

Brazilians in London: a report for the *Strangers into Citizens* Campaign

September 2007

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Introduction

On July 2005, Jean Charles de Menezes, a young Brazilian man who had lived in the UK for three years, met a violent death at the hands of police officers at an Underground station in south London when he was mistaken for a suicide bomber. This tragic event made headlines around the world, and brought the Brazilian community in London to the forefront of news for a while. There was some speculation in the press at the time that Jean Charles had acted suspiciously when confronted with the police because he was an undocumented migrant¹. Following his death, a police investigation discovered that his student visa had expired and that he was in the country illegally. He would then have been worried about being deported by the authorities which, some argued, might explain why he had run from the police and prompted his summary execution. Whilst the police later admitted that Jean Charles had never tried to escape, this version of the events was used by some to suggest that his death was somehow justified by the fact that he had been in the country in breach of his visa.

This case exposed societal unease about the presence and activity of irregular immigrants in the UK. Immigration has been a very ‘hot’ issue in recent years, particularly in light of increased flows of immigrants and fears about competition for jobs.

Changing people’s perceptions of immigrants - and particularly irregular migrants - is among the key objectives of London Citizens’ campaign *Strangers into Citizens*. London Citizens is an alliance of community groups, faith-based organisations, trade unions, and educational establishments committed to promoting social justice. The *Strangers into Citizens* campaign calls for an amnesty for the estimated half a million international migrants who, for diverse reasons, are undocumented and, as a result, lack citizens’ rights. Their regularisation would allow them to become full citizens and they would be able to play a more active role in society. Also, there would be an increase in government revenue from collection of unpaid taxes, unscrupulous employers would be exposed, and the national minimum wage would be more easily enforced (for more details, see www.londoncitizens.org.uk).

The study reported here emerged in the context of the *Strangers into Citizens* campaign. It focuses on Brazilians, who now comprise one of the new groups of immigrants who have arrived in the UK in the last decade or so. Little is known about Brazilian immigrants in the UK (although see Cwerner 2001; Jordan and Duvell 2002; Datta et al 2007a,b), yet they are now thought to make up a sizeable community. Hence, the research was prompted by the need to find out more about their situation. This report summarises data that was gathered to produce a socio-economic profile of Brazilians in London while also contributing to the *Strangers into Citizens* Campaign.

The Size of the Brazilian Community in London

Many analysts of Brazilians affairs in the UK will agree that the available official data about Brazilians in the UK are woefully inaccurate. Figures from the last British Census of 2001 enumerated just over 8,000 Brazilians in London, and unofficial estimates at that time indicated that they might number anything from 15,000 to

¹ We use the terms ‘undocumented’ and ‘irregular’ migrants broadly to refer to people who lack authorisation to be in the UK.

50,000 people (Cwerner 2001). Today, UK-based Brazilian organisations and analysts estimate the community size to be around 200,000 in the whole of the UK. The large majority of these, thought to number between 130,000 and 160,000, are based in London. It is estimated that there are currently around 30,000 Brazilians in the Borough of Brent alone. Stockwell, in South London, is thought to have another sizeable proportion of Brazilians, whilst the district of Bayswater in Central London has been long referred to as 'Brazilwater', indicating their heavy presence in the area. Thus, any official data about the Brazilian community in the UK is always likely to represent a gross undercount.

This discrepancy between the official figures and unofficial estimates was observed in previous studies of Brazilians in the US (Margolis 1998), and also in the UK (Cwerner 2001), and was explained in various ways. Firstly, the British immigration authorities have no effective means of tracking people down once they have entered the country, nor do they record their exit, except in cases of deportation. Secondly, the stay of most Brazilians will be constrained by the time limits indicated on their visa, although many will overstay. Without tracking departures, it is impossible to know how many Brazilians will have overstayed. Thirdly, and related to the previous point, many Brazilians will see their stay as temporary only or will be unwilling to make themselves known to the authorities, being thus unlikely to complete Census returns.

That Brazilian community in London is much larger than official estimates indicate can be surmised from the number of formal and informal businesses and services that have appeared over the last decade or so. These are provided largely by Brazilians and cater mostly for Brazilians, and the range is impressive. It includes personal care, counselling, solicitors and lawyers providing services in Portuguese, baby sitting, private cleaning, removals and transportation, travel agency, private functions, money transfer, accommodation, as well as shops selling Brazilian clothing and food and drink, and cafes and restaurants. Most are advertised in the half a dozen free publications produced in Portuguese that circulate widely amongst Brazilians and other Portuguese-speaking communities in London.

Churches of various denominations also use these publications to announce their activities, which are often organised and run by Brazilians and conducted in Portuguese. This is the case, for instance, of the Brazilian Chaplaincy in East London, set up by the Catholic Church and run by Brazilian priests, who conduct mass in Portuguese to hundreds of Brazilians at weekends. Last year saw the creation, for the first time, of the Brazilian Association in the UK (ABRAS), run by volunteers and which aims to provide a range of services to its membership, from legal and immigration advice, through to financial guidance and personal counselling. This association has already recruited hundreds of people. Thus, the indications are that the Brazilian community in London is reasonably large. In this report we describe the methodology used for gathering data about this immigrant community in London, before moving on to provide a profile of Brazilians in London.

A Survey of Brazilians in London

In 2006, a team of activists involved in the *Strangers into Citizens* campaign and based at the Brazilian Chaplaincy in East London designed a short questionnaire containing a mix of closed and open-ended questions in Portuguese. The questionnaire was distributed at churches (Catholic and Pentecostal) in East and Central London for self-completion by Brazilians attending religious services during

the months of September and October 2006. The survey produced a total of 423 questionnaires.

