



RELISE

*ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN EUROPE: A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF
BRAZILIAN COMMUNITIES IN PORTUGAL, ITALY, FRANCE, AND SPAIN¹*

**EMPREENDEDORISMO NA EUROPA: UMA VISÃO GERAL COMPARATIVA
ENTRE AS COMUNIDADES BRASILEIRAS EM PORTUGAL, ITÁLIA,
FRANÇA E ESPANHA**

Roberto Pessoa de Queiroz Falcão²

Eduardo Picanço Cruz³

The growth of international mobility among Brazilians in recent decades has been accompanied by a significant expansion of migrant entrepreneurship in different European countries. Although the literature has advanced in understanding this phenomenon in specific contexts, comparative analyses examining how different institutional environments, markets, and social structures shape entrepreneurial trajectories in distinct ways are still scarce (Dheer, 2024; Ram et al., 2017). This editorial seeks to fill this gap by comparatively analyzing Brazilian entrepreneurship in Portugal, Italy, France, and Spain, based on empirical evidence derived from fieldwork, in-depth interviews, and secondary data analysis.

Adopting the mixed embeddedness perspective, it is argued that migrant entrepreneurship cannot be explained solely by individual characteristics or economic motivations, but rather emerges from the interaction between individual resources, social networks, and the institutional and market structures of host countries (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001; Kloosterman, 2010). In this sense, the editorial explores how different national configurations produce distinct patterns

¹ DOI: doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19370113

² Unigranrio. robertopqfalcao@gmail.com

³ Universidade Federal Fluminense. epicanco@id.uff.br



RELISE

2

of entrepreneurial integration, as well as trajectories marked by adaptation, resilience, and, in many cases, transnational mobility (Schrooten et al., 2016).

This study is justified by the fact that the topic of Brazilian immigrant entrepreneurship in Portugal, Italy, France, and Spain has been little explored by Brazilian researchers. The importance of this research lies in: (i) the limited number of studies on Brazilian communities abroad; (ii) the current relevance of issues related to migration, refugees, and diasporas; (iii) the perception that entrepreneurship enables immigrants to overcome economic difficulties; and (iv) the observation that many Brazilians abroad distance themselves from their compatriots, weakening networks and the strength of their businesses. Furthermore, the researchers conducted academic outreach activities, providing training to entrepreneurs in collaboration with Brazilian consulates or local associations, similar to other initiatives previously carried out in Europe and North America.

The study is based on field notes and prior observations derived from interviews conducted with 55 Brazilians in Portugal, 32 in Italy, 25 in France, and 33 in Spain, between September 2024 and February 2026, within the framework of a postdoctoral fellowship at the Polytechnic Institute of Leiria (Portugal) and field data collection in Spain, France, and Italy under the Young Scientist of Our State program (FAPERJ).

MIXED EMBEDDEDNESS AND MIGRANT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The mixed embeddedness approach (Kloosterman et al., 1999; Kloosterman & Rath, 2003; Kloosterman, 2010) offers a particularly useful analytical framework for understanding migrant entrepreneurship from a comparative perspective. By integrating micro (individual resources), meso (social networks), and macro (institutional and market structures) dimensions,



RELISE

3

this perspective allows for the analysis of how different national contexts influence the opportunities and constraints faced by migrant entrepreneurs.

Within this framework, entrepreneurship is not merely an individual choice but a situated response to opportunity structures (Waldinger, 1990). Entrepreneurs with greater human, financial, and social capital tend to access more dynamic and diversified markets, while those in more vulnerable positions often enter sectors with low barriers to entry (Ram et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2014). The distinction between opportunity-driven and necessity-driven entrepreneurship, although useful, is here reinterpreted as a relational and dynamic phenomenon (Fairlie & Fossen, 2020). In particular, the influence of migration policies, barriers to diploma recognition, and language barriers is evident as drivers of entrepreneurship as a means of survival. Meanwhile, regulatory complexity and labor costs are highlighted by entrepreneurs in all four countries as factors that hinder entrepreneurial activity.

