who seek permanent residency in Mexico, and the fact that many Guatemalans enter Mexico in order to reach the United States, it can be inferred that the correlation between returning numbers and temporary labor migration to Mexico is more accurate. Therefore, it is believed that counting returns is a clear indicator of total temporary flows from Guatemala to Mexico.

In 2013, the survey counted 697,828 crossings of Guatemalans coming from Mexico into Guatemala (see Figure 2). It bears repeating that crossings rather than people are counted, as a migrant may cross the border several times.

We found that the number of crossings has grown steadily since 2006, with a fall during the 2009-10 recession (see Figure 1). It is important to note that 25% of the crossings recorded, indicate stays of less than 24 hours, while 38% accounted for stays longer than a month but less than a year.

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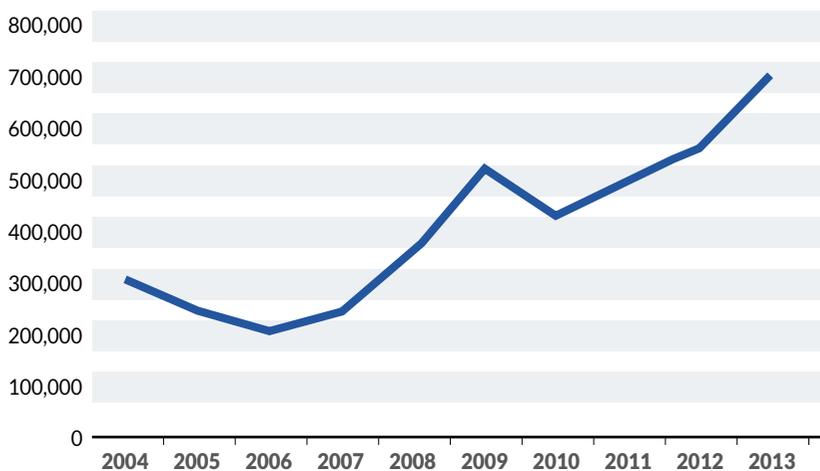
Map 1. Mexico-Guatemala Border - Emif Sur survey crossing points

GEOGRAPHICAL SAMPLE AREAS 2015



Source: <http://www.colef.mx/emif/cgeosur.php>

Figure 1. Number of total crossings from Mexico to Guatemala 2004-2013



Source: Emif Sur (various years)

Of the total number of crossings captured by the EMIF Sur 2013 Survey, 92% were made by people from the bordering areas, known as departments, or those close to the border, such as San Marcos, Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango, Retalhuleu, El Quiché, Alta Verapaz and Peten.

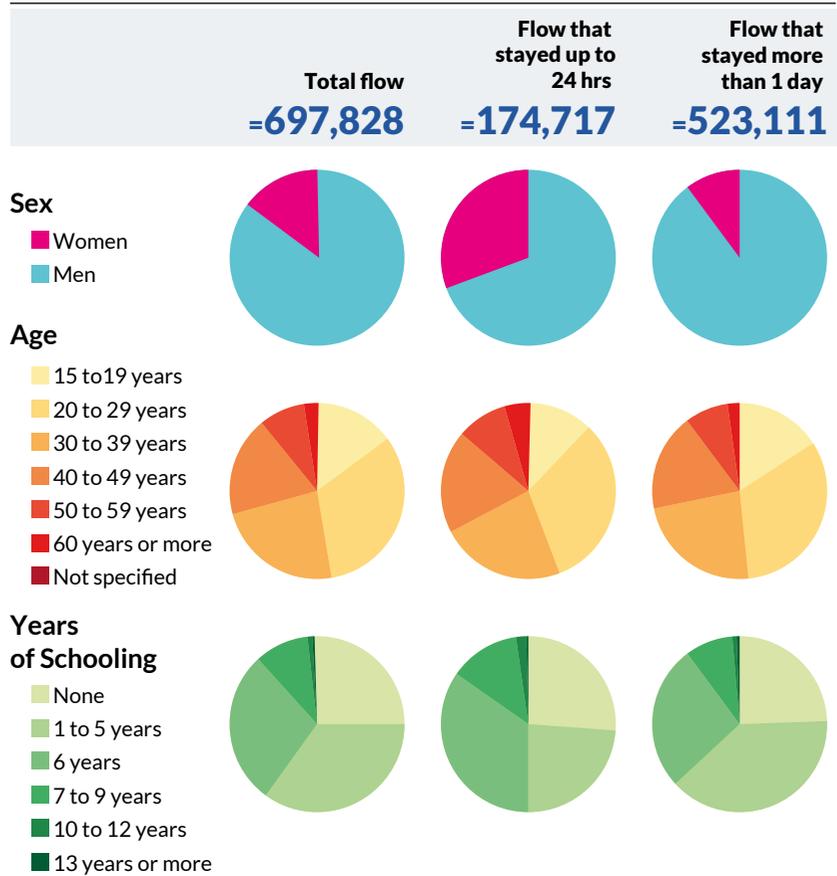
One of the most relevant results from the Emif Sur 2013 survey was that 89% of crossings between the Guatemala-Mexico border were made by Guatemalans who reported having immigration documents. Of these cases, 53% claimed to have a local pass or a Regional Visitors Card (TVR), which does not authorize productive activities, while 46% said they had a Visiting Border Worker Card (TVTF).



