

# **Managing immigration in Brazil: experiences, lessons and perspectives**

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## **Introduction**

The current migratory flows observed in the European continent acquire contours of extreme urgency, evidencing a series of major challenges. According to data from the United Nations and the European Union, more than one million immigrants arrived in Europe in 2015 motivated by the critical political, social, and economic situation faced by countries in North Africa and Middle East – a substantial increase compared to previous years.

The European Union is experiencing great difficulties in handling the large number of asylum applications, leading to thousands of immigrants camping out in border areas and living under extremely harsh conditions. Defending immigrant rights is a particularly complex issue in the current context of economic and national security crisis, as the worsening of social issues and xenophobia makes it difficult to establish any consensus in this regard.

However, recent researches carried out by the United Nations (2013a; 2013b; 2013c) and the International Organization for Migration – IOM (2013) shows an increasingly positive association between economic development and the better exploitation of the migratory flows, based on public policies focused on promoting sustainable development and improving the use of human capital.

Given the urgency of this matter, this paper seeks to introduce and analyze the design of the immigration policies and social integration practices recently developed in Brazil. Despite the economic, contextual, and social differences, the Brazilian experience can help to promote the exchange of valuable learnings and perspectives, elucidating the discussions on practical and feasible initiatives that minimizes the social consequences of the migratory crisis.

## **Historical context**

The issue of labor in Brazil became a serious political topic of discussion in the early 19th century, spawning two schools of thought: one in favor of slavery and the other in favor of free immigrant work.

The first group believed that agriculture in colonial Brazil should converge with the interests and needs of the Portuguese empire regarding the supply of goods and commercial profitability. In this sense, it was argued that progress could be built on slave labor (COSTA, 1821), leading to a total lack of public policies and laws designed to encourage immigration, which was completely contrary to the situation in the United States, where immigrants were benefited by incentive laws and initiatives such as the possibility of obtaining their own land.

The second group believed that only through free labor would it be possible to achieve progress and civilization. As black people were thought of as being “uneducated, lazy, immoral, idle and prone to vice”, slavery was blamed for all the sort of country’s problems and corruption. In opposition, the “ethic and civilization” inherent in the European man, with his “moral, religion and vice-free living”, would help to systematically “perfect the race and civilization” in Brazil given his “superiority over local inhabitants”, most of whom were of non-European origin or mixed race and virtually isolated for approximately three centuries.

The final decision taken was to abolish slavery although there was some differences of opinion with regard to how quickly it would be – straight away or gradually – and to what should be done with former slaves – send them back to Africa or allocate them in land as small farmers (COSTA, 1821).

From the abolition of slavery in 1888 up to the Economic Crisis of 1929, free work finally became socially accepted in Brazil while the European immigration has acquired important relevance, particularly in areas where slavery had played important economic and social role. Such immigration flows were strongly driven by specific immigration policies designed in order to encouraging the European migration, inspired by relevant sociological and political arguments at the time, such as:

- the “whitening” of the population (eugenics);
- occupation of territory, particularly in geopolitical strategic areas;
- the expansion and diversification of agriculture, with the creation of an agrarian middle class linked to food production and supplying the domestic market, with particular emphasis on Rio de Janeiro and Salvador.<sup>1</sup>

The founding of agricultural colonies by European immigrants paved the way for the implementation of major changes in production and land exploitation, with the establishment of medium-sized properties. This would meet the production needs of the domestic market and create the conditions for the rising of a new type of rural farmer, leading to a significant change in the social structure of the country, marked by the previous absence of a middle class in the cities.

In this context, more than 1.4 million immigrants arrived in Brazil in just ten years, twice as many as in the previous eighty years. Circumstantial events in the 20th century such as the two World Wars and the Japanese crisis helped to increase and diversify this movement, contributing directly to the Brazilian urbanization and industrialization processes due to the emergence of new and modern manufacturing techniques.

European immigrants brought much skilled labor to Brazil, mainly to work on the coffee plantations, where they adopted the *colonato* system: families of settlers promised landowners that they would cultivate a certain number of coffee plants; in compensation, landowners provide land and housing to those families. The remuneration system was mixed:

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<sup>1</sup> It was not unusual that the first non-Portuguese European colonies were established near these cities, including: Leopoldina (Bahia), in 1818, and Nova Friburgo (Rio de Janeiro), in 1820, founded by the Germans and Swiss, respectively.

some earnings coming from the sale of coffee and another part from an annual fixed salary. Families also kept part of what they produced and sold what was left over. Outside the coffee season, immigrant families received payment for general services that they provided on the farm (LIMA, 1998, p. 10-11).

