

Ezra Vrieze
Mayo High School
Rochester, MN
Brazil, Human Rights

Brazil's Food Crisis Is A Human Rights Issue

Brazil is a South American country with a Federal Presidential Republic government. Brazil has a population of over 218 million people, with 87.8% of the population located in an urban area (CIA). Just under 33% of the land is agricultural, with average farm sizes varying greatly from region to region, the west having the largest average farm size at around 1000 hectares (GYGA). The tropical climate gives Brazil long growing seasons. The country's major exports are sugar, soy beans, iron, petroleum, and poultry (CIA).

The average family size in Brazil is 2.77 people, and decreasing. The largest sector in terms of employment is retail and trade, and the average wage is 2,853 BRL (\$579.87 USD) per month (Take-Profit). The average family diet consists of beans and rice as a staple, supplemented with available meat or greens (Brown). Most Brazilians get their food from a supermarket, and stew, fry, or boil the ingredients in a kitchen. Class determines many things about how a Brazilian family lives, including food and who has it. Barriers to nutritious food include a lack of reliable information about healthy diets, low supply of nutritious food in supermarkets (Ministry of Health of Brazil), cost and high inflation of food prices, rise in unemployment, decreasing incomes, and weakening of social programs and policies designed to help the poor (Rio on Watch). Nutritious food is therefore primarily in the hands of the wealthy and educated.

Education is another cause -and example- of inequality in Brazil. There is a large gap in the quality of education between those who can afford to go to a private school or a public school (Bearman). Public schools are oftentimes poorly funded with outdated infrastructure, and in the poorest parts of Brazil can be missing essentials like a library. (Malala Fund). A large percentage of students, over %, drop out after the age of 14, though secondary school attendance has been increasing despite a large setback due to COVID-19 closures (Britannica). A large gap also exists in tertiary education, with 33% of people achieving a tertiary education in the capital state which has the highest GDP, compared to only 8% in Maranhão, located in the poor northeast region of Brazil. (Bearman). Because increased education leads to better jobs, the cycle of inequality continues with little upward mobility.

Similarly, while there are public hospitals and a public health care system to which all citizens are eligible, private hospitals tend to have better conditions which leads to the wealthy having access to a higher quality of healthcare by being able to afford a way to skip the long waits and overcrowding of the public health care's offerings. (Columbia). Public services like intensive care units are not evenly distributed around the country leading to longer travel times for those not in the immediate area, who are often in a vulnerable population. The public health care system is also at the mercy of funding cuts (Fox).

Wealth inequality also leads to many vulnerable populations being forced to live in favelas, low-income housing that is poorly supported in terms of infrastructure. Though it is reported 100% of Brazilians have

access to electricity and 99.4% of Brazilians have access to an improved drinking water source (CIA), water access and cleanliness in favelas is likely underreported. There is little to no access to public utilities or infrastructure in favelas, which “lack effective sewage systems, access to potable water and waste management systems. The communities have become so densely built up, that modern roads and utilities are nearly impossible to install.” (Logan).

It is obvious that many facets of life in Brazil and opportunities is a class issue, but due to Brazil’s demographics it is a race issue as well. Brazil, which had crawled out of the UN’s hunger map after progress in addressing the food insecurity of the country, was added back to it during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gustavo Carmo). 58% of Brazilians qualify post-pandemic as being food insecure, and 76% of the food insecure are Black (Manoel, Paraíba). More than half of the country is facing food insecurity, and more than half of those are Black people. The Brazilian government has never taken any meaningful strides to protect their nonwhite population, or adequate affirmative action after slavery and colonialism, as evidenced by the statistics. Welfare programs such as Bolsa Família and other “Zero Hunger” programs have been a success for Brazil in the past, and the return of strong welfare programs with the reelection of President Lula da Silva promises some relief to the millions of Brazilians facing food insecurity. This doesn’t, however, change such things as the needlessly complicated tax system which benefits the wealthy or generational poverty. In Brazil, several groups are overrepresented in poverty, including descendants of the formerly enslaved, the indigenous population, migrants, and women. These groups have been largely ignored in official hunger statistics in Brazil throughout history (FAO). Beyond disadvantages that persist to this day due to slavery and colonialism, such as white families who benefited from the institution of slavery having access to generational wealth their Black counterparts do not, there is a significant difference between wages between white and nonwhite employees in Brazil. White people have an average of 74% higher wages than nonwhite workers, and when gender is factored in the average Brazilian Black woman receives just 44.4% of the average income of white men (Harvard).

There is no simple way to fix this issue. Currently, a few different options have been in play over the past few years, but both have been targeted towards the impoverished as a whole and not affirmative action to close the racial gap in income, education, and food security.

Bolsa Família was the long running social welfare program for families under the Zero Hunger program group. It was praised by many for the millions it lifted out of poverty. It enforced schooling and healthcare for children by requiring check-ups and school attendance to qualify for the stipend, but the money allocated was only survivable and often not enough to escape poverty alone (World Bank). Bolsa Família also did not adapt to include the new poor after the 2014 economic crisis. When the program was discontinued, many families who were dependent on it were left struggling once again and fell back below the poverty line. Programs built for longevity and eventual self-sufficiency would be needed to keep families afloat.