The high proportion of Guatemalans with legal papers to enter Mexico is due to the provisions granted by the Mexican government to Guatemalan citizens, especially residents from the border departments, to stay in Mexican territory for up to 72 hours.

The data in Figure 2 shows clearly the profile of Guatemalan migrants crossing the border by land at the entry points included in the Emif Sur survey and their employment objectives: young, male with a very low level of schooling as well as a significant number of young Guatemalan women crossing the border for work.

Figure 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of migrant flow from Mexico to Guatemala



Source: EMIF Sur 2013, Conapo, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, INM, SRE, STPS and UPM.

What do these workers do?

The high proportion of Guatemalans with legal papers to enter Mexico is due to the provisions granted by the Mexican government to Guatemalan citizens

According to the EMIF Sur surveys, 59% of Guatemalan migrants work in agriculture, whether at the traditional coffee plantations in Soconusco or cultivating other crops such as sugarcane, banana, papaya, mango and palm oil.

A highly notable discovery was that the proportion of agricultural workers who returned from Mexico to Guatemala increased from 35% in 2004 to 60% in 2013, indicating a growing demand for Guatemalan farm workers, probably due to the scarcity of Mexican workers who instead choose to go to the north of Mexico or the United States.



In this same period (2004-2013) the proportion of workers of Guatemalan origin decreased in the industrial and construction sectors from 7% to 2% and 15% to 11%, respectively.

As for the percentages of street vendors, something very interesting happened: on the one hand, Guatemalans engaged in this kind of work declined from 16% in 2004 to 12% in 2013; however, if we are to only consider those workers who entered and left Mexico on a daily basis, the percentages rose from 28% in 2004 to 38% in 2013. This speaks of the importance of commercial activities in the border communities and the opportunities it brings for residents.

89% of crossings between the Guatemala-Mexico border were made by Guatemalans who reported having immigration documents

How much do they earn?

The percentage of crossings by Guatemalan workers who earn less than two minimum wages per month is 75%. This percentage is much lower among those who stay in Mexico for less than 24 hours with 44% reporting earnings of less than two minimum wages per month, which suggests that commercial activities and the service industry are better paid than the agricultural sector.

The remuneration of Guatemalans in Mexico are comparable to those received by Mexican workers in Chiapas. According to the National Occupation and Employment Survey,² 74% of the economically active population of Chiapas receives less than two minimum wages.