The increase in coffee production provided by the immigrant labor paved the way for the creation of new job opportunities. The commercialization of coffee required a vast rail network throughout São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro that, in turn, led to the creation of many small towns. At the same time, the country experienced a new wave of immigration from Japan, with many Japanese coming to Brazil to produce fruit and vegetables (SAKURAI, 1999). Subsequently, the money earned and saved led to many immigrants, mainly Italians, to settling in cities and working in various kinds of business sectors.

The migration flows to Brazil would be severely interrupted in the 1930s and 1940s due to the outbreak of the Crisis of 1929, the Getulio Vargas nationalist dictatorship and the worsening of the international situation prior to the World War II. As part of the measures taken during the “Estado Novo” (1937-1945), the so-called Nationalization Campaign aimed to reduce the cultural influence of immigrant communities in Brazil, resulting in the introduction of a policy of totalitarian inclusion and forced integration, such as:

- nationalization of education;
- obligatory teaching of Portuguese;
- not teaching foreign languages to children under the age of 14;
- the prohibition of grants from foreign institutions and governments;
- the prohibition of speaking foreign languages in public – even in religious ceremonies;
- control of the immigrant communities areas by army;
- censorship of radio programs and foreign language restrictions in the media;
- mandatory change of names of streets, signs and notices in shops and factories, as well as sports and community clubs and associations.

Brazil entering the World War II intensifying the repression against foreigners, mainly those linked with the axis powers (Germans, Italians and Japanese) with the introduction of several repressive measures, such as (SEYFERTH, 1999):

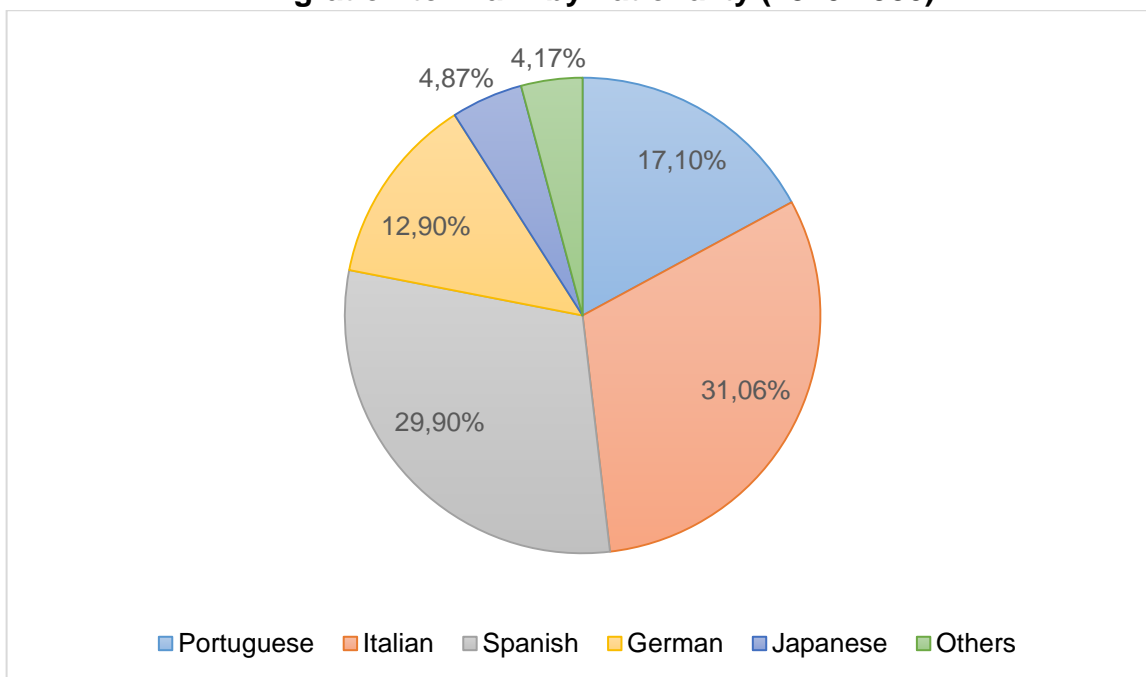
- restrictions to individual freedom;
- the need for authorization to travel within the country;
- the seizure of books, magazines, newspapers, and documents;
- the arrest of people who did not speak Portuguese.

It is important to note that the authoritarianism on the part of the State against the immigrants at this time did not consist of isolationist discrimination but rather of forced integration – subsequently reinforced by the climate of war.