METHODOLOGY AND EMPIRICAL CONTEXT

This editorial is based on a multi-method research design, combining in-depth interviews with Brazilian entrepreneurs, field observation, and analysis of secondary data. Field data collection was carried out between September 2024 and February 2026, covering different cities in Portugal (Leiria, Lisbon, Cascais, Porto, Porto de Mós, Albufeira, among others), Italy (Milan, Turin, and Rome), France (Toulouse and Paris), and Spain (Madrid, Barcelona, Tarragona, and Palma de Mallorca), allowing for the identification of both recurring patterns and contextual specificities.

The qualitative approach adopted prioritizes the understanding of entrepreneurs' trajectories, meanings, and practices, enabling the identification of underlying mechanisms that would not be captured by purely quantitative approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The comparative analysis was conducted



RELISE

4

through the identification of patterns of integration, challenges faced, strategies adopted, and forms of resource mobilization in each national context.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL CONTEXTS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

From a comparative institutional perspective, the regulation of citizenship and migrant integration varies significantly across Italy, Spain, Portugal, and France, shaping different opportunity structures for Brazilian entrepreneurs.

Portugal stands out as the most accessible context, combining relatively flexible regularization mechanisms, linguistic and cultural proximity, and lower administrative complexity, which facilitates both entry and business formalization. Many necessity-driven entrepreneurs register as self-employed (similar to Brazil's MEI system) to issue "green receipts" (*recibos verdes*) when providing services (such as construction, beauty and aesthetics services, floristry, accounting, among others). There is also a more affluent group that migrates to Portugal with their families intending to establish structured businesses (for example: nightclubs, event venues, restaurants, digital business hubs, real estate agencies, law firms, among others).

Italy, in turn, has recently moved toward a more restrictive model, limiting access to citizenship by descent (*jus sanguinis*) and introducing the requirement of an effective connection with the country, which raises barriers to formal integration for more distant generations. Regarding entrepreneurship, bureaucracy (similar to Portugal) stands out; however, there is a wide diversity of businesses created by Brazilians (cat hotels, cheese bread factories, digital marketing consultancies, Brazilian steakhouses, etc.).

France presents a more regulated and demanding environment, in which access to citizenship and entrepreneurial activity is mediated by stricter bureaucratic requirements, language proficiency, and formal recognition of



RELISE

5

qualifications. This tends to benefit migrants with higher levels of human and institutional capital, directly impacting the new wave of migration composed of highly skilled individuals, who often engage in sectors such as consulting, technology, high-end gastronomy, and fashion.

Spain, in turn, experienced a temporary opening with the Democratic Memory Law (2022–2025), which expanded access to citizenship for descendants, especially Latin Americans, followed by a return to more restrictive rules after its expiration. Even so, it maintains a preferential regime that allows naturalization after only two years of legal residence. Interviewed immigrants highlighted that one of the main current challenges for legal regularization is *empadronamiento* (registration or proof of residence), which is typically secured through a rental contract. In the Madrid region, there are numerous gastronomy-related businesses such as Brazilian steakhouses, tapioca shops, açaí shops, and alternative nightclubs. In Catalonia, there is a wide range of businesses, including Brazilian restaurants, cultural production companies, steakhouses, accounting services, and law firms.

Portugal: gateway and expansion platform

Portugal emerges as the most favorable context for the entrepreneurial integration of Brazilians, largely due to linguistic and cultural proximity, as well as a relatively accessible institutional environment (Esteves et al., 2018). Two distinct groups can be observed: (i) opportunity-driven entrepreneurs, often with prior planning, initial capital, and engagement in more qualified sectors, mainly living in regions such as Cascais, Estoril, and Porto; and (ii) necessity-driven entrepreneurs, who often entered the country irregularly and experienced situations of exploitation, having worked in cleaning services, construction and renovations, as waiters, and in restaurant kitchens.