Residents: Guatemalans, Salvadorans and Hondurans

Although the number of Guatemalan residents in Mexico is substantially greater than that of Salvadorans and Hondurans, Mexico is becoming a key destination for Hondurans. In the case of Salvadorans, Mexico is an attractive option because their remark-





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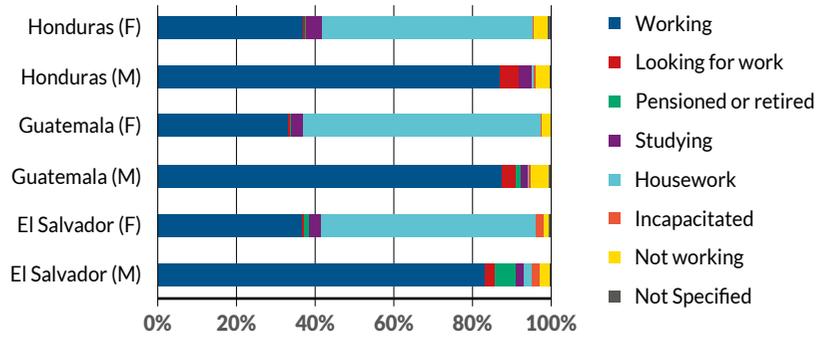
ably higher levels of schooling mean their incomes are greater, and they are located in areas beyond Chiapas and the border zones, particularly in Mexico City.

According to the Census of Population and Housing 2010, there are 31,888 Guatemalans residing in Mexico, 8,864 Salvadorans, and 9,980 Hondurans. This puts Guatemalans (representing 4% of all foreigners in Mexico) as the second largest group of immigrants in Mexico, after the US (representing 77% of all foreigners). Salvadorans and Hondurans claim far fewer immigrants (less than 1% for Salvadorans and 1% for Hondurans).³

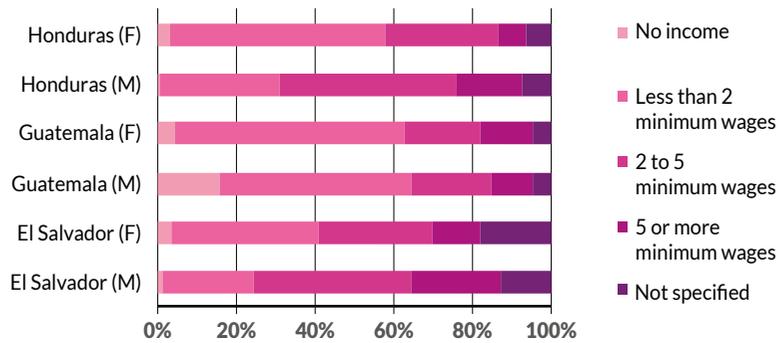
Between 2000 and 2010 - the dates when the censuses were carried out - all populations of migrant workers from the northern triangle of Central America rose. The Guatemalan population increased by 9% and El Salvador by 53%; however, the most notable increase was from Honduras: 138%, which suggests that Mexico has become a clear receiver of Honduran migrants. In this regard, we should also mention that the growth of the Honduran male population in this period reached 172%.

Figure 3. Labor data for Guatemalans, Salvadorans and Hondurans in Mexico by sex (Female (F), Male (M)), 2010 (percentages)

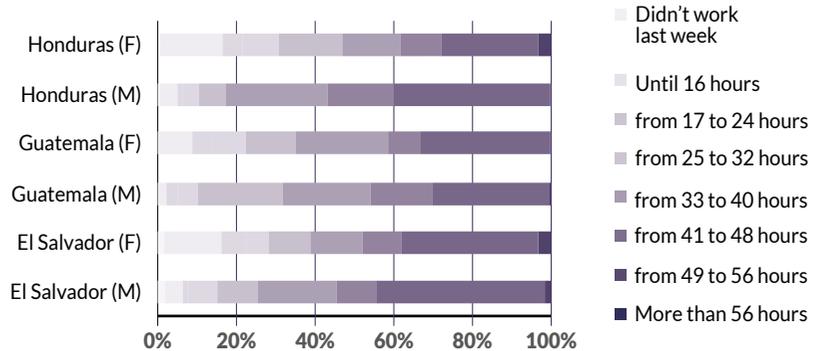
EMPLOYMENT STATUS



WAGES



HOURS WORKED



Source: Population and Housing Sample Census 2010, Mexico, INEGI.

There are more female working residents than male: 55%:45% in the case of Guatemala; 59%:41% for El Salvador; 54%:46% for Honduras.

How old are they and what levels of schooling do they have?