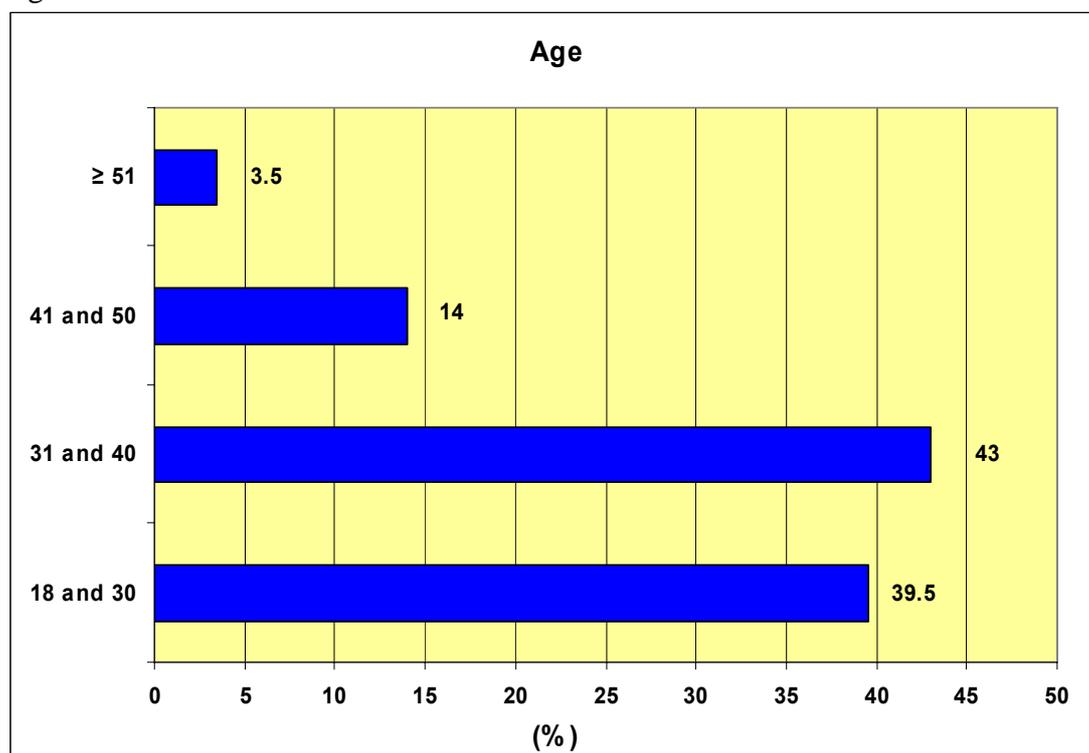
As far as is known, this constitutes the first survey of this type and scale ever undertaken of Brazilians in the UK. Although it cannot be said to be representative of the whole Brazilian community, we are confident that it reflects the situation of many Brazilians living in London.

A Demographic Profile of Brazilians in London

One of key findings of recent research on immigration is the growing participation of women in international flows. In the particular case of Brazilian immigrants, for instance, Margolis (1998) found in her study in New York that men made up only a slightly higher proportion of the sample than women. The survey of Brazilians in London replicates these findings. Men comprised just over one half of the sample (51.5 percent), whilst women made up just under one half (48.5 percent).

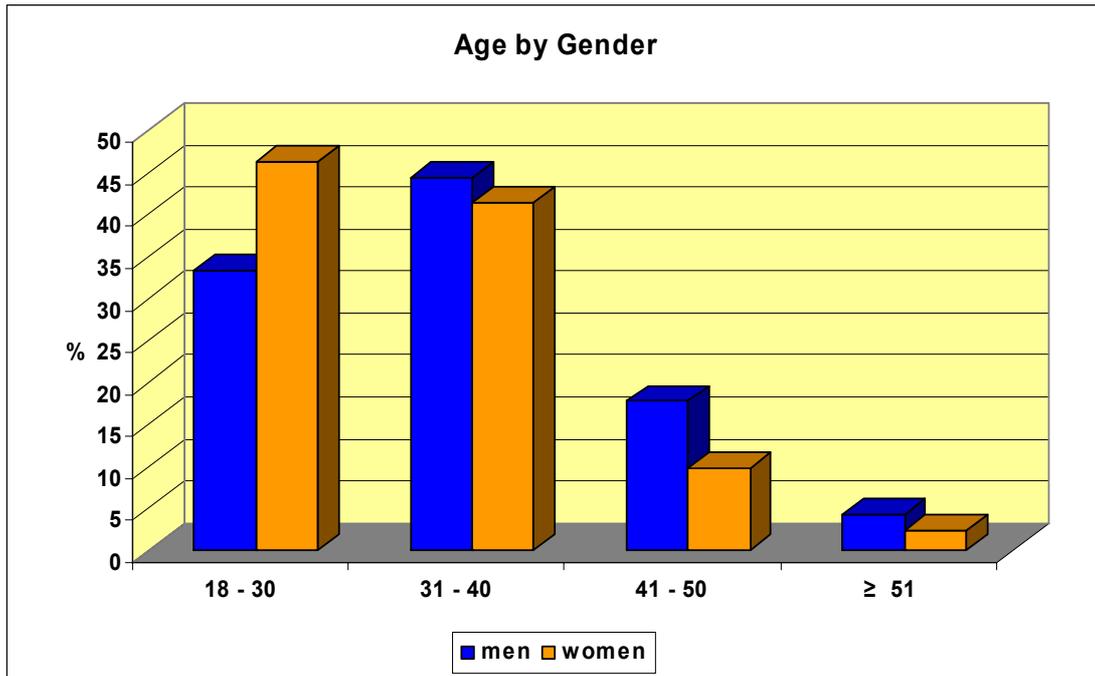
In terms of age, other studies have found that Brazilian immigrants tend to be young, (Cwerner 2001; Margolis 1998), a finding that is also replicated by the results of this survey. As can be seen in Figure 1, over four-fifths of respondents were aged between 18 and 40. The average age was 33.5.

Figure 1



The survey also found some key differences in the age distribution of men and women. As can be seen in Figure 2, more women were aged 18-30 (a 13 percent difference), whilst more men were aged 41-50 (a difference of eight percent). On average, men were slightly older (34.4 years) than women (32.7 years).

Figure 2



Previous studies have found that Brazilian immigrants tend to share accommodation, a strategy that Margolis (1998) found to be dictated by custom (not to be alone) as much as by need (to share rent costs). In New York, for instance, Margolis found that as many as 40 percent of the Brazilians she surveyed lived in ‘no-family’ households, sharing accommodation with friends or acquaintances, often fellow compatriots. This suggests that such Brazilians were for the most part single, as Cwerner (2001) has also claimed of Brazilians in London. Virtually all the Brazilians in the London survey shared accommodation. But whilst around two-fifths (41 percent) lived in no-family households, about as many (42 percent) lived with their partners or spouses. An equal proportion of sample shared either a house or a flat (31 percent in each case), indicating that they had their own room. Over one-third (36 percent) declared that they were sharing a room, with an average of three people per room. The majority of those surveyed (82 percent) had no children in the UK.

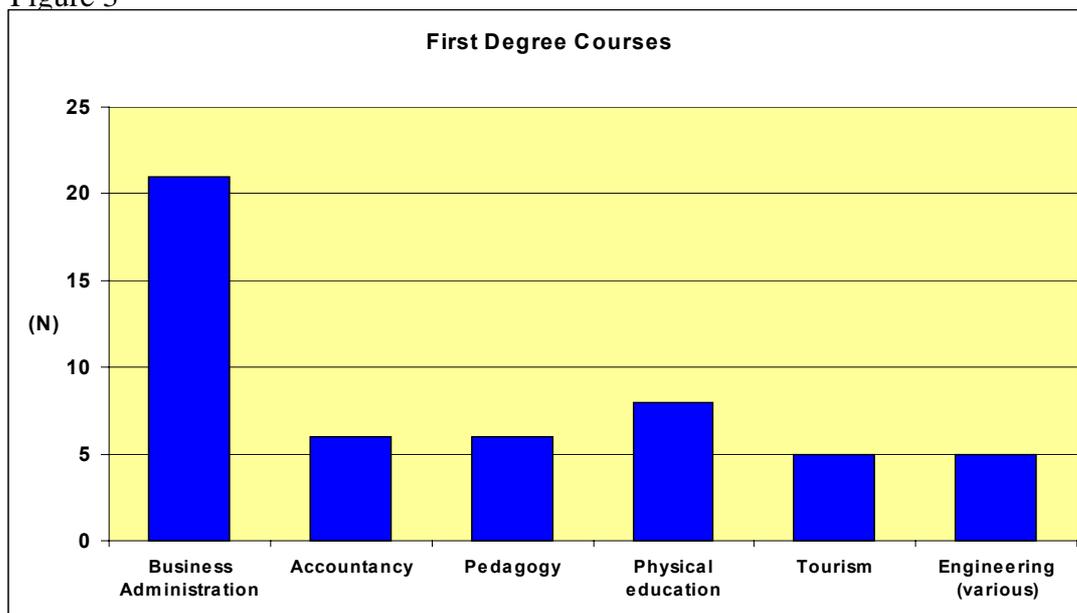
The Home Education of Brazilians in London