RELISE

6

More recently, due to the rapid post-pandemic growth of Brazilian immigration to Portugal, this influx has contributed to a rise in xenophobic sentiments, culminating in changes to migration laws with stricter regulations. In terms of family composition, many Brazilian couples migrate together. Even so, challenges related to bureaucracy and regulatory burdens persist, affecting both established entrepreneurs and new entrants (OECD, 2019). Portugal also functions as a platform for intra-European mobility, reinforcing the transnational dimension of the phenomenon (Schrooten et al., 2016).

Italy: entrepreneurship as a survival strategy

In Italy, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE, 2021), the Brazilian population is estimated at around 80,000 people, distributed across the following regions: (i) Lombardy: in northern Italy, it has the largest concentration of Brazilians in the country. The city of Milan, in particular, is an important economic and cultural center, attracting many Brazilians seeking work and study opportunities; (ii) Lazio: home to the capital, Rome, it also has a large Brazilian community. Many Brazilians are drawn to the region due to job opportunities in sectors such as tourism, hospitality, and services; (iii) Veneto: also in northern Italy, it hosts a significant Brazilian community, with many working in commerce and tourism; (iv) Emilia-Romagna: in northern Italy, it also has a significant Brazilian population, many of whom work in agriculture, construction, and industry; (v) Piedmont: located in the north of the country, bordering France and Switzerland, with Turin as its capital, this region attracts many Brazilians as it is the second wealthiest region in Italy and offers various job opportunities; and (vi) Tuscany: in central Italy, it is another popular destination for Brazilians, especially for those seeking opportunities in areas such as fashion and design.

The community is characterized by a large proportion of women (over 70%), some of whom are married to Italians and a smaller portion to Brazilians.



RELISE

7

There is generally a positive reception toward Brazilian culture, including music and cultural expressions. At the same time, a persistent stereotype regarding the sensuality of Brazilian women among Italian men can still be observed. A significant portion of Brazilians living in Italy with citizenship by descent come from the Brazilian states of São Paulo, Paraná, Santa Catarina, and Rio Grande do Sul - regions historically associated with Italian immigration to Brazil, though not exclusively.

Recent reforms to Italian citizenship (especially from 2025 onward) have restricted recognition based on *jus sanguinis*, primarily limiting it to children and grandchildren of Italians and introducing the requirement of a genuine connection to the country. There have also been changes in the transmission of citizenship to minor children, increased costs, and stricter procedures. Overall, these changes represent a shift from a model based on broad descent to one centered on effective ties to Italy.

In Italy, Brazilian entrepreneurship shows a higher incidence of trajectories driven by necessity. Language barriers, labor market segmentation, and institutional difficulties contribute to insertion into sectors with low barriers to entry (Solano, 2016). In this context, co-ethnic networks play a central role, providing initial support but also limiting access to broader markets (Ram et al., 2017). Informality emerges as a relevant element, reflecting adaptive strategies in response to structural constraints.

Spain: between opportunity and market saturation

In Spain, the main provinces with the highest concentration of Brazilians, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE, 2021), are Catalonia (22,263), the Community of Madrid (16,411), Andalusia (9,708), and Galicia (9,252), respectively.



RELISE

8

Spain, which recently modified its migration law toward greater openness, introduced the Democratic Memory Law (2022) as its main reform, expanding access to Spanish citizenship for descendants - especially Latin Americans - including grandchildren and great-grandchildren. However, this law was temporary and expired in October 2025, making the process more restrictive once again. Currently, the main pathway for Latin Americans is naturalization through residence, with a reduced requirement of two years, which is significantly shorter compared to other European countries, where the process can take between 7 and 10 years of residence to obtain citizenship.

Spain presents hybrid characteristics, combining opportunities in certain sectors with high saturation in niches traditionally occupied by migrants (Kloosterman & Rath, 2010). Brazilian entrepreneurs often operate in sectors such as tourism, gastronomy, and services, with notable activities including cultural performances, capoeira spaces, and Brazilian steakhouses. Economic volatility and intense competition impose additional challenges, requiring strategies of adaptation and differentiation (Baycan-Levent & Nijkamp, 2009).