The migration flows would only resume after the World War II, mainly due to the strong growth and revitalization of the Brazilian economy and less by the government incentives to

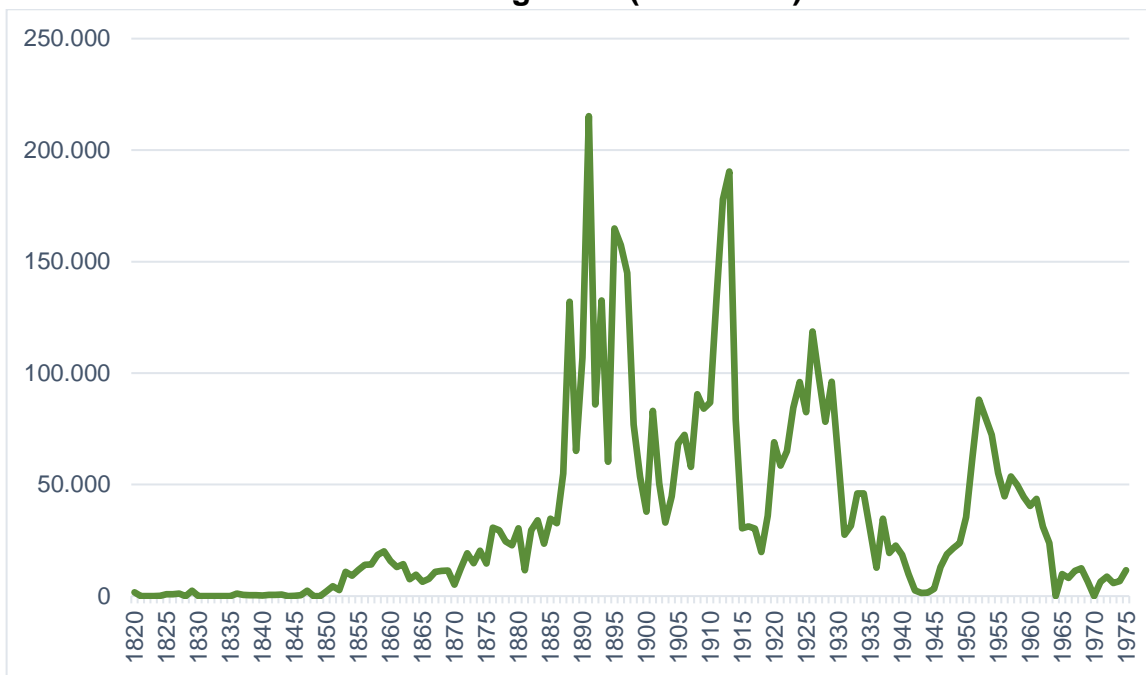
encourage the immigration. The composition of these new flows, however, was different from the previous ones, with more predominance of Arab and Jewish groups.

**Immigration to Brazil by nationality (1820-1980)**



Source: IBGE, 2000. (The Brazilian Geographical and Statistics Institute)

**Total immigration (1820-1975)**



Source: IBGE, 2000. (The Brazilian Geographical and Statistics Institute)

The effect that this wave of immigrants had on the economic development of Brazil is evident from the ethnic origin of businessmen in the State of São Paulo, the most advanced province in the country as far as the industrialization process began. According to research conducted by Bresser-Pereira (1962), 84.7% of businessmen in São Paulo were immigrants or had immigrant parents or grandparents. These figures show the irrefutable importance that immigrants played in the Brazilian economic development and in the formation of a large bourgeois middle class.

Businessmen of Italian origin are in first place, with 34.8%; followed by Brazilians, 15.7%; German, Austrian and Swiss, 15.2%; Portuguese, 11.8%; and immigrants from the Middle East (Lebanese, Syrians and Armenians in that order), 9.8% (BRESSER-PEREIRA, 2014, p. 124-125, *our translation*).

#### **Ethnic origin of businessmen in the State of São Paulo**

<b>Origin</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Brazilian (Brazilian of three generations)</i>	32	15.7
<i>Foreigners</i>	172	84.3
Brazilians, grandchildren of immigrants	23	11.3
Brazilians, children of immigrants	48	23.9
Immigrants	101	49.5
<i>Total</i>	204	100

Source: Bresser-Pereira (1962).

The establishing of the Military Dictatorship in 1964 led to increased concern about issues such as national security and, therefore, to greater restrictions and bureaucratization of immigration regulations, which reflected in the promulgation of the Foreigners Act No. 6815 of August 19, 1980. This new political reality associated with the period of economic stagnation resulted of the external debt crisis of 1980 led to a complete reversal of the migratory flows seen in previous years, with Brazilian of productive age leaving the country towards United States, Japan and Europe.

The subsequent economic and financial stability of the country in the 1990s helped to slow down the exodus of Brazilians and, at the same time, encouraged immigration from neighboring countries – in particular Bolivia, Peru and Paraguay. The increase in income, employment and consumption patterns of less well-off sectors of society between 2005 and 2010 – boosted by the robust economic growth and beneficial international dynamics characterized by the strong appreciation of the commodities prices, combined with the adoption of important social income transfer policies – help to turn the country more attractive to those who had left Brazil in past.