A further important finding of previous research on Brazilians living was that these immigrants were predominantly from a middle or lower-middle class background, with the level of education attained in the home country often used as an indicator of class membership (Margolis 1998; Cwerner 2001; Jordan and Duvell 2002). For instance, a majority of Brazilians surveyed in New York had attended secondary school, whilst about one third held university degrees (Margolis 1998).

Similarly, the study of Brazilians in London found that respondents were well educated. Over one half (54 percent) of respondents had attended secondary school, and over one third (36 percent) had continued their studies up to first degree level, although as many as one half of these had failed to complete their degrees. In terms of the gender split, more men (56 percent) had attended secondary school than women (51 percent), and slightly more women (37 percent) had gone on to study for a first degree than men (35 percent). The range of first degree courses pursued was quite wide, with some 30 different degree subjects mentioned by respondents, including

Dentistry, Law, Languages, Philosophy, Biology, Journalism and Hotel Administration. Figure 3 illustrates those most commonly mentioned.

Figure 3

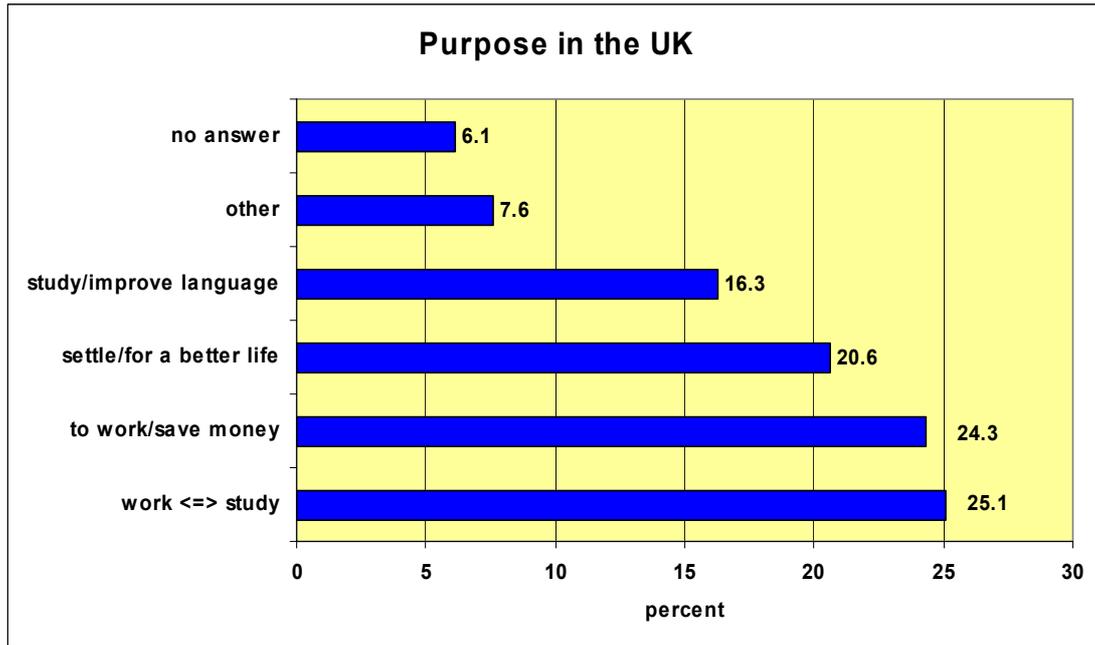


Why Brazilians Come to the UK

As with many countries from the Global South, one of the key reasons for emigration from Brazil is the search for better economic prospects. As Margolis (1998) reported, economic and professional considerations had motivated some two-thirds of those surveyed to leave Brazil and seek their fortunes in the US. Leading ‘push factors’ were the adverse effects of a national economy beset by recurrent inflation and instability in the 1980s and mid-1990’s, along with the lack of opportunities for those with professional qualifications or university training. Key amongst the ‘pull factors’ was the fact that jobs in the US paid better than jobs in Brazil, which allowed for higher savings. Thus, an uncertain economic future along with the prospect of being able to earn and save abroad had combined to produce what Margolis (1998:12) termed a ‘What have I got to lose?’ alternative for many Brazilians. In contrast, Cwerner (2001) found that a significant number of those in London also reported non-economic reasons for coming, such as ‘a desire to see the world’. In turn, Jordan and Duvell (2002) found that Brazilians had been motivated to come to London by economic gain as well as access to public infrastructure such as benefits and services, and also the desire to acquire knowledge or gain experience.

