

Exploring the Experiences of Forcibly Displaced People in Higher Education: A Case Study of Brazil

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CONTEXT

Only **6%** of refugees worldwide have access to higher education (HE), whilst the global access rate for the wider population is more than **40%** (UNHCR, 2023).

The United Nations set two main global commitments to address this issue:

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4)	15by30
To “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations, 2015)	Aims to achieve 15% enrolment of refugees in tertiary education by 2030 (UNHCR, 2019)

BRAZIL

Largest and most populated country in Latin America

Territory subdivided into **five regions** and **27 federal units** (26 states and the Federal District)

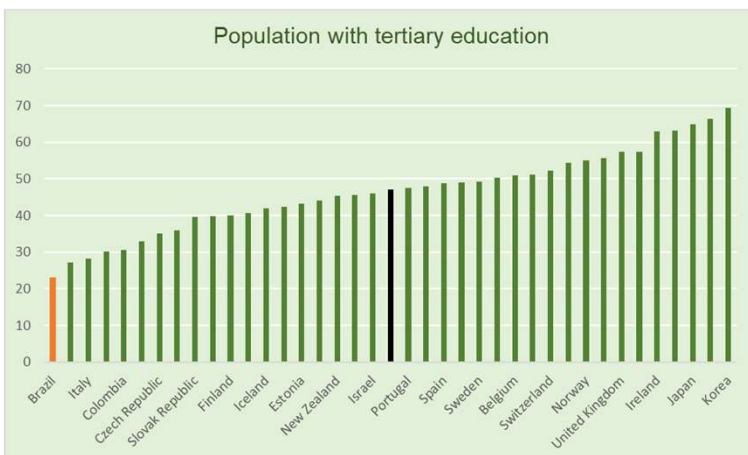
Significant socioeconomic, political and cultural disparities between regions

Only country in the Americas that has **Portuguese** as its official language



EDUCATION

Brazil has one of the lowest tertiary attainment rates among OECD countries (OECD, 2021)



Source: OECD (2023), Population with tertiary education (indicator). doi: 10.1787/0b8f90e9-en (Accessed on 29 June 2023)

In 2021, only **23%** of Brazilians aged 25-34 had an academic degree, compared to an average of **47%** among OECD nations (OECD, 2021)

In 2015, the Federal District was the state with the highest share of people with an academic degree (32%), whilst Maranhão had the lowest (7%) – 25 percentage points difference (OECD, 2022)

MIGRATION

Brazil recorded an unprecedented number of asylum requests in 2016-2021 due to one of the worst humanitarian crises in modern history, which prompted over **seven million** Venezuelans to flee their country (Cavalcanti et al., 2022; R4V Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform, 2022)

Main nationalities of people seeking sanctuary in Brazil:

	Venezuela: 78.5%
	Angola: 6,7%
	Haiti: 2.7%

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1) What is the role of universities in the context of displacement in Brazil and how can they contribute to achieving SDG4 – access to inclusive and equitable quality education for all, including refugees?

2) What are the contextual and individual circumstances that determine the ability of refugees to access higher education in Brazil, and how do these circumstances shape their experiences within academia?

3) How do Brazilian universities, in different contexts, contribute to facilitating the access of displaced students to higher education and in what ways do they support these students once they are enrolled?

Theoretical Framework

Latin American Decolonial Perspectives (Mignolo, 2009, 2011; Quijano, 2000, 2007)

Key Concepts

‘Coloniality of power’: discusses the power structures that persist in postcolonial societies and are responsible for worsening social inequalities (Quijano, 2000);

‘Epistemic disobedience’: the act of disengaging from the false notion of a ‘zero point epistemology’. “We know that we have to decolonise being, and to do so we have to start by decolonising knowledge” (Mignolo, 2009, pp. 160, 171)

Methodology

Qualitative **multiple-case study** built upon a **social constructivist** worldview;

Desk based research and **stakeholder interviews** with four universities across Brazil; followed by in-depth qualitative study – **focus groups** and **interviews with refugee students** in two universities, in different regions of the country with contrasting socioeconomic, political and cultural realities;

Thematic and **narrative** data analysis approaches.

References

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