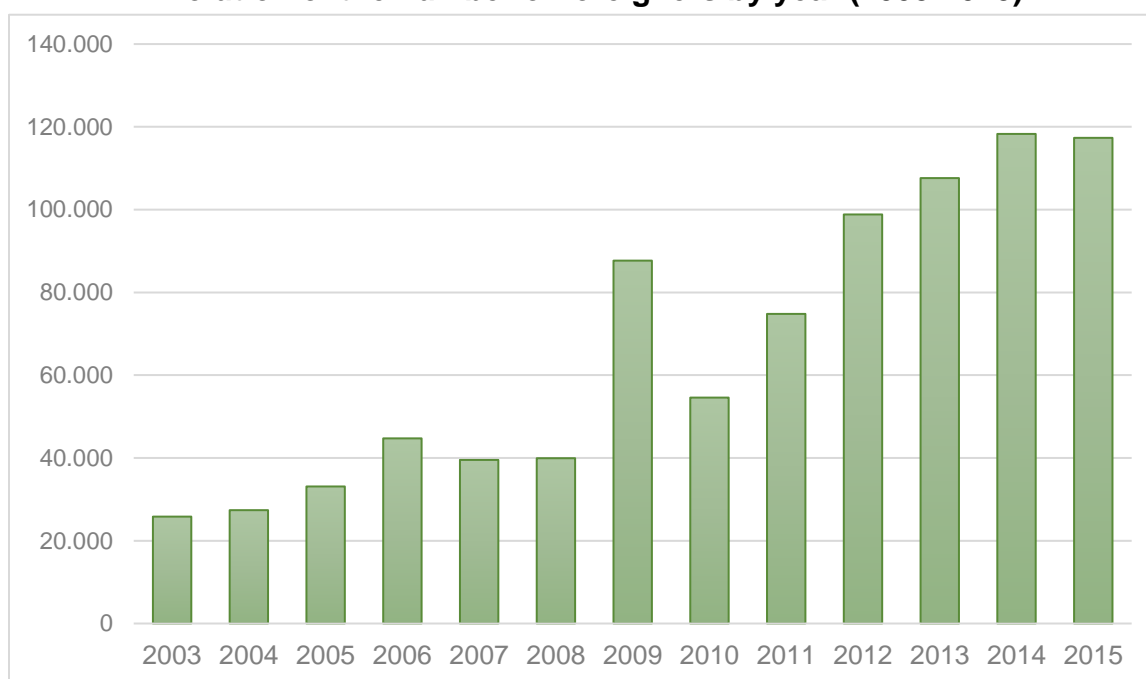
### Return of Brazilian emigrants and main countries of origin

1995-2000		2005-2010	
1. Paraguay	35,446	1. USA	51,933
2. Japan	19,692	2. Japan	41,417
3. USA	16,695	3. Paraguay	24,666
4. Argentina	7,797	4. Portugal	21,376
5. Bolivia	6,021	5. Bolivia	15,753
<i>Total</i>	85,651	<i>Total</i>	155,145

Source: IBGE, 2010.

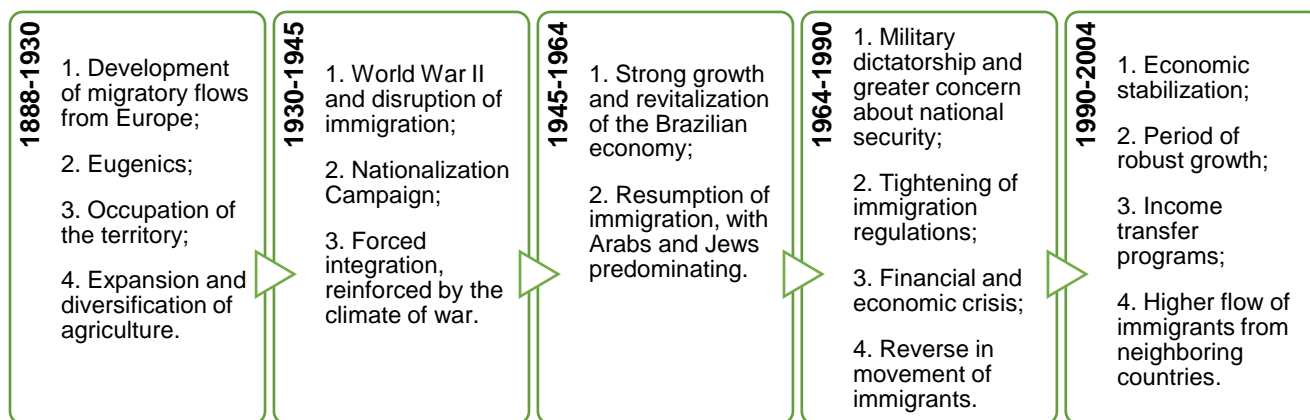
Data taken from the foreigners register of the Federal Police of Brazil show a significant and constant increase in the movement of foreigners in Brazil, particularly from 2003.

