

Abstract

Following its transition from a labor-exporting into a labor-importing country, Spain has enacted bi-national agreements with a number of countries in an effort to secure labor for key industries. In addition to meeting labor market needs, these programs have been part of the on-going effort to control undocumented migration into the region. Advocates assert that guestworkers are simple substitutes for undocumented workers, however the case of Spain's FVH sector shows that the answer is not so simple. Demographic analysis evidences that in developing these programs Spanish growers have preferenced Eastern European women over the North African men who have characterized the undocumented and regularized agricultural workers upon which the industry has depended. Although guestworker programs have helped stabilize the FVH sector and reduce Spain's significant underground economy, undocumented workers are not necessarily deterred by guestworkers but often displaced by them—creating new problems while solving old ones.

Temporary Guestworker Programs and the Displacement of Undocumented Migrant Workers in Spanish Agriculture

Following its relatively recent and swift transition from a labor-exporting into a labor-importing country¹, Spain has enacted bi-national guestworker agreements with a number of countries in an effort to secure labor for key industries. In addition to the recognition of a need for lower-skilled workers in sectors like agriculture, services and construction, temporary worker programs also have been seen as a means of reducing significant undocumented migration and curbing illegal employment in Spain's strong underground economy. Although a considerable body of research has addressed the effects of the guestworker programs of the post-World War II period, particularly those in the United States and Germany, on subsequent migration (*), less attention has been paid to the dynamics and demography of the recent era of temporary labor programs in Europe (*)². Temporary labor programs in Spain's profitable agricultural sector provide a case in point: As in many developed countries, migrant labor is now the norm rather than the exception in Spanish agriculture. One of the largest in the world, Spain's burgeoning fruit, vegetable and horticultural (FVH) sector, in particular, has been a heavy user of undocumented foreign labor over the last several decades and, more recently, a recipient

¹ Cornelius, W.A. 2004. "Spain: The Uneasy Transition from Labor Exporter to Labor Importer" in *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

of temporary labor through the aforementioned bi-national agreements. Yet controversy exists over the impetus, nature and effects of these programs in regard to their ability to limit undocumented migration and curtail the debated impacts of and on undocumented migrants in Spanish society.

In light of these questions and given increasing shortages of lower-skilled workers in developed countries more generally, the evolution and dynamics of the use of migrant labor in Spain's FVH sector from the early 1990s is examined. Using Spanish census data, as well as that from the labor force survey (EAPS) and from applications for regularizations and guestworkers³, this paper analyzes the relationship between temporary worker programs and illegal migration in regard to both absolute numbers and social consequences. More specifically, three central assumptions as to the effectiveness of such measures at combating undocumented migration and illegal employment in agriculture are assessed in light of the data: 1) that guestworkers act as perfect substitutes to undocumented workers and therefore 'replace' them in the labor market; 2) that these programs deter undocumented migration by limiting available employment; and 3) that expanded temporary migration schemes will indeed remain temporary and not increase future migration. Likewise, the demographic composition of this labor force and, in particular, the differences among guestworkers attained through bi-national agreements and the traditional undocumented and/or regularized labor force in Spain are examined in an effort to assess the motivations behind differences in national origins between officially sponsored guestworkers and "freelance" undocumented or regularized workers. Quantitatively, the paper assesses changes to the dimension and characteristics of this population over time; theoretically, it addresses the evolution of this phenomenon in regard to existing theoretical work on labor migration policies, Spain's status as an emergent country of immigration, and the evolving global labor market, in particular 1) the "gap hypothesis" and ; 2) the use of demographic/cultural characteristics and status as a means of controlling political will in the labor market.

² * references to follow

³ All data from Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) database and national reporting of regularization and guestworker applications.

It is often asserted that Spain, like the United States, has an immigration policy of “no policy” and enacts regularizations as an ad-hoc control and political pacifier to soothe domestic and European concerns. However, Spain’s efforts to regulate immigration and to regularize its labor force through temporary worker programs, which follow a broader trend for guestworkers across Europe, seem to contradict the “gap hypothesis” advanced by Cornelius *et. al* (2004) that a lack of firm action on immigration issues is itself a strategy for labor migration in that it provides industries with a low-cost labor source without addressing this politically sensitive and generally unpopular position as a policy goal. Yet Spain’s notoriously unflexible labor market, high social security payments, high levels of unemployment and strong underground economy, as well as several well-reported clashes between immigrants and natives, have supported the idea that tolerance of undocumented migration has been both economically and politically useful. Which side is Spain on? Temporary labor policies are a major step towards a comprehensive and labor market focused immigration policy for Spain, but questions remain as to specific aspects of these policies, particularly in regard to their effect on the wages of lower-skilled workers and issues of immigrant integration and adaptation. Are they improving the conditions for agricultural workers? For other workers? What about immigrant workers already regularized in Spain? Have they reduced overall levels of demand for undocumented labor or illegal employment? Do they help reduce undocumented migration into Spain? How do these programs compare to the general trend in Europe?

Preliminary conclusions point to a number of trends in guestworker versus undocumented labor in Spain’s FVH sector. Firstly, although clearly affected by a complexity of factors, agricultural guestworkers programs appear to have had little effect on overall numbers of undocumented migrants even though agriculture is a significant employer of undocumented labor in Spain. In fact, although this data can offer no conclusive evidence as to causality, undocumented migration has increased over the period in which temporary worker programs have been introduced. Secondly, official guestworker programs show preference for Eastern Europeans over the North Africans who have thus far characterized the undocumented and successively regularized agricultural workers upon which the industry has depended, and for women over men. The gender and ethnic

dimension of this trend will be further examined and provide a focus for this paper in light of its confirmation of the questions raised by Spanish labor unions and immigrant advocacy groups as to the role these guestworker policies play negating in social and political rights among immigrant workers. Although Spain has been generally more tolerant than other European countries of its Muslim population, clearly cultural issues are at stake and these policies may be passive attempts to join the backlash against Muslim immigrants across Europe.

In conclusion, this paper advances that the situation of workers in Spain's FVH sector has contradictory effects: on the one hand, Spain joins the long tradition that surrounds the history of officially sanctioned programs of using guestworkers to reduce union involvement and maintain lower wages by selecting workers with specific characteristics; on the other, guestworker programs are a step toward stabilizing the labor market and providing for the growing labor shortages in Spain's aging population, as well as introducing money into the Eastern European economies from which many guestworkers come. As well, these programs raise new questions as to the cultural motivations and social effects of preferencing one group of workers over another in the global labor market. In a sense, it seems that a secondary phase of the segmented labor market hypothesis is taking place, where a new group of migrant workers controlled by specific conditions is being used to displace an 'undesirable' group of workers—a process which maintains the secondary labor market, but does so through increasing governmental oversight and regulation and in a manner potentially more "popular" with voters.