Brazilians in the U.S. and Massachusetts: A Demographic and Economic Profile

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Brazilians in the U.S. and Massachusetts: A Demographic and Economic Profile

Michelle Borges, Phillip Granberry, Alvaro Lima, and Victor Martins

September 2023
This report is sponsored by the Gastón Institute and the Institute Diáspora Brasil (IDB). It updates the 2007 report “Brazilians in the U.S. and Massachusetts: A Demographic and Economic Profile” by Alvaro Lima and Carlos Eduardo Siqueira.¹

We thank Michelle Borges for her work on this document and Professor Phillip Granberry for his supervision. We would also like to thank the Gastón Institute for its continued support of the Brazilian community and its partnership with the IDB.

Immigrant communities are concerned about the scarcity of relevant data about their life experiences and the consequences of being invisible. This report will allow us to understand the demographic characteristics, spatial distribution, and economic contribution of the Brazilian communities who live in the United States and in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Alvaro Lima

June 2023

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Introduction

Brazilians have a significant and growing presence in the United States. In 2021, when the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimated that 4,215,800 Brazilians were living abroad, it calculated that 42% of them were living in the U.S. Portugal (7%) was distant second, followed by Paraguay (6%), United Kingdom (5%), Japan (5%), Italy (4%), Spain (4%), Germany (3%), Canada (3%), France (2%), and a host of other countries.

It is well documented that the U.S. Census undercounts low-income populations and immigrants, particularly the undocumented. However, within this limitation, the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) produces a sampling that enables an approximate demographic and economic profile of particular segments of the population. This report covers Brazilians both in the U.S. overall and in Massachusetts.
Brazilians in the U.S.

The 2021 U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey counted 750,839 Brazilians. This population includes both foreign and any native-born who claims Brazilian ancestry. Of this population, 74.9% are foreign-born. The foreign-born Brazilian population represents an increase of 265% in the last 20 years and constitutes 1.3% of the country’s entire foreign-born population of 45.3 million. Florida is the most popular destination for Brazilians coming to the United States, accounting for 21.8% of the total Brazilian population in the country. It is followed by Massachusetts (15.0%), California (9.3%), New Jersey (9.1%), and New York (5.6%). Collectively, these five states account for 60.7% of the total Brazilian population in the United States.

**Chart 1: Distribution of Brazilian Population in States of Largest Concentration, U.S., 2021**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other States</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The median age for the Brazilian population in the U.S. is 37.8 years old. There are slightly more females (53.3%) than males (46.7%). Regarding marital status, 58.9% of those over age 15 are married, 27.4% are single, and 12.3% are divorced. The most common age group is 45-64 (24.4%), followed by 35-44 (21.8%), under 18 (21.7%), and 25-34 (18.4%).

Of the foreign-born population 35.9% are naturalized U.S. citizens, leaving 64.1% as non-citizens. The citizenship figure reflects that the vast majority of Brazilian immigrants in the United States arrived recently. Of the Brazilians who are non-citizens, 68.8% entered the country between 2010 and 2020; 17.1% entered between 2000 and 2009; 6.0% entered between 1990 and 1999; and 3.2% entered before 1990.
Of those Brazilians who are naturalized citizens, only 11.6% came in the most recent decade (2010-2020), whereas 34.8% entered between 2000 and 2009; 29.7% between 1990 and 1999, and 23.9% prior to 1990.

Overall, data from the 2021 ACS show that 70.0% of Brazilians in the United States over the age of 16 are employed, while the Brazilian unemployment rate is 4.8%. Only 25.2% of Brazilians (primarily students, retired or disabled people, and full-time parents) are identified as not in the labor force.
The most common occupational category for employed Brazilians in the American Community Survey sampling is that of Management, Professional, and Related occupations (including Health Care), accounting for 40.2% of all jobs held by Brazilians in the United States. It is followed by Service occupations (25.2%), Sales and Office occupations (13.4%), Construction, Extraction, and Maintenance occupations (12.5%), and Production, Transportation and Material Moving occupations (8.8%). Farming, Fishing and Forestry occupations account for less than 1% of employed Brazilians in the sample.

Furthering the analysis and separating employment status by sex, Chart 6 shows that 80.6% of male Brazilians in the United States are employed, compared to 61.3% of females. Each sex has the same proportion of unemployment (4.8%), while Brazilian females are more likely to be outside the labor force than males (33.9% and 14.6% respectively).
Chart 6: Distribution of Brazilian Population by Employment Status and Sex, U.S., 2021

Chart 7 shows the distribution of Brazilian Population Occupation by sex. Males (41.1%) represented slightly more than females in Management, Professional, and Related occupations (39.1%). Females disproportionately work in Service occupations, representing 38.9% - a difference of 26.4 percentage points, compared to males (12.5%). Nevertheless, females are less likely to work in sectors such as Construction, Extraction, and Maintenance comprising 0.7% of the occupations. Production, Transportation and Material Moving occupations are also mostly held by males. In both occupations, males are 23.3% and 12.9%, respectively. In Sales and Office occupations, females represent 16.9%, while males 10.1%.