In order to work on fixing the harm the increase in food insecurity has caused, a stronger plan built to last a longer period of time would need to be put in place. Special attention must be given to Black and indigenous Brazilians as reparations to close the racial gap in the economic classes. Along with this, public schools should have a drastic increase of funding, and mandatory schooling should be increased to the age of 17, due to the correlation between more years of schooling and less food insecurity (World

Bank). An emphasis on schooling works on building a future and ending generational poverty that comes from lack of opportunities. Finally, a new tax system should be implemented that cuts the current benefits to large companies and wealthy individuals (Harvard) to fund public schools from a federal level and not a state level, so poorer states have access to the same opportunities and amenities at school. These changes would likely only be possible over a long period of time in which a progressive government ruled consistently, which isn't entirely unlikely due to the progressive Lula's election and reelection, though the notion is still somewhat idealistic.

Brazil is a country that has proven itself to be driven in fixing its problems, and its political power and visibility can make it a model for successful welfare programs around the world.

Works Cited

1. Schneider RM, Martins L., Burns, EB, James PE, Momsen RP. "Brazil." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; April 14, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Brazil>. Accessed 4/15/2023.
2. Manoel J, Paraíba T. "To Tackle Hunger, Brazil Needs To Tackle Racism First." Jan 4, 2023. To <https://Worldcrunch.com/culture-society/brazil-hunger-and-structural-racism>. Accessed 4/15/2023.
3. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations' Right to Food Team. "Right to Food: Lessons Learned in Brazil." 2007. <https://www.fao.org/right-to-food/resources/resources-detail/en/c/49547/>. Accessed 4/15/2023.
4. Carmo, LG (translated by Anderson L.). "Why the UN Added Brazil to the Hunger Map Once Again." Aug 30, 2022. <https://globalvoices.org/2022/08/30/why-the-un-added-brazil-to-the-hunger-map-once-again/>. Accessed 4/15/2023.
5. Fox, M. "Hunger, unemployment, healthcare inequity: The pandemic's devastating impact on Brazil's Black Communities." April 29, 2021. *The World*. <https://theworld.org/stories/2021-04-29/hunger-unemployment-health-care-inequity-pandemics-devastating-impact-brazils>. Accessed 4/15/2023.
6. Cherol, CCS, Ferreira AA, de Bem Lignani, J, Salles-Costa R. "Regional and Social Inequalities in Food Insecurity in Brazil 2013-2018. *Cad. Saude Publica*. 2022 38 (12): e00083822
7. "Brazil Economic Indicators" Apr 12, 2023. <https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Brazil/>. Accessed 4/15/2023
8. Pimentel R. "Equal Before the Law," But Not in Practice: Brazil's Social Inequality Crisis." Feb 9, 2022. <https://harvardpolitics.com/brazil-social-inequality/>. Accessed 4/15/2023.
9. "Mitigating Poverty, Improving Resilience, Restoring Opportunity." *Opportunities for All Brazil Policy Notes- World Bank*. Dec 2022. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/brazil/brief/opportunities-for-all-brazil-policy-notes>. Accessed 4/15/2023.
10. "Brazil- The World Fact Book." Apr 11, 2023. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/brazil/> Accessed 4/15/2023.

11. Carlos Daou, R. “How Lack of Funding is Affecting Public Education in Brazil.” Oct 5, 2022. <https://assembly.malala.org/stories/how-lack-of-funding-is-affecting-public-education-in-brazil>. Accessed 4/15/2023.
12. “Brazil.” Global Yield Gap Atlas, <https://www.yieldgap.org/Brazil>. Accessed 4/15/2023.
13. Bearman, Thomas. “Education and Institutional Inequality in Brazil.” Jun 18, 2019. <https://socialprotection.org/discover/blog/education-and-institutional-inequality-brazil>. Accessed 4/15/2023.
14. Logan, Andrew. “Fixing Favelas: Urban Housing Problems in Brazil.” The Borgen Project. Jul 2, 2015. <https://borgenproject.org/fixing-favelas-urban-housing-problems-brazil/>. Accessed 4/15/2023.
15. “Brazil.” Columbia University Comparative Health Policy Library, <https://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/research/others/comparative-health-policy-library/brazil-summary>. Accessed 4/15/2023.
16. Romero, Teresa. “Leading Economic Sectors Based on Number of Workers in Brazil 2020.” Statista. Oct. 12, 2022. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/763777/leading-economic-sectors-number-employees-brazil/#statisticContentainer>. Accessed 4/15/2023.
17. Ministry of Health of Brazil. Secretariat of Health Care. Primary Health Care Department. “Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian population.”; translated by Carlos Augusto Monteiro. – Brasília : Ministry of Health of Brazil, 2015. 150 p. : il
18. Suarez, Jacqueline. “Over Half of Brazilians Are Living With Food Insecurity.” RioOnWatch. Aug. 10, 2022. <https://riononwatch.org/?p=71267>. Accessed 4/15/2023.
19. “Brazil Wages: Minimum and Average.” Take-Profit.org, <https://take-profit.org/en/statistics/wages/brazil/> Accessed 4/15/2023.
20. “Average Size of Households in Brazil.” Global Data, <https://www.globaldata.com/data-insights/macroeconomic/average-household-size-in-brazil-2096120/>. Accessed 4/15/2023.
21. Brown, Sarah. “How to Eat and Drink Like a Local in Brazil.” Culture Trip. Dec. 20, 2016. <https://theculturetrip.com/south-america/brazil/articles/how-to-eat-and-drink-like-a-local-in-brazil/>. Accessed 4/15/2023.