

QSS20S1 Final Project Memo 1

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1 What I learned

Looking through the data sources in the GAO report, I noticed how disjointed they were. While the report is extremely comprehensive, it is evident that this level of depth is significantly harder to achieve because of the dis-aggregated nature of the data, and really, our bureaucracy. They have so many sources that are measuring really interesting aspects of the H-2 guest worker program (human trafficking rates, visa issuance, descriptive statistics on demographics of those in the program, petition data, etc) but there are so many different sources needed to gather inferences. Obviously, we've talked about this limitation in class and with our guest speakers, and this report speaks to the gravity of it. I was also interested by the qualitative data from interviews and surveys which provide more anecdotal evidence on the topic. I gathered that although there are some employers who violate the program in many ways and those are mostly the ones we've been talking about particularly in the context of TRLA, there are also some who are doing their job well and providing good working conditions for H-2 employees. Investigating these employers as well may also provide important insights into the program.

2 Gaps and questions

Following from my last point in What I Learned, I think it would be interesting to examine differences in quality of working conditions along other characteristics of the business/employer. This way, we can identify a pattern to better predict which employers are treating their H-2 (and other) employees poorly or well and minimize exploitation. I am also interested in the human trafficking data. Appendix III notes that "about 92 percent of the complaints did not have indicators of trafficking but involved commonly reported abuses such as wage and hour complaints (39 and 36 percent for H-2A and H-2B workers, respectively), as well as other contract violations (20 and 28 percent for H-2A and H-2B workers, respectively)." I was surprised that this number was so high, suggesting that workers are not hesitant to report this behavior, but that the incidents reported are often not categorized as trafficking. We know that human trafficking does in fact take place, and in significant quantities. I'd be interested to learn more about the concealment measures that employers involved in human trafficking take and how we can better identify a pattern to be proactive in helping those victims (which the report somewhat addresses with T visas as a proxy).