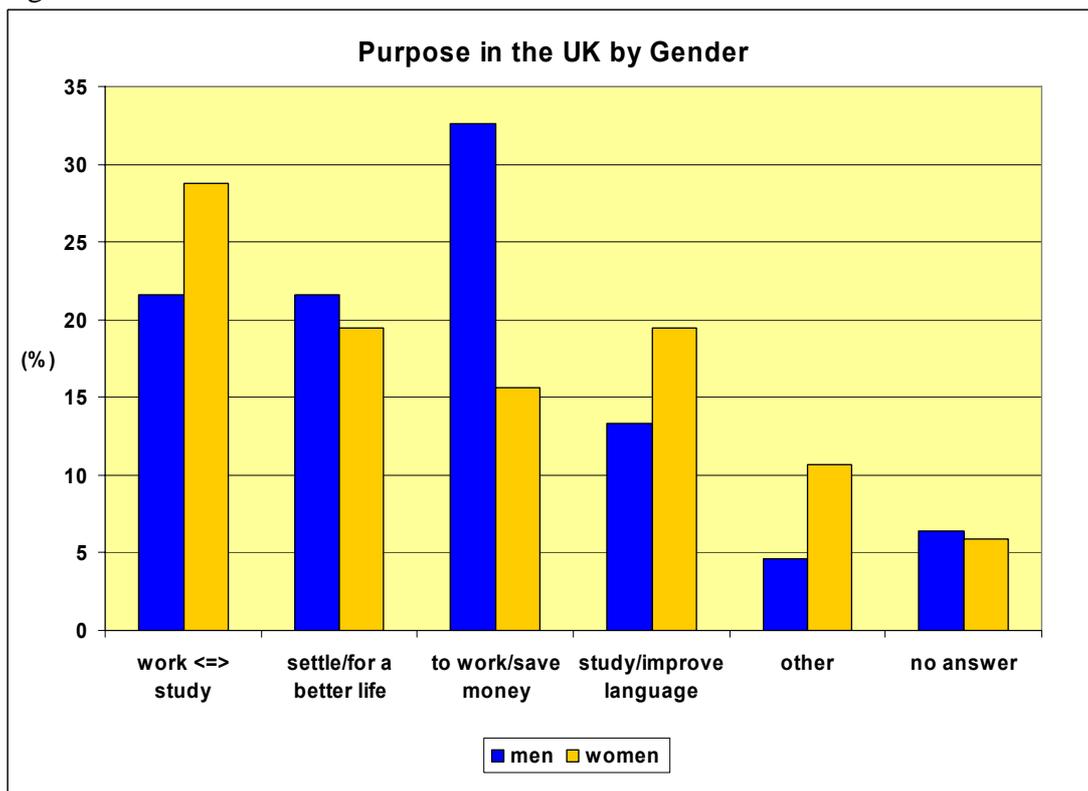
The Brazilians who took part in the London survey also gave various reasons for coming to the UK, such as: ‘for a better future back home’; ‘for a better life for my children’; ‘to develop professionally’; ‘to build my life here’; ‘to buy a house back in Brazil’; ‘to get my children educated’; ‘to obtain here what I couldn’t in Brazil’; ‘to pay off debt in Brazil’; ‘to practice my profession’; ‘to save money and go back to Brazil’; ‘to lead a dignified life’; and ‘to try for a new life’. The full set of reasons was grouped into major categories, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4



Commonly, the rationale guiding the immigration enterprise is the prospect of earning to save money that will be spent or invested in Brazil through remittances aimed at supporting family, clearing debts, buying land or property, and setting up and running a small business (Margolis 1998). Nearly one quarter of respondents reported coming to the UK solely to work and, implicitly, to save money, an important proportion of which is likely to be remitted back to Brazil (Datta *et al* 2007b). There were, however, important differences between men and women in relation to their reasons for coming to the UK, as can be seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5



As Figure 5 shows, women were more likely to come to the UK to work and study, or simply to study than men, who were more likely to come in order to work to earn and save. However, men were as likely as women to have moved here in order to settle or pursue a better life.

Brazilian Immigrants: entering and staying in the UK

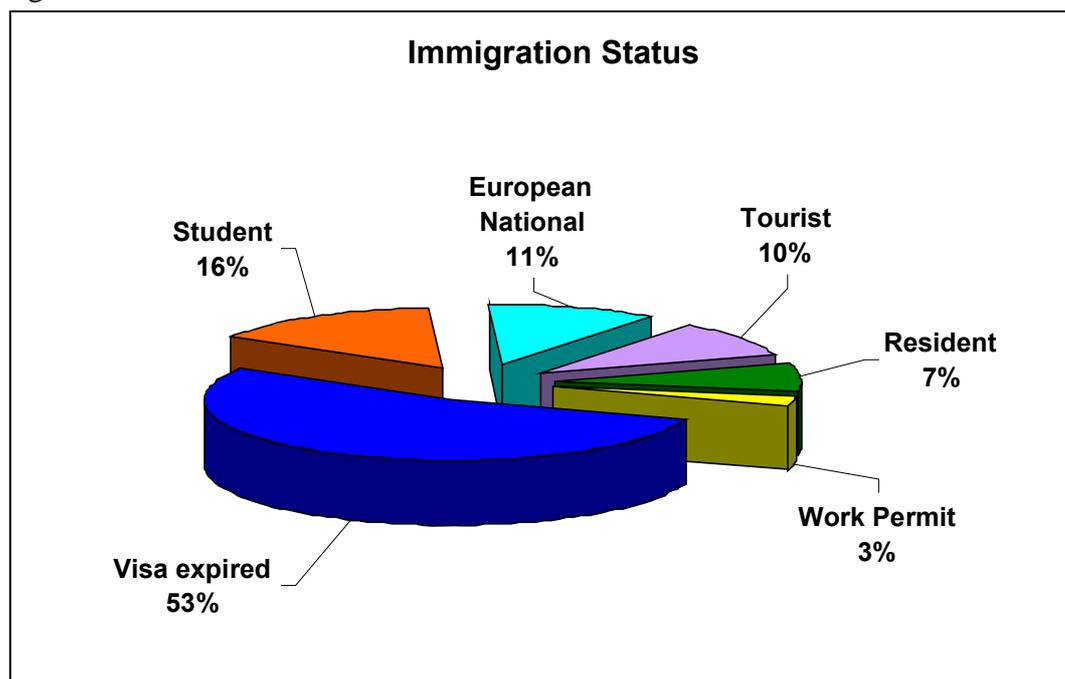
Although immigration legislation in the UK offers a number of entry routes into the country, the range of possible legal immigration statuses available to Brazilians is somewhat limited. As Jordan and Duvell (2002) showed, most Brazilians will enter the UK on a 'visitor' (tourist) visa, which is given at the port of entry for any period of time up to six months, and prohibits employment. Those who intend to stay longer and, as Cwerner (2001) argued, do not see themselves simply as tourists, will then face two options. One is to let their visa expire, which makes them 'overstayers' and replicates a strategy that Margolis (1998) found in use by one half of the Brazilians she surveyed in New York. The second strategy is to apply for a student visa for a limited period of time so as to avoid being in the country illegally.

The student visa requires enrolment on a recognised course, commonly an English language course, and attendance for a minimum of 15 hours per week. Student visa holders are then allowed to take up paid work, for a maximum of 20 hours per week during term-time, and full-time during holidays. The visa is normally given to cover the period of enrolment and extension is possible. As Jordan and Duvell (2002) demonstrated, this strategy was widely used by Brazilians, who more than any other groups in their study, held student visas which, as the participants admitted, were used purely as a strategy for staying on in the UK (Jordan and Duvell 2002). Often, though, obtaining or renewing a student visa entails additional expenses such as school and visa fees as well as constraints on time, both of which impinge on the ability to earn and save. Consequently, Brazilians often renew their student visa once or twice, and then allow it to lapse, thus becoming undocumented.

Another less common legal status available to Brazilians is that of being a European National, that is, a person who holds an European passport by virtue of ancestry (i.e. they are descendent of nationals from European countries, particularly Portugal, Spain and Italy). These individuals face no legal constraints on their right to live and/or work in the UK or in other countries of the European Union.