Chart 7: Distribution of Brazilian Population Occupation by Sex, U.S., 2021

Regarding educational attainment of the United States population over 25 years old, Brazilians in the sample hold more Bachelor’s and graduate degrees than either the native-born population or the foreign-born population overall. Ninety percent of Brazilians completed at least a high school diploma, compared to 74.3% of the total foreign-born population in the United States.
In the most popular states for Brazilians living in the United States, the median Brazilian household income is $99,101.14 in Florida, $102,393.6 in Massachusetts, $153,230.5 in California, $111,424.1 in New Jersey, and $162,306.7 in New York.

Chart 9 shows the distribution of Brazilian population household income. 27.3% of Brazilians living in the United States have a household income of more than $125,000 a year. However, 15.7 of the Brazilian population lives with an annual household income of less than $24,999. The remaining households fall in the other income categories $25,000 to $49,999 (17.6%), $50,000 to $74,999 (17.0%), $75,000 to $99,999 (13.4%), and $100,000 to $124,999 (9.0%).
Additionally, the 2021 American Community Survey estimated that 43.8% of the Brazilian population own their home, while 56.2% rent them.

**Chart 10: Distribution of Brazilian Population by Homeownership, U.S., 2021**
According to the 2021 U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, the state of Massachusetts is home to approximately 112,446 Brazilians, making it the second most popular destination for Brazilian immigrants in the United States.

Overall, Brazilians in Massachusetts are slightly younger than the population of Brazilians throughout the United States. The median age is 34.3 years old. There are slightly fewer females (49.0%) than males (51.0%). Regarding marital status, 62.0% are married, 25.1% are single, and 11.7% are divorced. The most common age groups are 45-64 (25.0%), followed by 35-44 (23.7%), under 18 (19.5%), and 25-34 (19.1%).

Of the foreign-born population, only 30.2% of the Brazilians in Massachusetts are U.S. citizens. This is 5.7 percentage points lower than for the overall Brazilian population in the United States. The remaining 69.8% are not citizens.

**Chart 11: Distribution of Brazilian Population by Sex, Marital Status, and Age, MA, 2021**
The citizenship data above reflect that the vast majority of non-citizen Brazilians in the U.S. arrived recently. Of the Brazilians in Massachusetts who are not U.S. citizens, 63.7% entered the country between 2010 and 2020. 25.1% entered between 2000 and 2009, 8.5% entered between 1990 and 1999, and 1.0% entered before 1990.

In the year following the Covid-19 Pandemic, in 2021, the state of Massachusetts received 1,050 Brazilian immigrants, making up 1.7% of the total non-citizen Brazilian population.

Of those Brazilians who are naturalized citizens (27,323), only 9.7% came in the most recent decade (2010-2020), whereas 31.2% entered between 2000 and 2009, 36.6% entered between 1990 and 1999, and 22.5% prior to 1990.

Overall, 77.6% of Brazilians over the age of 16 in Massachusetts are employed, a proportion that is 7.6 percentage points higher than for the Brazilian population in the United States. The Brazilian unemployment rate in Massachusetts is 4.7%, similar to the figure for all Brazilians in the United States. Just 17.7% are identified as not in the labor force – 7.5 percentage points lower than for the Brazilian population in the United States.
Chart 13: Distribution of Brazilian Population by Employment Status, U.S. and MA, 2021

Chart 14 shows the occupational distribution by sex of the Brazilian population in Massachusetts. The most common occupational category for employed Brazilians is Services, accounting for 35.6% of all jobs held by Brazilians in the state. It is followed by Construction, Extraction, and Maintenance (25.2%), Management, Professional, and Related (including Health Care) (20.5%), Production, Transportation and Material Moving (9.9%), and Sales and Office (8.8%). Farming, Fishing and Forestry account for less than 1% (0.2%) of employed Brazilians in Massachusetts in the sample.

Chart 14: Distribution of Brazilian Population by Occupation, MA, 2021
Chart 15 illustrates the distribution of the Brazilian population by employment status. In Massachusetts 86.8% of Brazilian males are employed, while 68.2% of females are employed. Unemployment is more equal between the sexes, as 4.6% of males and 4.9% of females are unemployed. At the state level, Brazilian females are more likely to be outside the labor force than Brazilian males – 26.9% and 8.6% respectively.