In all three cases, the majority of migrants are less than 34 years old: 56% in the case of Guatemalans; 40% for Salvadorans; and 58% for Hondurans. The Salvadoran population has the highest



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average age: 41% are over 45 years old. It also exhibits the highest growth for migrants aged under 14 (504%), which speaks of an important flow of families.

Besides age, there are other two important demographic factors that are worth noting with respect to the Salvadoran residents and what distinguishes them from Guatemalans and Hondurans. One has to do with schooling: 23% have accessed higher education (compared to 8% of Guatemalans and 13% of Hondurans). The other factor has to do with their place of residence: 73% live outside the border regions, in particular Mexico City. This contrasts with the number of Guatemalans and Hondurans who live in Chiapas: 66% and 35%, respectively.

As noted earlier in this section, higher levels of education mean higher incomes, which explains the cases of male Salvadorans (see Figure 3). Nevertheless, we found that all Central American women consistently earn less than their male counterparts. In the case of Guatemalan women, this phenomenon is particularly striking, since in this group the percentage of those earning less than two minimum wages rose to 58%.

What kind of work do they do? (See Figure 4).

Most Guatemalan men work in agriculture (47.2%): many of them are day laborers or farmhands, while the women work in the service sector, where many are domestic workers.

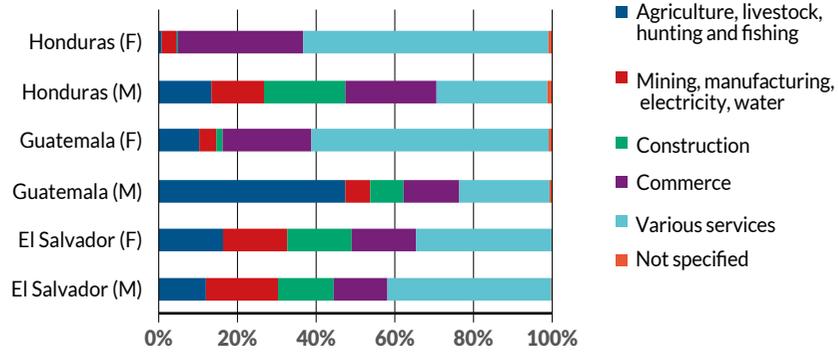
Salvadorans, both men and women, work in various services (42% for men; 73% for women): there are craftsmen, merchants, professionals and technicians, some of them reaching the category of officials or managers. In the case of women, it is notable that, despite their higher educational levels, they engage in activities that do not require advanced human capital, neither in terms of formal education nor work experience. This presents an obstacle to better paying jobs. Nonetheless, 15% of Salvadoran women in 2010 worked as professionals or technicians.

As for Honduran residents, the most notable data from the 2010 census indicates that 28% of men were engaged in various crafts, while 18% worked in support roles and basic activities.

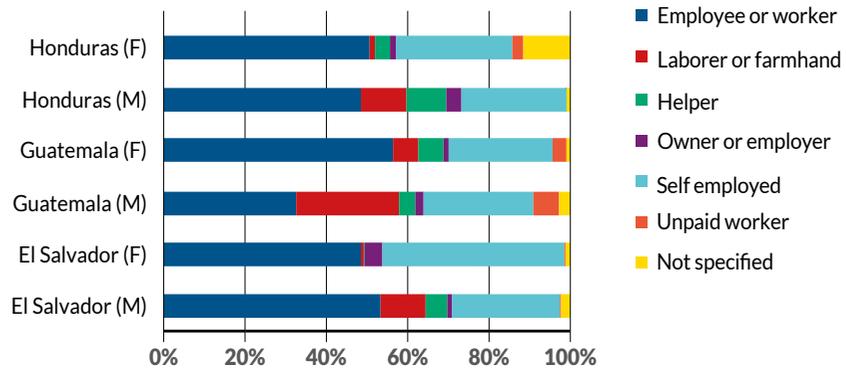
Most of these Central American workers do not have access to social security.