### Evolution of the number of foreigners by year (2003-2015)



Source: Federal Police (2016a).

Based on this historical context analysis, the map below summarizes the major developments that have taken place in Brazil, encompassing the circumstantial political changes and government guidelines regarding the immigration process.



Source: Own data.

## Public policy and immigration in the 21st century

Independently of the consolidation of the economic and social advances of a certain national reality, as well as of the international conventions that recognize the rights of immigrants in their search for better living conditions, it is very difficult for any country to suddenly absorb large numbers of immigrants. Reconciling the right of a country to control immigration and the human right to migrate in search of better opportunities has become a major challenge for modern economies.

It was the search for better living conditions, for example, that made Brazil one of the main destinations for Haitians after the economic collapse and social disorder of one of the poorest countries in the Americas – social disorder represented by the loss of 350,000 lives and 1.5 million of homeless.

For humanitarian reasons the Brazilian government gave Haitians a work permit visa at the same time that the Department of Foreign Affairs played an important role in reorganizing the Brazilian Embassy in Port-au-Prince alongside with the International Organization for Migration, leading to a substantial increase in the number of visas granted to Haitians. Fernando Vidal, the Brazilian ambassador in Port-au-Prince, says that the embassy currently has the capacity to issue up to two thousand visas every month (KAWAGUTI, 2016). It is estimated that there are 50,000 Haitians in Brazil distributed in more than fifty municipalities from north to south. Haitians now account for the greatest number of migrant workers, ahead of the Portuguese (CAVALCANTI, *et al.*, 2015).

In addition to Haitians, it is estimated that around 350,000 Bolivians live in Brazil, 200,000 of them in illegal situation. It should be noted that illegal immigrants are more vulnerable to exploitation or semi-slavery regimes, which adversely affects both Brazilian workers, because of the large difference in wages paid, and immigrants themselves, who are more likely to work in degrading conditions.

The regularization of immigrant groups presupposes the creation and implementation of specific policies able to provide them protection and fully recognize their civil, political, and social rights in order to ensure their effective integration into society.

The effective incorporation of these immigrants, however, requires more action than just introducing legislation to fight racism and discrimination based on racial and ethnic origin. Requires specific actions and programs in order to promote their capacity to 1) support their family; 2) enable them to enter the labor market; and 3) become an active part in society.

Being negligent with this insertion will mean that immigrants will end up living in a society dominated by prejudice and discrimination, leading future generations to shutting themselves up in their own communities, becoming “foreigners” in their own homeland.

This paper presents the main progress made in Brazilian immigration policy in two central and interrelated aspects: 1) immigration legislation and 2) policies and programs.

## **1) Immigration legislation**

The evolution of immigration policy in Brazil has been hindered by the lag of currently legislation: the Act No. 6.815 of August 19, 1980, promulgated during the military dictatorship and, therefore, excessively influenced by the concern with the national security; greater degree of restriction and bureaucratization of migratory flows; and restriction of political rights and freedom of expression.

The National Immigration Council (CNIg), attached to the Department of Labor and Social Welfare (MTPS), was set up as a result of this legislation, with the responsibility to organize and manage the immigration policy. The council is made up by representatives of the federal government, business, labor organizations, civil society, and permanent observers, and has played a key role in economic and social development by boosting the involvement of executives in foreign companies established in Brazil and welcoming recently arrived immigrants, speeding up their full incorporation into society.

Despite the re-democratization process and promulgation of the Federal Constitution of 1988, Brazil has made little progress in adjusting its laws to the new global migration trends. Act No. 6.815 is still the main law that regulates the legal situation of foreigners. It is vitally important to update its norms and brought into line with modern-day migration trends, mainly in relation to the fundamental concepts established by human rights.

Initiatives to update the current legislation has been included in the draft of Act 5.655 sent to National Congress in 2009. The draft covers issues such as foreigners entering, leaving, and staying in Brazil, including procedures designed to:

- simplify immigration procedures for investors, researchers, teachers, artists, and sportsmen;
- reduce the existing bureaucracy in obtaining and renewing documents and applying to change temporary visas to permanent visas;
- allow tourists to conduct business in Brazil in order to attract foreign investment;



- guarantee to immigrants the fulfillment of their human and social rights;
- turn the CNlg into the National Immigration Council, making it more flexible and expanding its coverage (IOM, 2009).

