

Shaping Brazil: The Role of International Migration

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Since its founding in 1500 by Portuguese colonists, Brazil, the largest country in South America with over 184 million people, has had a strong immigrant presence. The composition of the population has been greatly influenced by distinct waves of immigrants at different moments in history. Much of this immigration, in turn, has been tied to economic factors.

Over time, Brazil's governments have encouraged migration flows to fill its vast territory and boost agricultural production. The first wave, coordinated by Portugal, brought Portuguese migrants and slaves from Africa.

In recent periods, the government implemented policies to encourage migration from Germany, Italy (mostly at the end of the 19th century) and Japan (mostly at the beginning of the 20th century) to interior areas of the southern states of São Paulo, Paraná and Rio Grande do Sul.

To this day, economic developments such as South America's common market are driving migration, with undocumented immigrants from neighboring countries accounting for the majority of new arrivals.

The government has no policies encouraging immigration. At the same time, no policy has been created to discourage or prevent illegal immigrants from entering.

Past Migration Flows

During Portugal's early rule, immigration to Brazil (from countries other than Portugal) was prohibited because the Portuguese wanted to prevent other European countries from establishing claims to territory. France was unsuccessful in establishing a colony at present-day Rio de Janeiro, and the Dutch were forced to leave Brazil in 1645 after setting up colonies in the northeastern state of Pernambuco.

Only after 1808, when Portugal's king fled to Brazil, with the help of the British Royal Navy, to escape Napoleon's rule, did Brazil open its ports to commercial trade and permit non-Portuguese Europeans to settle in Brazil.

An estimated six million Africans were forcibly taken to Brazil between 1550 and 1850 to work on sugar cane plantations in the northeastern part of the country. Although the trans-Atlantic slave trade did not end in Brazil until the 1850s, the internal slave trade persisted for economic reasons; slaves were sold from the northeast to the southern states, where the coffee industry was booming. It was only in 1888 that slavery was truly abolished, making Brazil the last country in the Western Hemisphere to do so.

Three distinct waves of immigrants followed the end of the slave trade; each brought migrants from different countries who had varying motives.

In the first wave, during the second half of the 19th century, the empire welcomed Europeans who came to work in coffee cultivation. These immigrants were highly sought after as a means of replacing slave labor; they also served as "whitening" and "civilizing" agents.

After their defeat in the American Civil War, some Confederate soldiers fled to Brazil in a

futile attempt to continue an economy based on slavery. By 1867, 2,070 American soldiers had entered Brazil through the port of Rio de Janeiro.

From 1880 to 1903, 1.9 million Europeans arrived, mainly from Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. People also came from Ukraine, Russia, Lithuania, Hungary, Armenia, China, and Korea.

In a second wave, from 1904 to 1930, another 2.1 million Europeans from Italy, Poland, Russia, and Romania immigrated; most arrived after World War I. In 1908, the first Japanese immigrants arrived in the country, settling mainly in the state of São Paulo and in the north of the state of Paraná to work in coffee plantation farms. By 1941, approximately 189,000 Japanese had immigrated to Brazil, according to the Brazilian Embassy in Tokyo.

Immigration to Brazil during this period was also fueled by the adoption of more restrictive immigration policies in the United States, Canada, and Argentina, previously the principal destinations for immigration in the Western Hemisphere.

A third wave of immigrants (1930-1953) was markedly smaller than the previous two due to historical factors. In 1930, the bourgeoisie began a revolution against the coffee cultivators. The resulting laws, which protected native Brazilian workers, made it difficult for immigrants to find jobs. In addition, as the demand for coffee declined in the 1930s because of the Great Depression, so did immigration.

At the same time, the nationalistic government of Getulio Vargas encouraged Europeans to assimilate into Brazilian culture. The goal was to replace the immigrants' home cultures by forcing them to learn Portuguese, prohibiting them to organize their own political groups, and forbidding them to publish foreign-language magazines and newspapers, or to instruct classes in languages other than Portuguese. Large communities of European immigrants in the south, especially in Rio Grande do Sul, were perceived as obstacles to constructing a single Brazilian identity.