Figure 4. Labor data for Guatemalans, Salvadorans and Hondurans in Mexico by sex (Female (F), Male (M), 2010 (percentages)

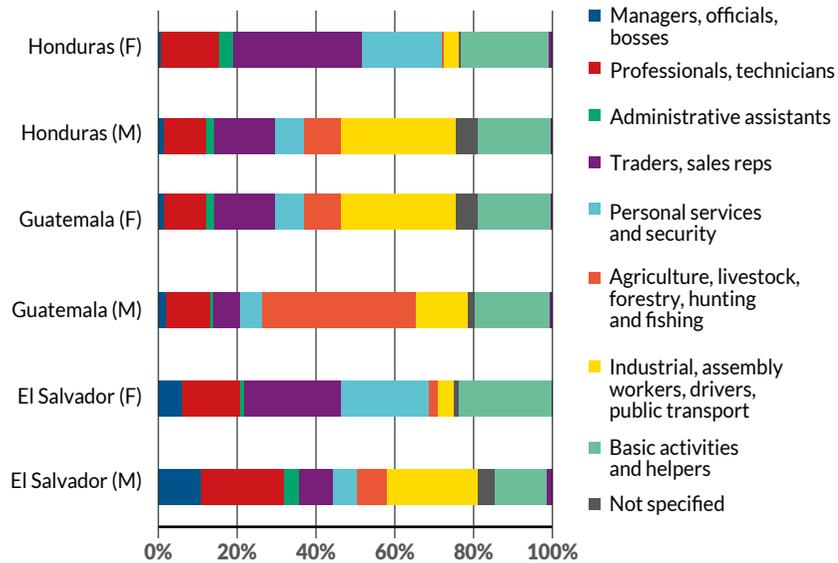
EMPLOYMENT SECTOR



POSITION AT WORK



OCCUPATIONS



Source: Population and Housing Sample Census 2010, Mexico, INEGI.



○ Conclusion

- The growth of the Central American population in Mexico between 2000 and 2010 shows that this country is an increasingly popular destination for nationals from Honduras and El Salvador. The case for Guatemala is different due to the immigration policies in place for these migrants to enter and leave Mexico.
- The majority of Central American migrants are involved in precarious work, although a significant percentage of Salvadorans are managers or officials.
- The Salvadoran population is scattered throughout the Mexican territory, while Guatemalans are concentrated in Chiapas. Guatemalans are more likely to come and go across the border, while Guatemalan women are most likely to cross and return on a daily basis.
- Guatemalan men, whether crossing daily or settled for longer periods in Mexico, are mostly engaged in agricultural work, while Salvadorans and Hondurans are more likely to work as artisans or traders. Guatemalan women, meanwhile, tend towards domestic service, while Salvadoran and Honduran women, commerce.
- Guatemalans working in the agricultural sector are the lowest paid workers while Salvadorans are more likely to earn more than twice the minimum wage.
- Based on the data presented in this work, we can conclude that Mexico has a great responsibility to migrant workers who labor within the territory.

○ Policy Recommendations

➤ **Labor:**

- Provide efforts for Central Americans in Mexico to make the transition from informal to formal employment.
- Promote active labor policies such as training and networking to encourage better performance and better quality jobs for Central Americans.
- Design programs for temporary work for Guatemalan agricultural workers at a national level or, at least, in other states in Mexico, such as Sinaloa and Baja California.
- Include the workplaces in which Central Americans in Mexico work amongst those that are subject to labor inspection to promote the compliance of Mexican labor law.

➤ **In terms of social security and social policy:**

- Increase the social security coverage to include these Central American populations, starting with the Salvadorans, whose average age is higher.
- Negotiate agreements between social security institutions so that the formal work of Central Americans in Mexico is included in the calculation of their pensions.
- Create educational systems to validate studies carried out in other countries. This would facilitate integration of Central American children and adolescents into the Mexican school system.
- Extend some of Mexico's social programs to include Central American migrants, in particular Guatemalans who have, on average, the most precarious jobs.

➤ **In the political sphere:**

- Promote the liaison between the governments of all of these countries to prevent the human and labor rights of these migrants from being violated. For example, governments could organize informative events on the human and labor rights of migrant workers in Mexico, to help prevent fraud in the recruitment process and ensure compliance with Mexican labor laws.



NOTES AND REFERENCES

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