France: institutional complexity and barriers to access

In France, there is a positive reception of Brazilian culture, particularly music, although there is still limited familiarity with Brazilian cuisine. In this context, integration into local (French) networks and proficiency in the language emerge as critical factors for success and for both labor market and entrepreneurial integration, reinforcing the importance of social and institutional capital (Ram et al., 2017).

The Brazilian population in the country is estimated at around 80,000 people, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE, 2021), with the highest concentration primarily in the Paris metropolitan region and in major cities in the central and southern parts of the country (including Bordeaux, Lyon, Nice,



RELISE

9

Cannes, Montpellier, among others). France also presents a more regulated institutional environment, with higher barriers to entry related to business formalization, access to credit, and recognition of qualifications (OECD, 2019). At the same time, it offers opportunities in more specialized niches for entrepreneurs with higher levels of human capital.

Discussion: trajectories, mobility, and embeddedness dynamics

The comparative analysis reveals that Brazilian entrepreneurship in Europe is deeply shaped by the interactions between individual resources and contextual structures. One of the main findings is the fluidity of entrepreneurial trajectories, which often shift between necessity and opportunity over time. In addition, the importance of intra-European mobility is evident, reinforcing the need for transnational approaches (Schrooten et al., 2016). The role of social networks also proves to be central, especially in the distinction between bonding and bridging social capital (Granovetter, 1973).

Theoretical and methodological implications

From a theoretical perspective, the editorial reinforces mixed embeddedness as a robust approach for multilevel comparative analyses (micro, meso, and macro) and proposes a dynamic interpretation of entrepreneurial motivations (Kloosterman, 2010).

Methodologically, it highlights the value of qualitative and multi-method approaches in capturing the complexity of the phenomenon, contributing to mechanism-based explanations (Gioia et al., 2013).



RELISE

10

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study sought to understand the dynamics of immigrant entrepreneurship in the contemporary European context, with an emphasis on the new wave of migration and its implications for business creation and development. Based on an interpretivist and qualitative approach, the findings show that immigrant entrepreneurship cannot be reduced to a purely economic logic; rather, it is a multifaceted phenomenon that emerges at the intersection of migratory trajectories, social resources, institutional structures, and identity processes. The results reinforce the relevance of the mixed embeddedness perspective, demonstrating that entrepreneurial opportunities are simultaneously shaped by structural factors - such as regulation, labor markets, and migration policies - and by individual and collective resources, including social networks, cultural capital, and prior experiences. In addition, the study highlights the growing importance of transnational practices and mobility as constitutive elements of entrepreneurial strategies, expanding the understanding of how immigrants navigate and connect different institutional contexts and markets.

Another central finding concerns the heterogeneity of entrepreneurial trajectories, which vary not only according to economic motivations but also due to symbolic, identity-related, and aspirational factors. In this sense, immigrant entrepreneurship should be understood as a dynamic and situated process, marked by continuous adaptation to contextual conditions and by forms of agency that combine necessity, opportunity, and meaning-making. By integrating these dimensions, the study contributes theoretically by advancing the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship, articulating the mixed embeddedness perspective with a processual and interpretivist approach to entrepreneurial trajectories. This integration broadens the traditional analytical scope by incorporating symbolic and transnational dimensions that are often underexplored, while also reinforcing the dynamic and non-linear nature of the phenomenon. By emphasizing the



RELISE

11

agency of actors in recombining resources under conditions of constraint, the study proposes a more integrated and multiscale perspective, connecting micro (individual), meso (networks and markets), and macro (institutions) levels, and offering a robust foundation for future theoretical advancements.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. The qualitative and interpretivist nature of the research, although appropriate for capturing the complexity of the phenomenon, limits the statistical generalization of the findings. The empirical focus on specific European contexts may restrict the applicability of the results to other settings with different institutional and migratory configurations. Moreover, data collection based predominantly on interviews is subject to recall and interpretation biases on the part of participants. Finally, the absence of a longitudinal approach limits the understanding of changes in entrepreneurial trajectories over time.