Discussions advanced slowly until the approval of the Decree 8.757, in May 2016, leading to significant changes into Act No. 6.815/80. The main changes introduced by the new decree aim to facilitate (RUEDIGER, 2015, p. 90-98):

- grant temporary visas to foreigners who hold grants for research, development and innovation;
- grant temporary visas to relatives and legal dependents over the age of 17;
- extend temporary visas and turn temporary visas to permanent visas;
- grant visas to those who can perform strategic professional skills to Brazil;
- turn tourist visas into student visas and student visas into work permits;
- reduce the bureaucracy required to apply for a work permit;

In summary, the new rules are structured in order to bring together aspects that promote both economic growth and respect for human rights, encouraging the attraction and retention of skilled immigrants and cutting down the typical bureaucracy of immigration procedures, guaranteeing them the same rights as Brazilians except for those reserved to native Brazilians – such as holding certain public positions.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the obstacles created by outdated laws, the CNlg took a major step forward in recognizing the importance of modernizing immigration management and the assistance to immigrants, finding solutions to any potential inconsistencies and discrepancies by the introduction of new regulations. In view of this, was introduced in 2010 the National Immigration and Migrant Workers Protection Policy, aiming to change immigration from a matter of national security to a matter of human rights.

Other relevant changes in legislation came into effect arose from the editing of Decree No. 6.964-2009 and Decree No. 6.975/2009, which promulgated bilateral temporary and permanent residency agreements with MERCOSUR countries (Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay), Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru, in order to facilitate the immigration from these countries by eliminating visa requirements.

## **2) Policies and programs**

Although essential, public immigration policies are not limited to regulation and control of the migratory flows. It also includes actions, programs, and initiatives specifically designed to address the challenges related to the immigration process, especially with regard to the adaptation and promotion of better standards of living.

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<sup>2</sup> Rights set out in Article 12, paragraph 3, of the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 (BRAZIL, 1988).

The increasing number of immigrants coming to Brazil<sup>3</sup> over the last years highlights the importance of these actions, designed and introduced to guarantee the minimum conditions to an autonomous life and to comply with the individual and collective rights enshrined in the Brazilian Constitution.

Article 5. Everyone is equal in the eyes of the law, without distinction of any kind, which guarantees Brazilians and foreign residents the inviolable right to life, freedom, equality, safety and property [...] (BRAZIL, 1988).

In this way, the recent Brazilian immigration policy has been experiencing significant innovations and initiatives focused on support the integration of immigrants on three specific planes:

- access to basic services;
- access to work under humane and fair conditions;
- respect human rights and preventing discrimination and xenophobia.

The purpose of these actions is to not only promote economic and social development but also establish a greater coherent and modern posture in relation to the migration phenomenon.

In the sphere of the basic services, it is worth noting the structuring of local centers of reference and temporary shelter for immigrants that came to Brazil seeking for new life opportunities. These centers are able to promote support and information on migratory issues, job opportunities, specialized legal advice, psychological support, and professional intermediation.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, these centers also provide Portuguese literacy courses. These literacy courses are essential to immigrants given the dramatic situation of vulnerability, social risk, violation of rights, and cultural exclusion due to the isolation caused by not speaking the native language (LUSSI, 2015, p. 137). In this way, learning Portuguese has been a major factor in helping immigrants to overcome the language barrier and to benefit from several facilities as finding employment opportunities and access essential public services, favoring their effective integration into Brazilian society.

To better serving the immigrants' needs, specific courses have been structured and implemented in order to train and educate public servants about the immigrants' cultural specificities. The awareness of public servants has become increasingly important and required to identify the main difficulties faced by immigrants and thus enable them to provide quality and respectful public services in essential areas such as health, education, culture, sports, recreation, and policies on women.

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<sup>3</sup> The number of working immigrants increased by 126% between 2010 and 2014. During this time, the number of immigrants increased from 69,015 to 155,982 that, although significant, accounts for just 0.5% of the workforce in Brazil.

<sup>4</sup> The first center was opened in São Paulo in August 2014. Since then, other centers have been created in major cities, such as Florianopolis and Porto Alegre.

The initiative taken by Brazilian public banks to provide financial services is also noteworthy. These measures are not only important for the increasingly role and facilities inherent to the banking system nowadays, but mainly for enabling them to receive social benefits such as those available under the “Bolsa Família”<sup>5</sup> (Family Grant) and “Minha Casa, Minha Vida”<sup>6</sup> (a Brazilian popular housing program). Other prerequisites to receive such benefits are: 1) have a minimum amount of income; 2) legally live in the country; 3) have an official identity document.