Most immigrants in the 1930s came from Japan; they mainly worked in agriculture. This migration flow was suspended in 1941 because of World War II, and restarted in the 1950s. The Japanese immigration continued after the war because the state of São Paulo still attracted agriculture workers to its thriving economy.

Encouraged by the Brazilian government, immigrants from Spain, Syria, and Lebanon migrated to Brazil between 1953 and 1960 to work in the new industrial sector. By 1970, a total of 115,000 Spaniards and 32,000 Syrian-Lebanese were living in Brazil.

After the military coup d'état in 1964, the government ended policies to attract foreign migrants. The new ideology had a strong patriotic bias, and the government believed the country should rely on its native population. Since then, the Brazilian economy has relied largely on internal migration.

Recent Migration Policy

In 1980, the government established the National Immigration Council, the agency responsible for implementing migration policy and issuing visas and work permits. It also defined the criteria for giving foreigners legal residence and work permission.

In 1981, the new immigration law went into effect. It outlined different visa categories for foreigners, such as tourist visas, temporary visas, permanent visas, and diplomatic visas. Some rules assessing visa renewal and changing visa category were also established.

Between 1997 and 2004, the Brazilian government implemented a variety of normative resolutions regarding rules for foreign workers. The main government intention was to prioritize visas and work permits for foreigners who have at least a college degree.

However, even though it became more difficult to obtain work permits, most new immigrants have been less-skilled and have had less education than the government wanted. As a result, Brazilian workers' organizations have been pushing the government to create new obstacles for foreign workers so they do not have to compete with them for jobs.

Despite this pressure, the government has not made significant changes to the work permit system.

Emigration

Beginning in the second half of the 1980s, Brazilians from various socioeconomic levels started to emigrate to other countries in search of economic opportunities. High inflation and low economic growth in the 1980s, known as the "lost decade", followed by the government's unsuccessful liberal economic policies in the 1990s, meant that even educated Brazilians could make more money doing low-skilled work abroad.

By the 1990s, over 1.8 million Brazilians were living outside the country (see Table 1), mainly in the United States, Paraguay, and Japan, but also in Italy, Portugal, the United Kingdom, France, Canada, Australia, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Israel. There were no specific policies implemented by the government to encourage or discourage this emigration process.

Table 1: Brazilian Emigrants by Country of Residence, 2000

Consulate Branch	Total	Percent
Total in the US	799,203	42.3
New York	300,040	15.9
Miami	200,005	10.6
Boston	150,005	7.9
Washington	48,001	2.5
Houston	40,140	2.1
Los Angeles	33,007	1.8
San Francisco	15,003	0.8
Chicago	13,002	0.7
Total in Paraguay	442,104	23.4
Ciudad del Este	280,059	14.8
Asuncion	107,040	5.7
Salto del Guaira	55,005	2.9
Total in Japan	224,970	12.0
Nagoya	135,079	7.2
Tokyo	89,891	4.8
Other Countries	421,618	22.3
Total	1,887,895	100.0

Source: 2000 Brazilian Consulate Report

During the 1980s, Brazilians in the US would enter the country on a tourist visa, work for a year or two, and then return to Brazil for a year or two, repeating the process only when they needed to work for more money. Anthropologist Maxine Margolis, who studied Brazilians in New York City, called this "yo-yo" migration.

However, changes in American policy made this back-and-forth movement more complicated. Difficulty in obtaining tourist visas caused the number of Brazilians emigrating to decrease, and those who were able to enter the US usually did so illegally.

In the last few years, more and more Brazilians have started obtaining tourist visas for Mexico; they then attempt to enter the US via the Mexican border. Although the US Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) does not publicly release information about the ethnicity or country of origin of migrants it apprehends, an April 2005 Reuters article reported that CBP arrested 8,629 Brazilians crossing from Mexico in fiscal year (FY) 2004.

Brazilian migration to Paraguay dates back to the 1960s; these Brazilians are known as "Brasiguayos." They work in agriculture, and many are landowners in the border regions of Paraguay.

The Brazilians who go to Japan are descendants of former Japanese immigrants. They enter Japan legally, and find work with the help of recruiting agencies.

Although the Brazilian government does not have any specific policy to bring emigrants home, many Brazilians choose to return. The 2000 Brazilian Census provides some information about the high number of return migrants.

