

THEMATIC ARTICLE

Obstacles to validating professional experience and the productive integration of refugees: a study among recruiters in the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo

LEANDRO DE CARVALHO ¹

¹ UNIVERSIDADE DE BRASÍLIA (UNB) / PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM DIREITOS HUMANOS E CIDADANIA, BRASÍLIA – DF, BRAZIL

Abstract

In recent years, the hundreds of thousands of people arriving in Brazil seeking refuge have been welcomed. After their emergency needs are met, they receive support to restart their professional trajectory and ensure their and their families' sustenance and autonomy. Data supporting this cycle of social protections has been produced on the competencies of immigrants- allowing for the improvement of guidance and training. However, little is known about the obstacles to validating the experiences and possible hiring of these professionals. In the face of this scenario, an unprecedented proposal was conducted that questioned companies, through their recruitment and selection departments, to capture the technical and subjective circumstances that could affect the validation of refugees' experience and qualification, culminating in their approval or rejection for job positions. This quantitative and exploratory research was conducted among recruitment and selection professionals working in companies in the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo, who responded to a virtual questionnaire in a non-probabilistic sample. The research showed that the respondents do not master the procedures for hiring refugees, ignoring points of legislation and nurturing unfounded fears about labor audits. In addition to these points, the perpetuation of racial stereotypes that disadvantage Africans and Central Americans and privilege Europeans and North Americans was seen. Finally, the role of business organizations in the cycle of social protection and productive insertion of groups in high vulnerability was discussed.

Keywords: Refuge. Immigration. Job. Human resources. Productive insertion.

Os entraves para a validação de experiências profissionais e a inserção produtiva de imigrantes em busca de refúgio: um estudo entre recrutadores(as) da Região Metropolitana de São Paulo

Resumo

Nos últimos anos, as centenas de milhares de pessoas que chegam ao Brasil em busca de refúgio têm sido acolhidas e, depois de supridas as necessidades emergenciais, recebem apoio para recomeçar sua trajetória profissional e garantir o sustento e a autonomia para si e sua família. Para apoiar esse ciclo de proteção social, foram produzidos dados sobre as competências dos(as) imigrantes, de modo que fosse permitido aprimorar as orientações e capacitações, mas pouco se sabia sobre os entraves para a validação das experiências e possível contratação desses(as) profissionais. Diante desse cenário, foi conduzida proposta inédita de questionamento das empresas, por meio de seus departamentos de recrutamento e seleção, com o objetivo de captar as circunstâncias técnicas e subjetivas que poderiam interferir na validação da experiência e da qualificação dos(as) imigrantes em busca de refúgio, culminando na aprovação ou recusa dessas pessoas no processo de seleção. Esta foi uma pesquisa de abordagem quantitativa e exploratória conduzida com profissionais de recrutamento e seleção atuantes em empresas da Região Metropolitana de São Paulo, que responderam a um questionário virtual em amostra não probabilística. A pesquisa captou que os(as) respondentes não dominam os procedimentos para a contratação de refugiados(as), ignorando pontos da legislação, e que nutrem receios infundados sobre auditorias trabalhistas. Além desses fatos, foi identificada a perpetuação de estereótipos raciais que desfavorecem africanos(as) e centro-americanos(as) e que privilegiam profissionais de origem europeia ou norte-americana. No fim, foi colocado em discussão o papel das organizações empresariais no ciclo de proteção social e inserção produtiva de grupos em alta vulnerabilidade.

Palavras-chave: Refúgio. Imigração. Trabalho. Recursos humanos. Inserção produtiva.

Los obstáculos para la validación de experiencias profesionales y para la inserción productiva de inmigrantes en búsqueda de refugio: un estudio entre reclutadores de la Región Metropolitana de São Paulo

Resumen

En los últimos años, los cientos de miles de personas que llegan a Brasil en busca de refugio han sido acogidos y, luego de atender sus necesidades de emergencia, reciben apoyo para reiniciar su trayectoria profesional y garantizar el sustento y la autonomía para ellos y sus familias. Para apoyar este ciclo de protección social, se produjeron datos sobre las competencias de los inmigrantes, lo que permitió mejorar la orientación y la formación, pero poco se sabía sobre los obstáculos para validar las experiencias y la posible contratación de estos profesionales. Ante este escenario, se realizó una propuesta inédita de encuesta a las empresas, a través de sus departamentos de reclutamiento y selección, con el propósito de captar las circunstancias técnicas y subjetivas que podrían interferir en la validación de la experiencia y cualificación de los inmigrantes en busca de refugio, culminando en la aprobación o rechazo de estas personas en el proceso de selección. Se trató de una investigación cuantitativa y exploratoria realizada entre profesionales de reclutamiento y selección que actúan en empresas de la Región Metropolitana de São Paulo, que respondieron un cuestionario virtual en una muestra no probabilística. La encuesta encontró que los encuestados no dominan los procedimientos para la contratación de refugiados, que ignoran puntos de la legislación y que tienen temores infundados acerca de las auditorías laborales. Además de estos puntos, se identificó la perpetuación de estereotipos raciales que desfavorecen a africanos y centroamericanos y privilegian a europeos y norteamericanos. Al final se discutió el papel de las organizaciones empresariales en el ciclo de protección social e inserción productiva de grupos en alta vulnerabilidad.

Palabras clave: Refugio. Inmigración. Trabajo. Recursos humanos. Inserción productiva.

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INTRODUCTION

In May 2022, the sad milestone of one hundred million people affected by forced displacement (Alto Comissariado das Nações Unidas para Refugiados [ACNUR], 2022) was made public. These are people who could not remain in their homes or cities and were forced to move out for protection in other cities or countries. The phenomenon is also perceived in Brazil as a country that receives immigrants seeking refuge.