While on the subject of welfare, with emphasis on job creation, the National Technical Training and Employment Program (PRONATEC, acronym in Portuguese) emerges as an important initiative able to provide employment opportunities, inclusive to immigrants. Implemented in 2011 with the purpose of increasing the offer of professional and technical training courses in Brazil, the PRONATEC seeks to increase the professional qualification and labor productivity of young people, workers, and beneficiaries of welfare programs (BRAZIL, 2016d). In addition to the economic benefits of increasing labor productivity, the improving of the immigrants’ professional skills will prevent them from being exploited, paving the way for better job opportunities particularly in the so-called information technology age – in which skills need to be constantly updated according to market needs.

It is important to point out that the policies and programs discussed above were not specifically created to cater for immigrants. They have been introduced to meet the needs of Brazilian society as a whole and without any kind of distinction, such as observed in the Constitution of 1988. The great differential in public policy level was to make this social framework also accessible to the immigrant, which has led to important results as:

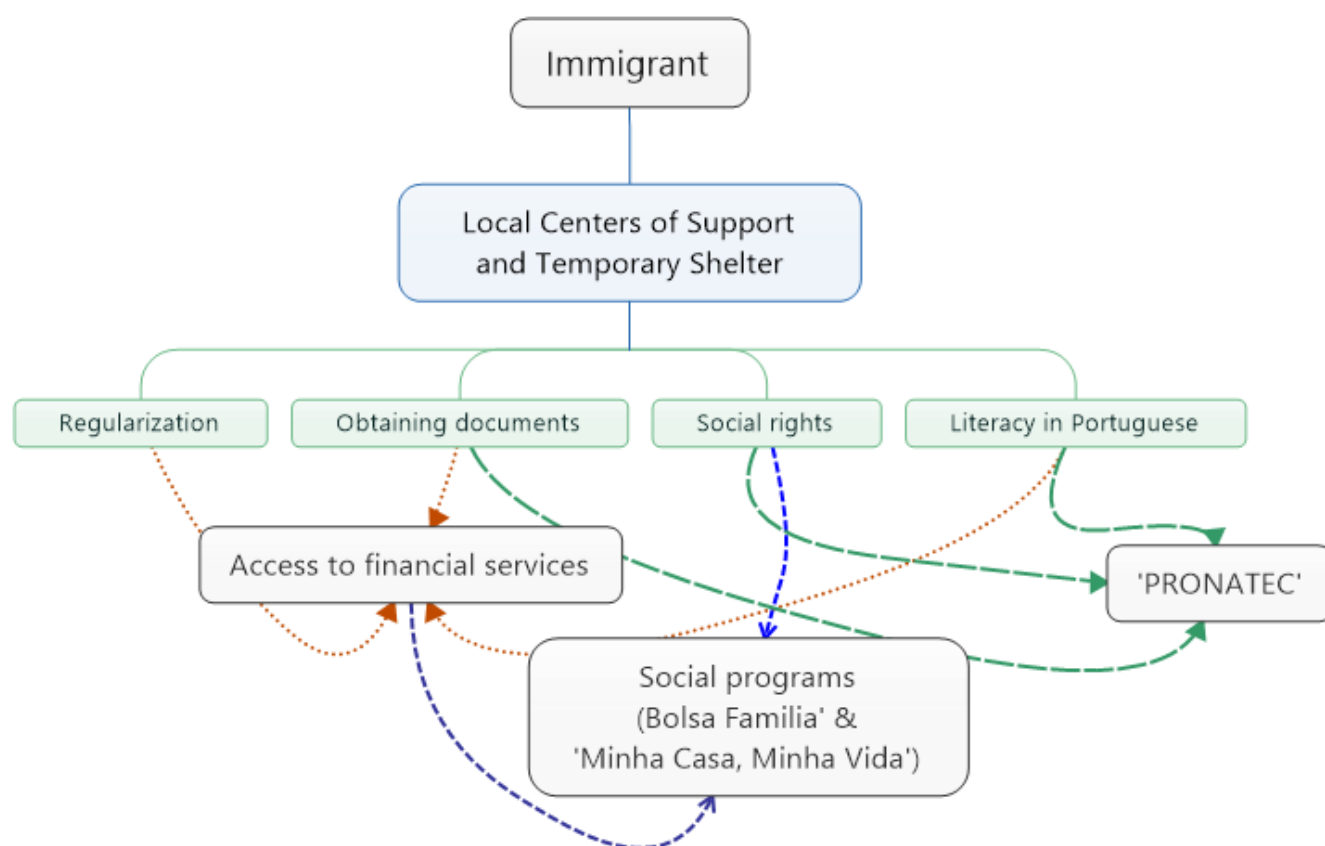
- incentives for immigrants to legalize their situation;
- creation of opportunities for social and economic development of the immigrant population;
- the fight against the old and deep-rooted perception of immigrants as being a threat to national security and native Brazilian workers.