Of those who reported residing in another country less than 10 years before the 2000 census, 66.9 percent were Brazilians (Table 2). If only the returning migrants (former Brazilian emigrants) are considered, 26.8 percent of Brazilians came from Paraguay, 17 percent came from Japan, and 15.8 percent came from the United States.

Country of Origin	Foreigners	Percent of Total Foreigners	Former Brazilian Emigrants	Percent of Total Former Brazilian Migrants
South/Central America	43,125	46.5	76,354	40.8
Argentina	8,483	9.2	6,851	3.7
Bolivia	6,489	7.0	4,624	2.5
Chile	1,997	2.2	1,852	1.0
Colombia	1,812	2.0	1,237	0.7
Cuba	761	0.8	256	0.1
Paraguay	11,156	12.0	50,201	26.8
Peru	3,656	3.9	1,496	0.8
Uruguay	5,431	5.9	4,235	2.3
Venezuela	1,146	1.2	1,739	0.9
Rest of South/Central America	2,194	2.4	3,864	2.1
North America	9,029	9.7	32,540	17.4
Canada	738	0.8	1,848	1.0
Mexico	664	0.7	1,101	0.6
United States	7,628	8.2	29,591	15.8
Europe	21,636	23.4	36,927	19.7
France	3,079	3.3	5,096	2.7
Germany	2,831	3.1	4,600	2.5
Italy	3,583	3.9	5,210	2.8
Netherlands	623	0.7	871	0.5
Portugal	4,290	4.6	5,511	2.9
Spain	2,124	2.3	3,430	1.8
Switzerland	980	1.1	2,006	1.1
United Kingdom	1,867	2.0	7,389	3.9
Rest of Europe	2,259	2.4	2,815	1.5
Africa	3,723	4.0	3,002	1.6
Angola	1,689	1.8	1,015	0.5
Rest of Africa	2,034	2.2	1,988	1.1

Asia	14,368	15.5	35,708	19.1
China	2,908	3.1	715	0.4
Japan	5,364	5.8	31,774	17.0
Lebanon	1,739	1.9	543	0.3
North and South Koreas	1,546	1.7	361	0.2
Taiwan	1,161	1.3	446	0.2
Rest of Asia	1,651	1.8	1,869	1.0
Oceania	255	0.3	1,239	0.7
Not specified	506	0.5	1,411	0.8
Total	92,643	100.0	187,180	100.0
Total percent	33.1	---	66.9	---

Source: 2000 Brazilian Census.

* This includes only people who entered Brazil between 1990 and 2000.

Remittances from Brazilian emigrants were estimated at \$5.2 billion in 2003, according to a study by the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB).

Immigrants: Recent Flows and Total Numbers

Throughout the 1990s, Brazil received significant legal and illegal migration flows from both South Korea and Latin America (mainly Bolivia and Peru). South Koreans went to Brazil to work in the textile industry, both in production and trade. Those immigrants hired illegal Bolivians and Peruvians immigrants, who had lower wages than Brazilians workers.

According to the 2000 census (see Table 2), South and Central American migrants constituted 46.5 percent (or 43,125 people) of the total international flow to Brazil between 1990 and 2000. The next highest number, 23.4 percent or 21,636 people, came from European countries, while 15.5 percent (14,368) were from Asian countries and 9.7 percent (9,029) were from North America.

The 2000 census also provides information on the state or country of birth of individuals. Immigrants are those born in a foreign country, regardless of citizenship. The following data indicate some interesting trends.

The Brazilian southeast is the main destination for immigrants to Brazil (see Table 3); this region is home to 73.4 percent of the total immigrant population (683,830). Over half of these immigrants (343,944) are in the state of São Paulo. Other states with high levels of international immigration include Rio de Janeiro, Paraná, Minas Gerais, and Rio Grande do Sul.