In light of these limitations, a promising agenda for future research emerges. Quantitative and multi-method studies may help test and extend the generalizability of the findings across different national contexts. Longitudinal investigations are particularly relevant for understanding the evolution of entrepreneurial trajectories throughout the migration cycle. Furthermore, comparative analyses between countries - especially across different institutional regimes - can deepen the understanding of the role of regulatory structures and entrepreneurial ecosystems. It is also important to incorporate intersectional perspectives, exploring how gender, race, and class influence the trajectories of immigrant entrepreneurs. Finally, future research may advance the analysis of the role of digital technologies, platforms, and transnational ecosystems in shaping new forms of immigrant entrepreneurship, contributing to a more contemporary and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.



RELISE

12

REFERENCES

BAYCAN-LEVENT, T.; NIJKAMP, P. Planning and management of urban green spaces in Europe: comparative analysis. *Journal of Urban Planning and Development*, v. 135, n. 1, p. 1–12, 2009.

BRASIL. Ministério das Relações Exteriores (MRE). Comunidades brasileiras no exterior: estatísticas – ano-base 2023. Brasília: MRE, 2024. Disponível em: <https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/assuntos/portal-consular/comunidades-brasileiras-no-exterior-estatisticas-2023>. Acesso em: 18 mar. 2026.

DENZIN, N. K.; LINCOLN, Y. S. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. 5. ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2018.

DHEER, R. J. Cultural diversity: an impetus to economic growth—under what conditions? *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, v. 36, n. 7–8, p. 855–880, 2024.

ESTEVES, A. I. P.; FONSECA, M. L.; MALHEIROS, J. Labour market integration of immigrants in Portugal. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, v. 44, n. 14, p. 2375–2391, 2018.

FAIRLIE, R. W.; FOSSEN, F. M. Defining opportunity versus necessity entrepreneurship. In: POLACHEK, S. W.; TATSIRAMOS, K. (org.). *Research in labor economics*. Bingley: Emerald, 2020. p. 253–289.

GIOIA, D. A.; CORLEY, K. G.; HAMILTON, A. L. Seeking qualitative rigor. *Organizational Research Methods*, v. 16, n. 1, p. 15–31, 2013.

GRANOVETTER, M. The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, v. 78, n. 6, p. 1360–1380, 1973.

JONES, T.; RAM, M.; EDWARDS, P. et al. Mixed embeddedness and new migrant enterprise. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, v. 26, n. 5–6, p. 500–520, 2014.

KLOOSTERMAN, R. Matching opportunities with resources. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, v. 22, n. 1, p. 25–45, 2010.

KLOOSTERMAN, R.; RATH, J. Immigrant entrepreneurs in advanced economies. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 2001.



RELISE

13

- KLOOSTERMAN, R.; RATH, J. *Immigrant entrepreneurs*. Oxford: Berg, 2003.
- KLOOSTERMAN, R.; VAN DER LEUN, J.; RATH, J. Mixed embeddedness. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, v. 23, n. 2, p. 252–266, 1999.
- OECD. *The missing entrepreneurs 2019*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2019.
- RAM, M.; JONES, T.; VILLARES-VARELA, M. Migrant entrepreneurship. *International Small Business Journal*, v. 35, n. 1, p. 3–18, 2017.
- RAM, M.; THEODORAKOPOULOS, N.; JONES, T. Forms of capital and Somali enterprise. *Work, Employment and Society*, v. 22, n. 3, p. 427–446, 2008.
- SCHROOTEN, M.; SALAZAR, N. B.; DIAS, G. Living in mobility. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, v. 42, n. 7, p. 1199–1215, 2016.
- SOLANO, G. Immigrant self-employment and transnational practices. *International Review of Sociology*, v. 26, n. 1, p. 121–141, 2016.
- WALDINGER, R. *Ethnic entrepreneurs*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1990.