

Chapter 9

Migrants Learning to Become Entrepreneurs: The Case of Migrants in the City of Sao Paulo, Brazil

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates migrant self-selection on values, beliefs, and attitudes who have become entrepreneurs and are engaged in entrepreneurial activities in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. The authors investigate, during the second semester of 2019, migrants who became entrepreneurs in the food industry, in the manufacture and trade of food typical of the migrant countries of origin. Findings provide new insights into the determinants of research and practice of migrant entrepreneurship. They seek to link the discussion of migrant and refugee entrepreneurship with the issue of UNESCO's recognition that cuisine integrates the concept of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity and to relate the entrepreneurial performance of migrants and refugees to issues related to cultural identity with associations to the memory of the homeland. The results provide economic, political, and cultural contexts for theories; identify contexts that promote community development; and help reconcile debates in the areas of migrants and entrepreneurship.

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INTRODUCTION

Until 2017 an estimated 68.5 million individuals were currently forcibly displaced worldwide, including 19.9 million refugees under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] mandate and 5.4 million Palestinians registered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency [UNRWA] (UNHCR, 2018). With no end in sight to conflict and violence in the world's main refugee home countries, such as Syria, Iraq, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Venezuela, integration into host communities is instrumental in allowing newcomers to rebuild their lives in peace and dignity.

Humans migrate for a host of reasons — to escape harm or death, to reunify with family members, or to search for new opportunities — and these factors can evolve en route. In this study, migrants are defined as any foreign-born individuals living in a host country in which they are planning to remain for the long term, while newcomers are a subset of migrants who have specifically left their place of origin due to threat of violence, conflict, persecution or inhumane treatment.

Labor market participation is key to integration, with clear positive outcomes for both integrated individuals and their new host countries. In the case of Brazil, although the migrant numbers per year are not as high as other countries such as in the European zone or USA, the positive impacts on the economy is certainly evident. While Brazil has received by the end of 2018 about 11,000 refugees, by the year of 2017 Germany had received 1,413,127 refugees (Zhang, 2019). In the same year 2017, Spain welcomed 17,536 refugees and France 337,143 (Sorino & Cala, 2019). While President Trump, in his administration, has reduced the admission of refugees to the United States to 30,000 annually, this number is still higher than that of those admitted to Brazil (Khullar & Chokshi, 2019).

Sao Paulo (Brazil), the highest dense city in Brazil has approximately 12,180,000 inhabitants. Brazil has a long history of migration: similarly to the USA, Argentina and Mexico, it received several substantial waves of migrants since the mid-19th century, driven in part by institutional agreements between Brazil and other countries, alongside economic necessity as people search for opportunities to create better lives by immigrating. Between 1894 and 1933, almost 4 million migrants arrived in Brazil, mainly Italians, Portuguese, Spanish, Japanese, Syrians and Turkish. The 1950s was also a period of strong migration with 30-80,000 entrants per annum. From 1960, this flow reduced and stabilized at relatively low levels – less than 10,000 per annum (IBGE, 2000, pp. 225-226). However, the numbers have recently been increasing. According to data from the UNHCR-ACNUR (Brazil, 2019) – United Nations Refugee Agency, Brazil recognized, by the end of 2018, a total of 1,086 refugees from several different nationalities. With this, the country reaches the mark of 11,231 people recognized as refugees by the Brazilian state. A number that has recently increased particularly by the wave of Venezuelan refugees crossing the border with the Brazilian state of Roraima in the north of the country, due to the political-humanitarian crisis that has struck Venezuela – Pacaraima in Brazil and Santa Elena de Uairén in Venezuela. According to the National Committee for Refugees in Brazil [CONARE] (CONARE, 2019), 52% of the total number of refugees received by the country are in the city of Sao Paulo. The aim of this study is restricted to migrants who have become entrepreneurs and are engaged in entrepreneurial activities in the city of Sao Paulo, Brazil. The study was realized during the second semester of 2019.

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