Table 3: Immigrants* by State of Residence, 2000

State of Residence	Total	Percent
Southeast	501,819	73.4
Minas Gerais	21,022	3.1
Espírito Santo	3,752	0.5
Rio de Janeiro	133,101	19.5
São Paulo	343,944	50.3
South	101,219	14.8
Paraná	49,662	7.3
Santa Catarina	12,559	1.8

Rio Grande do Sul	38,998	5.7
Central-West	32,352	4.7
Mato Grosso do Sul	14,000	2.0
Mato Grosso	5,481	0.8
Goiás	5,911	0.9
Distrito Federal	6,960	1.0
North	22,847	3.3
Rondônia	4,341	0.6
Acre	1,787	0.3
Amazonas	6,899	1.0
Roraima	2,618	0.4
Pará	5,814	0.9
Amapá	807	0.1
Tocantins	581	0.1
Northeast	25,593	3.7
Maranhão	1,414	0.2
Piauí	353	0.1
Ceará	3,631	0.5
Rio Grande do Norte	1,578	0.2
Paraíba	1,282	0.2
Pernambuco	5,332	0.8
Alagoas	875	0.1
Sergipe	480	0.1
Bahia	10,649	1.6
Total	683,830	100.0

Source: 2000 Brazilian Census.

* Immigrants include all people born in a foreign country.

In 2000, 56.3 percent of Brazil's total foreign population came from Europe, 21 percent from South and Central America, and 17.8 percent from Asia (see Table 4). The largest populations are from Portugal (31.2 percent), Japan (10.4 percent), and Italy (8 percent).

Table 4: Immigrants* by Country of Birth, 2000

Country of Birth	Total	Percent
South/Central America	143,274	21.0
Argentina	27,531	4.0
Bolivia	20,388	3.0
Chile	17,131	2.5
Colombia	4,159	0.6
Cuba	1,343	0.2
Paraguay	28,822	4.2
Peru	10,814	1.6
Uruguay	24,740	3.6
Venezuela	2,162	0.3
Rest of South/Central America	6,184	0.9

North America	16,459	2.4
Canada	1,253	0.2
Mexico	1,258	0.2
United States	13,948	2.0
Europe	385,194	56.3
France	8,382	1.2
Germany	19,556	2.9
Italy	55,032	8.0
Netherlands	3,500	0.5
Portugal	213,203	31.2
Spain	43,604	6.4
Switzerland	2,944	0.4
United Kingdom	4,034	0.6
Rest of Europe	34,939	5.1
Africa	15,679	2.3
Angola	6,340	0.9
Rest of Africa	9,339	1.4
Asia	121,787	17.8
China	10,301	1.5
Japan	70,932	10.4
Lebanon	16,090	2.4
North and South Koreas	8,645	1.3
Taiwan	4,536	0.7
Rest of Asia	11,282	1.6
Oceania	571	0.1
Not specified	868	0.1
Total	683,830	100.0

Source: 2000 Brazilian Census.

* Immigrants include all people born in a foreign country.

Because the government wants to attract high-skilled employees, the Labor Ministry provides experts, managers, and administrators with temporary work visas. Between 1998 and 2004, 109,824 work visas were issued (see Table 5).

Among those visas, 17.2 percent were given to workers from the United States. The other top temporary-work visa recipients were French (5.9 percent), British (5.7 percent), and German (5.6 percent).

Table 5: Immigrants* with Authorization to Work by Nationality, 1993-1997 and 1998-2004

Country of Origin	1993-1997	1993-1997 (percent)	1998-2004	1998-2004 (percent)
United States	3,609	19.1	18,915	17.2
England	1,341	7.1	6,306	5.7
China	1,103	5.8	4,051	3.7
France	1,971	10.4	6,530	5.9
Japan	1,397	7.4	3,929	3.6
Germany	1,694	9.0	6,189	5.6

Argentina	1,316	7.0	3,950	3.6
Italy	1,368	7.2	4,930	4.5
Netherlands	665	3.5	2,468	2.2
Spain	896	4.7	3,825	3.5
Portugal	707	3.7	2,025	1.8
Philippines	241	1.3	3,759	3.4
Canada	546	2.9	2,565	2.3
Other countries	2,046	10.8	40,382	36.8
Total	18,900	100.0	109,824	100.0

Source: Labor Ministry/Labor Relations Secretary/Immigration General Coordination.

*Immigrants include all people born in a foreign country.