The narrow range of legal immigration statuses accessible to Brazilians is reflected in the survey findings, as shown in Figure 6. The chart shows that less than one-fifth held student visas, whereas just over one-tenth held European passports. A further ten percent were in the country on a tourist visa. Around seven percent also reported that they had obtained residency in the UK, which is a further immigration status possible for Brazilians who meet certain conditions (such as being in the country for a number of years, or being married to a European national). A small minority declared that they held a 'work permit', but such permits are normally only available to highly-skilled workers, being a route into citizenship in the UK. Most importantly, and echoing the findings by Margolis (1998), the London survey revealed that over one half of all Brazilians in London were in fact undocumented.

Figure 6



As these findings indicate, Brazilians tend to remain in the UK beyond the time limit on their visas. Yet, as other studies have found, Brazilian immigrants generally do not think of themselves as settlers in host societies. Rather, they think of their stay as temporary, one that will take only as long as is necessary to save money and go back home. In practice the planned duration of their stay will vary over time. Brazilians who planned to stay abroad for a few months may end up staying for many years, even when they are not settling permanently (Margolis 1998; Cwerner 2001).

The London survey shows that most Brazilians are relatively recent arrivals, thus comprising one of the groups of new immigrants into the UK. It also shows that a large majority (69 percent) had spent between one and five years in the UK, a finding that indicates that Brazilians tend to remain the UK for the mid-term. Those surveyed had spent an average of 2.8 years in the country, with no major difference between men (2.7 years) and women (2.9 years). As in previous studies, this suggests that these individuals may see their stay in the UK as temporary, as a period to pursue their objectives of earning and saving, learning the language and gaining work experience, with a view to returning to Brazil eventually.

Nonetheless, as will be seen later, many Brazilians would like remain for longer, but as the possibilities for staying on legally are restricted, and as many become undocumented, this becomes progressively problematic. As Cwerner (2001) noted, even though immigration control cannot reach everyone, many undocumented Brazilians live in fear of deportation.

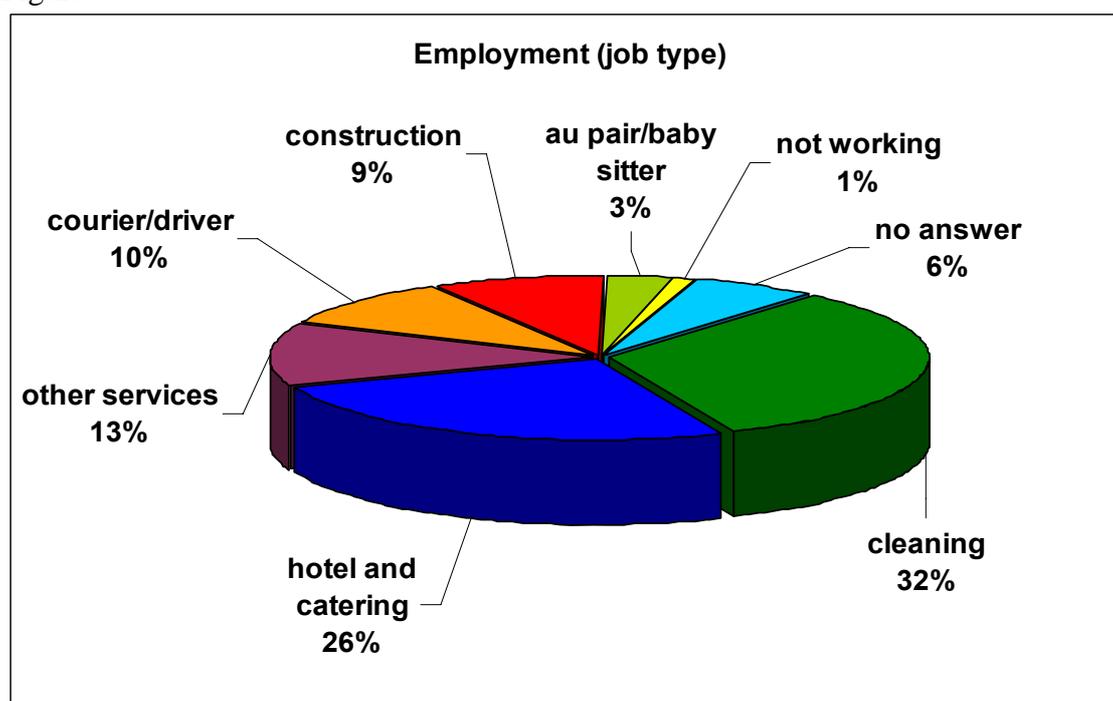
Brazilians at Work in London

As with many other groups of international migrants, Brazilians will often take up jobs in the host societies that bear little resemblance to the jobs they used to do in their home country. As already seen, many are relatively well educated. Yet, they will commonly take jobs that are for the most part unskilled and low-paid (Margolis 1998; Cwerner 2001; Jordan and Duvell 2002; Datta *et al* 2007a,b). The reasons for this

include restrictions imposed by their immigration status and lack or limited knowledge of the host country language. Hence, as Margolis (1998) found out in the US, Brazilians would take up whatever jobs were available to newcomers with little knowledge of English and no authorisation to work, especially those in restaurants and private domestic services.

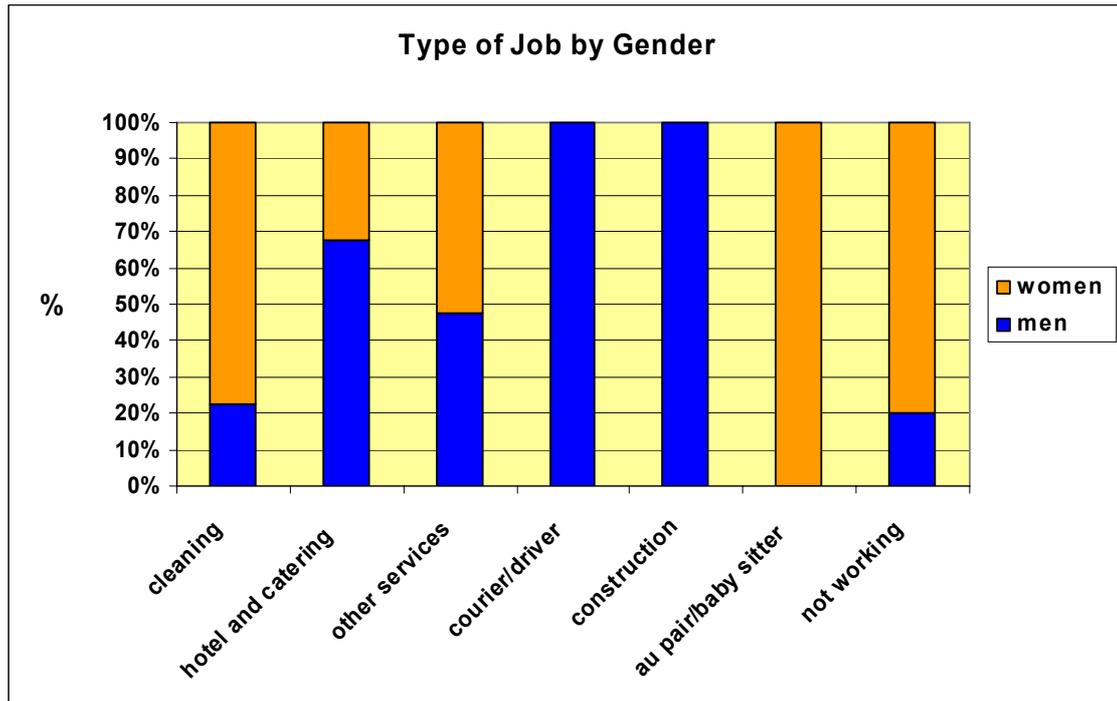
Similarly, the results of the London survey shows that Brazilians had taken up unskilled jobs, although two types of jobs predominated, as illustrated in Figure 7. The chart shows that about one third of those sampled had taken up cleaning jobs (in offices and in private homes). This was followed by about one quarter who had taken jobs in the hotel and catering sector. Other jobs mentioned were driving/couriering (10 percent) and work in construction (9 percent). The chart shows that some 13 percent of those surveyed mentioned a variety of jobs that were classed as 'other'. These included being a beautician, salespeople, office workers, seamstresses, a swimming teacher, a factory worker, and a business owner. But whilst Margolis (1998) found that about a quarter of Brazilians in New York held two jobs, the absolute majority of Brazilians in the London sample (98 percent) had only one job.