The figure below summarizes the current structure of welfare benefits, as well as the interrelation built between in its various aspects and dimensions:

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<sup>5</sup> Benefits program oriented to families under the poverty line (monthly per capita income between BRL 85.01 and BRL 170.00) and in extreme poverty (monthly per capita income below BRL 85.00), in order to help them meet their basic needs. The program also aims to ensure that poorer sectors have access to food, education, and health (Brazil, 2016b).

<sup>6</sup> The most important home ownership program set up in Brazil. It includes several ways of helping families in need of housing, both in urban and rural areas, family income, and house value (Brazil, 2016c).



Source: Own data.

## The outlook

Despite the fact that Brazil continues to attract immigrants in search of better opportunities and higher standard of living, the major economic crisis that has affected the country since the beginning of 2015, with negative effect on economic growth and creation of jobs, has been appointed as one of the main reasons for the recent outflow of immigrants.

Nevertheless, the eventual recovery of the economic growth rate seen in the recent past creates the conditions for a prompt resumption of the immigration trend of previous years. In this context, it is vitally important that Brazil keeps improving the immigration laws and introducing public policies in order to promote the support and social integration with the objective of reflecting the needs associated with modern-day global migration trends, closely linked with human rights.

We should emphasize that Brazil is undergoing and will continue to undergo significant demographic changes in the coming years, including: 1) a reduction in the population growth rate; 2) a drop in the number of children and adolescents; and 3) an increase in the number of old people and retired. By comparing the demographic pyramid of 2010 with the forecast for 2035, the impact of these changes in the future becomes apparent, with subsequent influence on the job market, social security, fiscal sustainability, and economic growth.

## Demographic forecast for Brazil (2010-2035)



Source: IBGE, 2016.

Therefore, immigration has become an important factor in overcoming the consequences of demographic ageing, with emphasis to the following aspects:

- immigrants fill important niche markets, from the most dynamic sectors to those in decline;
- younger immigrants have a better educational level than previous generations;
- immigrants make a major contribution to revitalizing the job market;
- immigrants contribute more than they receive in social benefits, having a positive effect on reducing the social security deficit.

To summarize, immigration contributes positively to economic growth by both increasing the economically active population and contributing to technological progress and development of human capital (OECD, 2014). Developed countries, for example, have, to a major extent, established specific policies to attract and retain immigrants, particularly the skilled ones. Therefore, it is essential that Brazil continue to develop and expand its mobility and integration system as a way to compete in this fierce international talent competition, particularly taking into account the deficit in the Brazilian job market.

Possible measures include (FGV, 2015, p. 89-98):

- introducing specific work permits for skilled workers in strategic areas, such as technological development and innovation;
- adopting points system for granting visas and classifying candidates according to a balanced list of desirable features with minimum qualification specificities;
- providing immigrants an assistance service, with extensive information about the country and area where they live;
- facilitate the visa scheduling process with Brazilian consulates, mainly from the use of Internet and information and communication technologies;

- streamlining bureaucratic processes, mainly those related to revalidation of foreign educational qualifications and documents emission;
- Periodically mapping the labor market and job opportunities, as well as the type of talent needed to develop technologies alongside of companies, trade unions, and other labor organizations, in order to strategically aligning current demands with the attraction and retention of talented immigrants.

## **Final considerations**

Integration of immigrants is a complex process that requires close communication between the players involved, for example, 1) immigrants themselves; 2) national and regional governments and institutions; and 3) local community.

When poorly planned the migration phenomenon becomes particularly problematic, with disastrous consequences not only for immigrants – in the form of social discrimination, unequal access to the job market, unequal salaries, degrading working conditions, and poor professional development – but also for the receiving country – in the form of social and urban problems.

Therefore, the positive effect of immigration on economic and social development is intrinsically related to the introducing of good public policy. It is essential considerate the migration phenomenon from broader perspectives, with laws and policies designed in such a manner to promote the social integration and welfare of immigrants (IOM, 2013; IOM, 2010).

Despite the many challenges and obstacles that remain, Brazil has made considerable progress in that direction. In view of the predicted decrease in the Brazilian population in absolute numbers as from 2030 and the need to compensate the drop in the birth rate and the aging population by introducing foreign labor, it is vital to expand and improve the current inclusive initiatives.

Properly designed public policies that reflects the specific characteristics of the world migration scenario must ensure that immigrants do not become in vulnerable situation, as well as create the appropriate social structure to better recognize and encourage their talents and contributions. This perspective will ensure that immigration become equally beneficial for immigrants and countries, and that the immigrants become an essential part of equal, inclusive, and sustainable social and economic development (BAN KI-MOON, 2013).

In this way, initiatives based on international human rights and social, labor and productive incorporation of immigrants need to be encouraged on an ongoing basis, in order to meet the needs and expectations of all those involved in the global immigration phenomenon.

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