Regional Patterns

From the 1960s until the 1970s, around 200,000 Brazilians moved to neighboring countries, especially Paraguay and Argentina. During this period, even though the Brazilian economy was experiencing rapid growth, the other Latin American countries were seen as offering economic opportunities not necessarily available domestically.

Brazilian emigrants to other Latin American countries today are mainly peasants who settle in border areas of Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay, and Venezuela. In general, however, the Brazilian populations in these and other Latin American countries have dwindled since the early 1990s. Former Brazilian emigrants have been returning from other South American countries with the exception of Paraguay, which continues to attract Brazilians to work in agriculture.

Although the government has not encouraged regional immigration, Brazil has become an important, attractive destination for Latin Americans from various socioeconomic backgrounds.

The "Asunción Agreement" has greatly contributed to this phenomenon. In 1991, the agreement created a common market in the continent's southern cone countries — Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay, collectively known as the Mercosur. Although the agreement does not include migration provisions, it has increased population movements among the party countries.

Bolivians and Peruvians, whose countries also share borders with Brazil, tend to settle in metropolitan areas such as São Paulo. Chile, one of only two countries on the continent that does not border Brazil, and Argentina have been a source of highly skilled workers. Most migrate to the São Paulo metropolitan region. In 1997, anthropologist Sidney Antonio da Silva estimated that more than 300,000 immigrants from Chile, Bolivia, and Paraguay were living in the state of São Paulo, working in lower-paid jobs.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

In the early 1990s, Brazil began receiving asylum seekers from West African countries, particularly Angola (also a former Portuguese colony) and Sierra Leone. Not surprisingly, the majority of asylum seekers who are granted refugee status in Brazil today are from Africa (see Table 6).

The National Committee for the Refugees (CONARE), the government organization that adjudicates applications, granted refugee status to just over 3,000 people between January 1998 and February 2005.

In 1999, Brazil signed an agreement with the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to begin a formal refugee resettlement program. When the program launched in 2001, the first refugees to arrive were from Afghanistan.

The program has become increasingly focused on resettling refugees from Colombia who are fleeing its longtime conflict. Since 2003, Brazil has become home to over 100 Colombian refugee men, women, and children.

Brazil has said it can accept 275 resettled refugees in 2005, but since the program is dependent on funds from UNHCR, the number who actually arrives will depend on funding.

Continent of Origin	Total	Percent
Africa	2,506	81.5
Latin America and Caribbean	274	8.9
Asia	181	5.9
Europe	113	3.7
Total	3,074	100.0

Source: National Committee for the Refugees (CONARE).

Undocumented Migration

With over 14,500 kilometers of land borders, the majority of which are not well-secured, it is relatively easy for low-skilled Latin Americans to illegally enter Brazil and find work in agriculture and factories. They enter through so-called "dry borders," which are the western and northern Brazilian borders with other countries.

As mentioned previously, the textile industry in São Paulo is managed by migrants from South Korea who hire undocumented Bolivian, Peruvian, and Colombian workers. These illegal workers accept poor labor conditions and low wages because of their vulnerable situation.

In general, researchers are aware that government census data does not include undocumented migrants. The best estimate of their numbers comes from the government, which estimates 200,000 Bolivians, 20,000 Peruvians, and 50,000 Koreans living in Brazil.

Thus far, the government has not seriously attempted to control illegal migration, nor has it made any plans to regularize illegal workers. However, due to the increasing economic integration between Latin American countries, politicians and social scientists have discussed the need to improve labor regulations in Brazil and other Mercosur countries.

Conclusion

The current Brazilian government, elected in 2003, is concentrating its efforts on strengthening the common market (Mercosur) and implementing new alliances with other Latin American countries, such as Chile, Peru, Venezuela, and Cuba. If this policy succeeds, both the economic and population flows among those countries and to Brazil will likely increase.

However, the government will need to acknowledge the growing undocumented workforce and take action to ensure undocumented workers do not become a segregated and marginalized segment of society.

After economic stagnation in the 1980s and 1990s, Brazil is experiencing robust economic growth and continued economic stability. Improved opportunities at home may lead to a decrease in emigration to Europe and the US.

But continued regional economic cooperation and economic growth, as well as their consequences for migration, will depend largely on the government's ability to stay focused on these goals.

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