Figure 7



Although a common feature of such jobs is the limited skill required, take up can be highly differentiated by gender. In New York, for instance, Margolis (1998) found a marked sexual division of labour among Brazilians. Four out of five women were working in private domestic services (live-in housekeepers, day cleaners, nannies and baby-sitters), whereas the highest proportion of men worked in restaurants (30 percent), followed by construction. The London survey broadly replicates these findings, as shown in Figure 8. The graph shows that men were working in construction, courier and driver jobs, whilst women worked as au pairs or baby sitters. It can also be seen that more men than women worked in hotels and catering, whilst women dominated in cleaning but were also more likely to be out of a job than men.

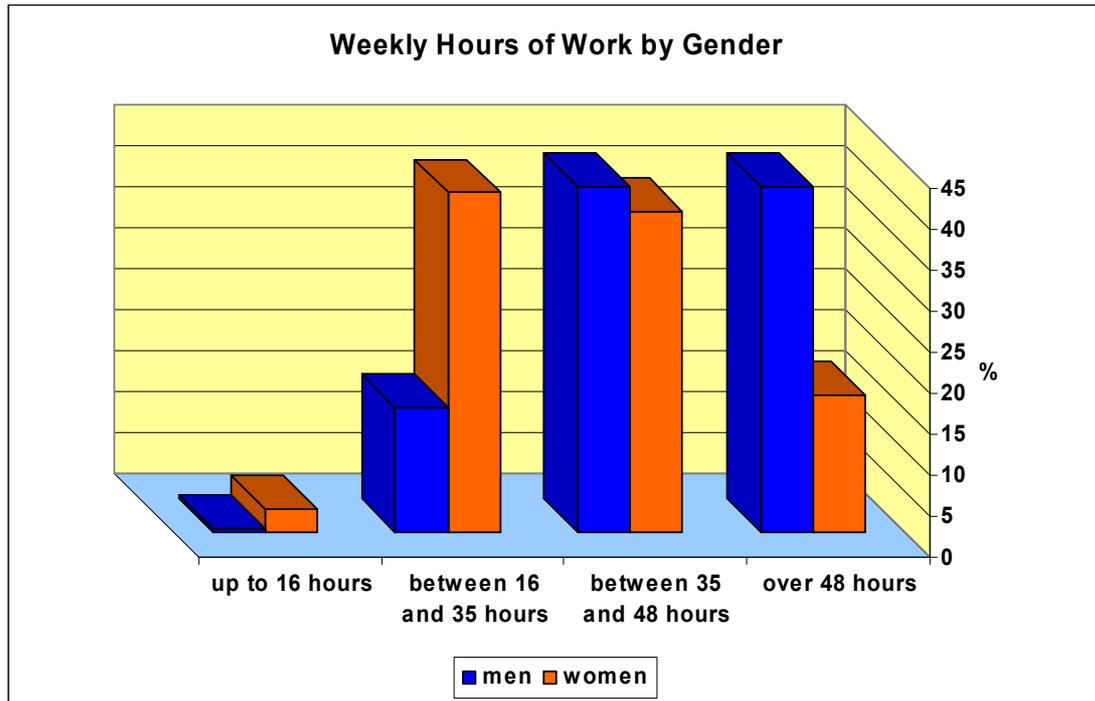
Figure 8



Earning levels in turn will vary according to the type of job and the length of the working week, although the hourly pay rate should never drop below the National Minimum Wage. In the survey of Brazilians in London, over three-fifths (63 percent) were working full-time (35 hours or over). Of these, some 42 percent worked over 48 hours per week. Nearly one quarter (24 percent) also worked between 16 and 35 hours per week. On average, Brazilians worked 41.9 hours per week.

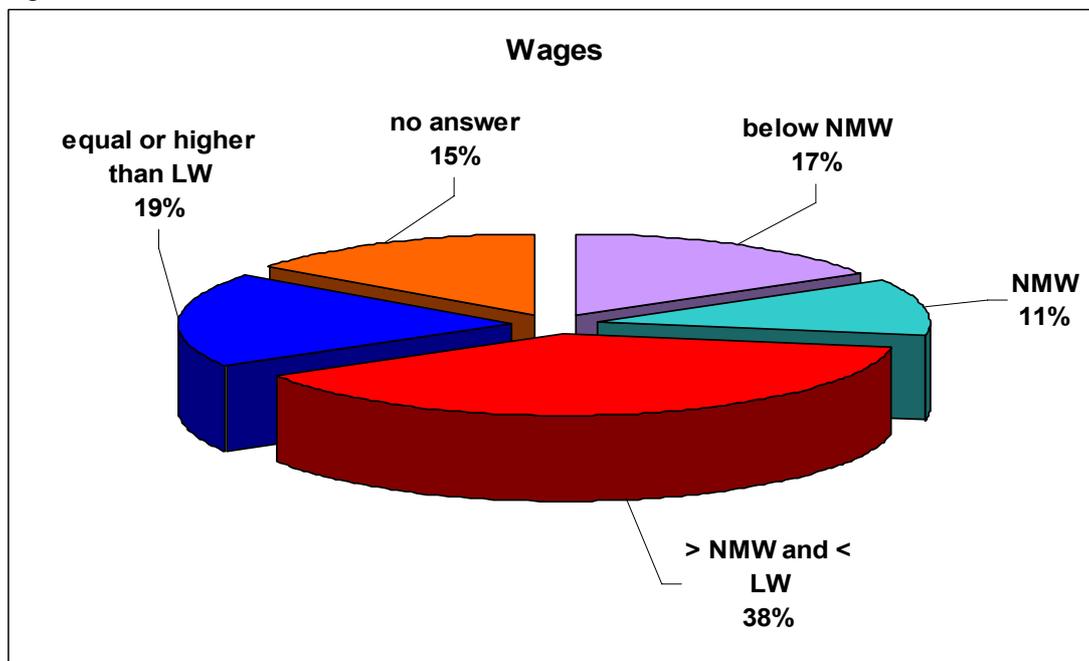
There were also some important differences between men and women as to the number of hours they worked at their jobs in a week, as shown in Figure 9. The graph shows that slightly more men worked between 35 and 48 hours per week than women. However, men worked a much longer week (over 48 hours) than women (42 percent of men against 17 percent of women). Conversely, a much higher proportion of women worked between 16 and 35 hours per week than men (41 percent of women against 15 percent of men). Only a very small proportion of both men and women would work less than 16 hours per week. Overall, there was a statistically significant difference between the average hours worked by Brazilian men and women. Whilst men worked on average 45.9 hours per week, on average women worked 37.2 hours a week.

