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| Brazilian diaspora  Activity sheet 6 |

**The Brazilian diaspora**

Brazil was long seen as a country of immigrants, but increasingly there is acknowledgement of its growing diaspora, in North America, southern Europe, Japan and the UK. Although Brazil is an upper-middle income country, people often cite socioeconomic and political uncertainty over recent years as a key driver of migration. In 2021, official surveys estimated the Brazil-born population in England and Wales at 119,000, around double the population in 2011. However, the Consulate of Brazil estimates the UK diaspora at 220,000. An interesting feature of the Brazilian community in the UK is that a significant number of Brazilian residents are secondary migrants, coming to the UK after living in southern Europe (some 29% with EU passports, typically Italian or Portuguese) mainly for economic reasons in the wake of the 2009 Global Financial Crisis, or for education and family reasons.

Brazilians are concentrated in the Southeast of England and around half the Brazil-born population is thought to reside in London. Census data suggests that the Brazil-born adult population has tended to be younger than average, and more likely to be cohabiting with people who are not family than the general population. Class, racial and regional divides affect social relations within the Brazilian diaspora and between the diaspora and local communities.

Reflecting the strong economic motivations driving migration, Brazilian migrants have high rates of employment in a range of occupations, the most common being hospitality. Some of these employment sectors were hit hard during the pandemic and people had to be very creative and adaptive in terms of work: second jobs and side hustles were common. As one new motorbike delivery worker put it: ‘I started to discover other talents I had but didn’t know I had! I discovered that I could wash the dishes very well, I knew how to paint walls… I worked in construction, restaurants, and then I found the motorbike…’ A former Brazilian civil servant turned courier turned car valet explained: ‘You must reinvent yourself… we learned long ago how to reinvent ourselves. Coming here, we had to get by, and learn to do things differently.’ At the same time, many people with precarious status and insecure work really struggled. Non-profit organisations, community groups and churches stepped in where they could help: one workshop participant commented that ‘The organizations came together like I've never seen them before, offering all kinds of support.’

**Transnational engagement and remittances**

Brazil hosted many migrant workers from other parts of Latin America and the world, but it also receives remittances from its own diaspora. Official remittance inflows to Brazil stood at $5 billion at the end of 2022. However, this is a very small proportion of Brazil’s Gross Domestic Product.

The *Connecting During Covid* project’s online survey of 128 Brazilians in the UK found more than 70% of survey participants said that they did *not* feel pressure to send money – contrasting with higher levels of pressure experienced in the Indian and Somali community, and possibly reflecting relatively better income situation of relatives in Brazil. Nevertheless, 27% sent family remittances in 2019, increasing to 39% in 2020. The average (mean) amount remitted decreased in 2020 by nearly a quarter.

During the pandemic, Brazil struggled with soaring infection rates, particularly in early 2021, and escalating unemployment. Participants repeatedly contrasted protections put in places in the UK via universal credit and furlough with the more limited support available in Brazil. The predicament of elderly relatives was a concern for many migrants. Despite experiencing periods of unemployment, one woman emphasized ‘We always paid the bills at my mother’s house because she is retired, and she can barely survive with her pension. If we don’t help, there’s no way.’ Other people helped their parents with online administration so that they did not have to go out to do their shopping or pay their bills.

Economic upheavals abroad also meant that UK residents found themselves helping new people, for instance: ‘My brothers are healthy and strong, I don’t usually help… We had to help, because they [lost their jobs] … we can send some help that will not hurt us financially but for them will mean so much because of the currency exchange.’ Sometimes the primary remittance recipient would share what they received with other family members. People also commented that while previously they sent money for gifts, during the pandemic they were sending money that was used to cover more basic needs. As one workshop participant put it, ‘many used to send money to Brazil to buy a house, a car, or have a better quality of life when they return. But now what we hear is that people send money to Brazil for their families to survive.’

People’s attitudes to remittances varied. One woman explained ‘I understand how difficult it is for you to have… your life together… and then all of a sudden everything is upside down… [Sending money is] a good feeling… I think it strengthened the bond between a very big family.’ But some people found the responsibility burdensome. For example, another interviewee reflected that supporting his mother in Brazil ‘modifies the type of relationship. It creates dependency, you feel guilty and responsible… to realise that someone who I always relied on [now has] to be dependent on me was a big emotional shock.’ One couple explained that they sought to avoid people depending on them too much by only helping their siblings when they actually asked: ‘let them go after it… Otherwise they think we are rich, they think we need to send every month!’

Brazilians often send money to Brazil for individual reasons, e.g. savings/investment/debts, and there was some charitable giving. The Remittance Prices Index, reported that the average cost of sending $120 from the UK to Brazil at the start of 2023 was 5.07%, ranging from a low of 1.67% via online services to a high of 12.36% if sending cash via a MoneyGram high street agent. Our survey indicated that even prior to the pandemic, Brazilians had a strong preference for digital mechanisms for sending remittances.

**Further reading**

* Lindley, Anna, Kavita Datta, Elaine Chase, Laura Hammond, Kaltun Fadal, Iris Lim, Gabriela Loureiro and Saliha Majeed-Hajaj (2023) 'Remitting Through Crisis: Experiences of Migrant and Diaspora Communities in the UK.' Connecting During Covid-19 Research Briefing No. 2. London: Queen Mary University of London. <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/geog/media/geography/docs/332_23-Remittances-Crisis-Report-v3.pdf>
* Martins Junior, Angelo (2021) ‘Moving difference: Brazilians in London’ *Migration Mobilities Blog*, Bristol: University of Bristol. <https://migration.bristol.ac.uk/2021/03/16/moving-difference-brazilians-in-london/>
* McIlwaine, Cathy and Diego Bunge (2016) Moving Towards Visibility: the Latin American community in London. Trust for London. <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/107149344/Towards_Visibility_full_report.pdf>

**Questions**

1. Why do you think the estimates given for the Brazilian population in the UK vary so significantly?
2. Are remittance inflows significant in Brazil? Give reasons for your answer.
3. How did remittance practices change during the pandemic?

**Answer guide**

1. Why do you think the estimates given for the Brazilian population in the UK vary so significantly?

*The first estimate is of people in England and Wales and is based on official surveys. It excludes: people who are undocumented migrants, people of Brazilian heritage born outside Brazil, and Brazilians in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Consulate estimated may capture more of these groups. The text does not explain how the Consulate arrived at its estimate, though.*

1. Are remittance inflows significant in Brazil?

*Official data suggested that remittances are not a major financial inflow in Brazil, compared to the size of the economy.*

*The research reported suggests that incoming remittances have often tended to be for the migrants’ own savings, debt repayment or investment.*

*But there are also family remittances that can be important for particular individuals and families. During the pandemic, the elderly and people facing unemployment or income reduction may have found remittances particularly helpful.*

1. How did remittance practices change during the pandemic?

* *In the research survey, the proportion of people sending family remittances increased from 27% in 2019 to 39% in 2020. However, the average amount decreased in the same time period by nearly a quarter.*
* *There was particular concern about older relatives, with some people helping by sending money, and also by helping elderly parents access online services so they could avoid exposure to Covid-19.*
* *People found that new contacts were asking for help.*
* *While previously it was common to send money for gifts, during the pandemic it became more common to send money for essential needs, with some Brazilians in the UK feeling like people depended on them more that before.*