Chart 16 shows the distribution of the Brazilian population occupation by sex in Massachusetts. Females are found more commonly in Services occupations – 59.2%, a dramatically higher figure than for the 17.5% for men. Men disproportionately work in Construction, Extraction, and Maintenance, representing 43.7% of their workers.
Chart 17 presents the distribution of the Brazilian population aged 25 or more by educational attainment in the United States and Massachusetts. Overall, the Brazilian population in the United States holds higher education than in Massachusetts: 55.5% of Brazilians in Massachusetts have a high school degree or less as their highest degree, while 64.9% of the overall Brazilian population in the United States has attended at least some college.

**Chart 17: Distribution of Brazilian Population Aged 25+ by Educational Attainment, U.S. and MA, 2021**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>MA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree Some college</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chart 18 shows a comparison between Brazilians in the United States and Brazilians in Massachusetts based on population by household income. Although the percentages are similar in general, the category of household income between $50,000 to $74,999 and more than $125,000 show the largest differences, with more Brazilians in Massachusetts falling into the first one than the latter. It indicates that, comparatively, it is less likely for a Brazilian household in Massachusetts than in the U.S. overall to have an income of more than $125,000.

Chart 18: Distribution of Brazilian Population by Household Income, U.S. and MA, 2021

With respect to Brazilian population homeownership in the U.S. and Massachusetts, Chart 19 shows that Brazilians in Massachusetts are more likely to rent than to own their homes, compared to Brazilians in the U.S.
The Brazilian population over the last 20 years has dispersed across eastern Massachusetts with the largest concentrations around Framingham and Boston. The cities and towns near Framingham also include Marlborough, Milford, and Worcester. In the area around Boston, the largest cities and towns in addition to Boston are Somerville, Everett, Malden, and Revere. Lowell, Barnstable, and Fall River are other notable cities and towns with a larger foreign-born Brazilian population. Even though Brazilians live in different regions of Massachusetts, our analysis did not show major differences in the demographic and individual characteristics of the population.
Foreign-Born Brazilians

Brazil is second only to the United States in total population in the Americas, and their migration has increased over the last 20 years. In the United States and Massachusetts, the growing Brazilian population has made significant demographic and economic contributions. They have high rates of labor force participation. However, Brazilian educational attainment in Massachusetts is lower than Brazilians in the rest of the United States, and thus their economic contributions differ. Brazilian males provide more labor for the construction industry, and Brazilian females provide more labor for the service sector. As a result, their household income is lower in Massachusetts than in the rest of the country but not significantly lower than other households in the state.

In Massachusetts, the Brazilian impact is substantial. In 2021, they earned over $3.8 billion in wage income. Further, Brazilians’ consumer demand supported an additional 26,800 jobs and contributed $3.3 billion to Massachusetts’ gross state product. Brazilians also contributed $191.6 million in state income taxes and $66.6 million in state sales taxes in 2021.2

2 Regional Economic Models, Inc. (REMI), FPI Massachusetts Regions
About the Gastón Institute

Established in 1989, the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy was created by the Massachusetts Legislature in response to a need for improved understanding about the Latino experience in the commonwealth. Now in its 34th year, the Gastón Institute continues its mission of informing the public and policymakers about issues vital to the state’s growing Latino community and providing information and analysis necessary for effective Latino participation in public policy development. To learn more about the Gastón Institute, visit www.umb.edu/gastoninstitute. Follow us on Twitter: @GastonInstitute

One of the goals of the Gastón Institute is to be responsive to the needs of the Latino and policy communities through the research we undertake. Please feel free to contact us with suggestions or requests for specific information.

About the Authors

Michelle Borges is an economist from Brazil. She is currently pursuing a master’s degree in Applied Economics at the University of Massachusetts Boston and working as a research assistant at the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy. Her research interests span the areas of Labor Economics, Development Economics, Immigration, and Feminist Economics.

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Alvaro Lima is the Director of Research for the Boston Planning & Development Agency. After working in the south of Brazil on economic development projects with low-income communities, he worked in Mozambique as a development economist for the Frelimo Government, the first socialist government in Africa. Alvaro was the Senior Vice President and Director of Research of the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City (ICIC) in the United States. Before ICIC, he was the Director of Economic Development at Urban Edge, a Boston-based community development corporation. He is the founder of the Instituto Diaspora Brasil (IDB). Alvaro holds a Master’s in Political Economy from the New School for Social Research.

Victor Luis Martins, holds an M.A. in Applied Economics from the University of Massachusetts Boston. He specializes in Financial Economics and Macroeconomics, applying both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to analyze economic and social policy issues. Currently, his research focuses on the effects of financialization and interest burden within the United States, as well as other related economic and demographic factors in Latinx communities in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Victor’s research involves programming skills for data analysis and statistical modeling, complementing his empirical proficiency in interpreting and analyzing data.