Figure 9



Regarding levels of earning, the study found that wages amongst Brazilians in London showed some variability. As can be seen in Figure 10, the National Minimum Wage (NMW)² and the Living Wage (LW)³ were used for categorising the hourly rates of pay of the sampled Brazilians.

Figure 10



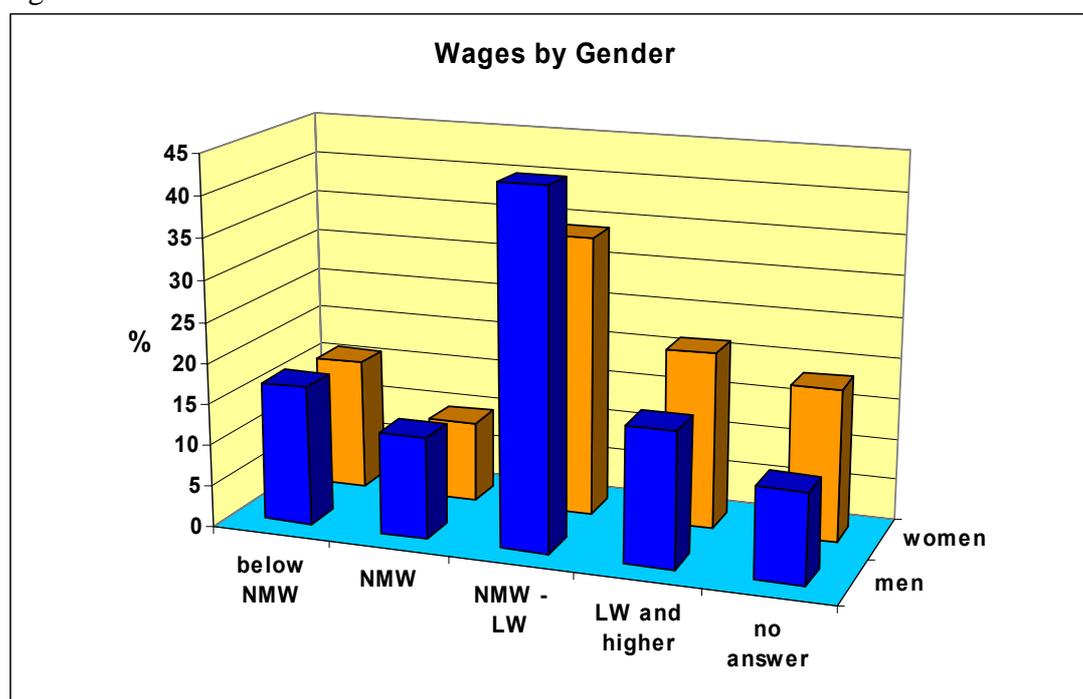
² At the time of the survey, the NMW stood at £5.05 per hour.

³ The Living Wage is that wage necessary to provide a minimally decent standard of living for a family of four (parents and two children) and is worked out yearly by the Office of the Mayor of London. At the time of the survey, it stood at £7.05 per hour. Further information can be found at www.livingwage.org.uk/campaign.html

As Figure 10 shows, over one third of those surveyed were earning between the NMW and the LW, whilst one in five earned above the LW. A further 11 percent earned the NMW. Hence, over one half of the sample earned above the NMW. The average hourly rate for the whole sample (£6.49) also fell between the NMW and the LW. Only a minority of Brazilians (17 percent) earned hourly rates below the statutory NMW, although the large majority of these (72 percent) were undocumented. However, only a little over one fifth of those whose visa had expired earned below the NMW. In other words, being undocumented did not necessarily attract rates of pay below the NMW, a finding that mirrors the results obtained for Brazilians surveyed in the US (Margolis 1998).

In terms of the gender split of hourly rates of pay, the findings of the London study reveal some important variations, as illustrated in Figure 11.

Figure 11



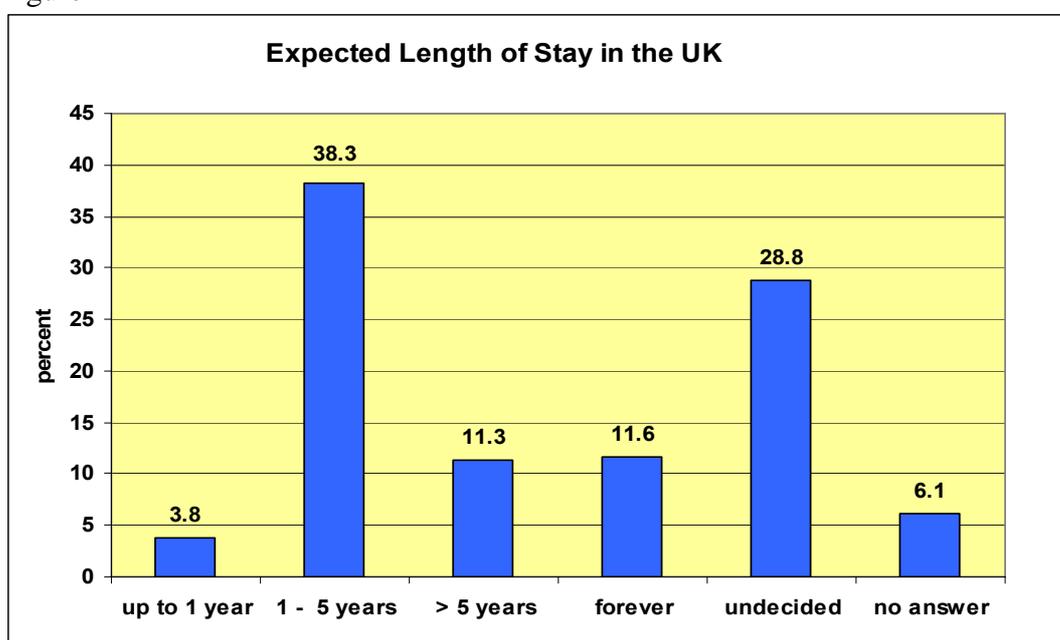
As can be seen in Figure 11, more men were earning rates between the NMW and the LW than women (nearly a ten percent difference). Conversely, more women were earning the LW or higher rates (a five percent difference). Brazilian men earned on average £6.42 per hour, whereas women received on average the hourly rate of £6.58.

Brazilians in London: sojourners or settlers?

As seen earlier, many Brazilians in the London study had come to the UK for economic reasons, to work and save (one half of those sampled). Most had also been in the country between one and five years (over two-thirds of the sample), suggesting that they look to the mid term to fulfil their objectives in the UK, although the pursuit of their ambitions often entails becoming undocumented and living in constant fear of deportation. Indeed, other studies have shown that Brazilians often see their move abroad, at least initially, as transient rather than permanent. But such a view is conditioned, to an extent, by the types of visas that they are able to access in the host countries.

Margolis (1998) observed that many Brazilians found themselves caught up in a dilemma as to whether to remain in the US or return to Brazil. Since the vast majority thought of themselves as sojourners, their subsequent decision to stay represented a clear change of plans, and they often held onto the ‘myth of return’ whilst missing the various deadlines they would set themselves. In fact, about one third of Brazilians in New York reported their intention to stay on, whilst one fifth were undecided about whether to stay or return home. In addition, three quarters of the Brazilians were still living in the US one year and a half after Margolis had first interviewed them. Similarly, Cwerner (2001) argued that an important aspect of Brazilian immigration to London was the constant shifting of temporal horizons. Jordan and Duvell (2002) found that Brazilians who claimed they had come to the UK for personal development or for an experience often stayed longer than planned. The London survey indicates that expectations about the length of stay point towards long-term residence. Figure 12 shows the expectations of Brazilians as to the length of their stay in the UK.

Figure 12

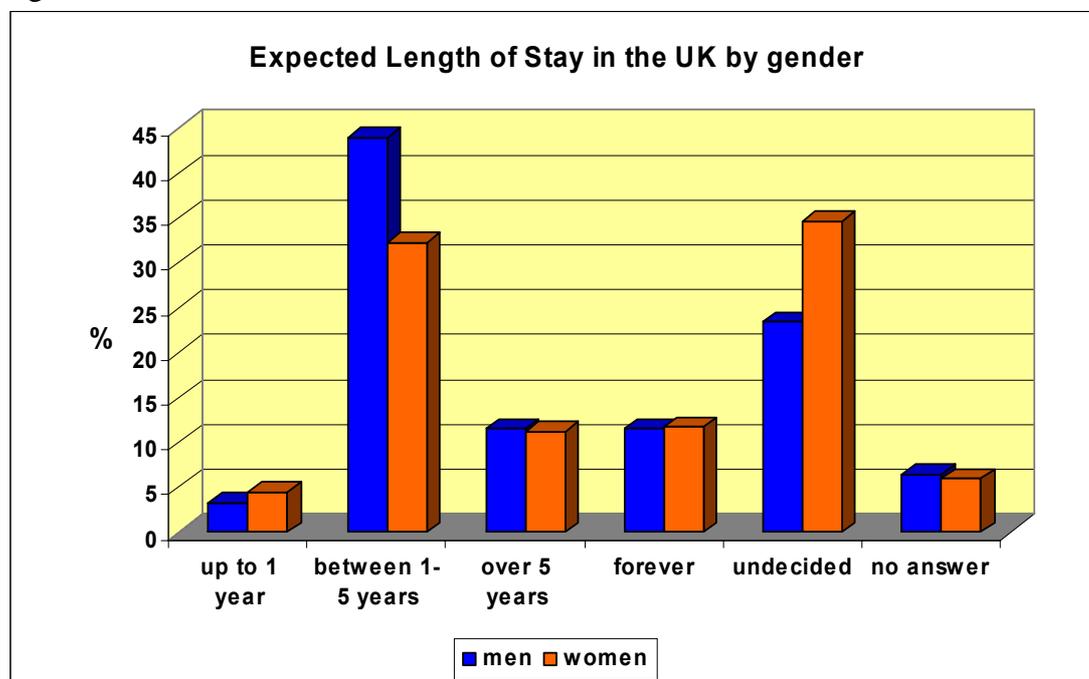


As Figure 12 shows, over one third of Brazilians expected to remain in the UK for the mid-term (from one to five years), thus suggesting that they may see themselves as ‘sojourners’. However, some 11 percent of those sampled were looking to stay for the longer term (over five years), and the average expected stay was 4.5 years. In addition, 11 percent of the sample intended to live permanently in the UK, alongside an important minority (29 percent) who had not ascertained how long they expected to remain. Many respondents in this latter category used expressions such as ‘for as long as I can’, ‘for as long as God allows’, ‘for as long as possible’ to indicate their expectation about the length of their stay in the UK, indicating an aspiration to stay.

In terms of differences between men and women as to expectations about the length of their stay abroad, Margolis (1998) reported that roughly half of Brazilian men and women in New York intended to return to Brazil. She also found that more men than women were determined to stay. The survey of Brazilians in London produced slightly different results, as Figure 13 shows. It can be seen, for instance, that men and women were equally likely to plan to stay on for the long term or to settle permanently. However, many more men intended to stay for the mid-term than

women (a difference of twelve percentage points), whilst more women than men were undecided as to how long they would remain in the UK (a nine percentage point difference). On average, men expected to remain in the UK for 4.6 years, whilst women expected to stay for 4.3 years.

Figure 13



Brazilian Support for London Citizens' Strangers into Citizens Campaign

As reported earlier, about half of the Brazilians the London survey were undocumented. Yet, virtually all Brazilians who participated in the study agreed with the idea of an amnesty for irregular migrants in the UK and supported the call by the *Strangers into Citizens* Campaign for regularisation. The amnesty call thus resonates beyond those who might benefit directly from regularisation.

The survey has shown that most Brazilian men and women who made the move to London were well-educated and from a middle-class background. Their main motivation was the search for better economic opportunities than those available in Brazil. On arriving in London, most had taken up unskilled and low-paid jobs which were very different from the ones they had done at home, but which nevertheless afforded them better wages than they would earn in Brazil, thus allowing them to save for the future. Many initially envisaged their stay as temporary, looking to stay only long enough to earn and save money that would be spent back home. Others would like to stay long-term or settle permanently. In either case, the visas they were able to access on entering the UK placed constraints on their stay, although they would breach these in pursuit of their aspirations, thus becoming undocumented.

After Margolis (1998), we argue that the Brazilians in the London study should be seen to represent the wider community of undocumented immigrants in the UK, thus serving as surrogates for immigrant groups with compelling economic motives for seeking their fortunes here. These workers play an important role in the British economy, not only by doing the jobs shunned by the British-born which are essential

to the functioning of society, but also by creating multiplying effects through consumption. These are workers who are vulnerable to exploitation and exclusion by virtue of their undocumented status. It is this vulnerability which the call for regularisation by *Strangers into Citizens* intends to eradicate.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all the Brazilians who took part in the survey.

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