In the past ten years, applications for refugee status in Brazil have increased: in 2011, 1,465 applications were filed; that number grew to 32,000 in 2017, and in 2019, 82,552 applications were filed (Comitê Nacional para Refugiados [CONARE], 2020). The Committee points out in its reports that the period from 2011 to part of 2020¹ totaled 265,729 applications for refugee status (CONARE, 2021).

These are people who experience a series of vulnerabilities as a result of forced displacement and need support with different aspects of life. The tens of thousands of people who arrive in Brazil seeking refuge have been received by social organizations and public facilities which provide emergency services and support with the first steps of integration into the new social context. Once their emergency needs are met, these people are given support to learn or improve their knowledge of Portuguese, guidance on labor conditions in the country and, where necessary, are referred to professional training. Over this journey and preparation, companies are expected to validate these people's qualifications and professional experience, giving continuity to their professional paths so that they can ensure sustenance and autonomy for themselves and their families.

This simplified schema shows that refugee emergency services and social and productive integration involve the participation of various actors who have a direct and decisive influence on the success of this initial cycle of protection and assistance.

The work performed by social organizations and the government in receiving and providing emergency services has been addressed by several studies (França, Ramos, & Montagner, 2019; Moreira, 2014; Ruediger, Santos, Spindel, & Piquet, 2017; C. A. S. Silva, 2014; Zeni & Filippim, 2014), which has contributed both for theoretical advancements about the dynamics of migratory flows and for defining reception protocols and legislation advancements. In another research front, since 2015 analyses of government databases have increased with a view to improving information on demographic data about immigrants seeking refuge by characterizing them according to gender, age and nationality, and analyzing information about education, type of occupation and professional experience (CONARE, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021; Lima, Fuentes-Muñoz, Nazareno, & Amaral, 2017).

Other studies presented perceptions about difficulties to enter the Brazilian labor market in ethnographies dedicated to understanding the impressions and aspirations of people of different ethnicities and nationalities (Faria, Ragnini, & Brüning, 2021; Teixeira, E. C. M. Silva, Balog, & Sá, 2021). Others pointed out weaknesses in the social protection process, as well as the denial of rights (Cirino, 2020; J. C. J. Silva, Bógus, & S. A. G. J. Silva, 2017), bringing into debate the juridical framework and the fulfillment of human rights in crisis contexts, as seen with the help provided to the Venezuelan indigenous people of the Warao ethnicity, which proved a challenge for governments at the local and federal level.

All these studies have contributed directly to understanding the phenomenon, and in many cases they propose new perspectives and methods for understanding the circumstances where they occur, whether to ensure the rights of those who cross the country's borders for refuge, or to assimilate the dynamics of operation of social and public organizations in these settings, or still, from the immigrant's perspective, to gain further insights into the importance of forms of assistance that consider the needs of those receiving them.

However, despite the advancements in understanding the flows and services, as well as in the methods and protocols, it was still necessary to understand the other stages of this complex cycle, which begins with emergency services and continues through the immigrant's professional preparation, though not ending there. This path reaches companies' borders, and in order to overcome these, it is necessary to validate the passports (i.e., qualifications and experience) of those who arrive there.

¹Until March 2020, before borders were closed due to the health crisis.

With this in mind, the study discusses the interferences internal to companies which might speed up or prevent such validations, and looks into hiring procedures, investigating what subjective, implicit aspects are present in the selection processes involving non-Brazilians and could influence the decisions of recruitment professionals: if curriculums list the same qualifications as those of Brazilian workers, will the immigrants have the same hiring chances? Will they be perceived as professionals with the same, lower, or higher capacity? Could the worker's geographic origin be seen as an indication of the presence or absence of technical skills? Supposing other aspects, when an immigrant is before them, could the recruitment professionals think that the main advantage of hiring them would be the possibility to pay them a lower wage? Or that this is a group of workers who accept different working conditions from those of Brazilians, without demanding reparations? Or, on the other hand, are they seen as more agile workers and good decision-makers?

Given such questions, still without answers, it was considered necessary to think beyond immigrant applicants and to also look at the people receiving them in the labor market. To that end, the goal established for this study was to capture the technical and subjective circumstances that could interfere with the validation of the experience and qualifications of immigrants seeking refuge, in order to advance the understanding of the elements that further or hinder these professionals' engagement in productive work.

The novelty of this study consisted in questioning companies, by means of their recruitment and selection departments, and this focus allowed making a diagnosis that shows the extent to which the question is understood by human resources professionals; it also maps the consistency of the information circulating among these recruitment professionals and investigates how immigrants' qualifications are perceived.

This interdisciplinary study contributes to different fields of investigation and analysis, indicating reflections for migration studies, juridical sciences, and administrative sciences, in business or public organizations, by signaling/proposing the debate about the complexity of companies' participation in the processes of social protection and social and productive integration.

Beyond the particular context of a selection process for new workers, otherwise related only between applicant and employer, this discussion expands to encompass the role of business organizations in the social protection processes. While these are not seen as a part of social work, the context of immigrants seeking refuge shows the relevance of discussing internal processes, the circulation of information and the perpetuation of stereotypes as elements that can pose obstacles to the social and productive integration of groups in high vulnerability.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

To achieve the proposed goal, an instrument and a data collection method were planned so as to capture recruiters' knowledge of the legislation on hiring immigrants, understand the circulation of information in the work environment about subjects related to immigration and the hiring procedures and, finally, understand the perceptions of recruiters about the competencies and characteristics of immigrant professionals, so that these three components combined might show the obstacles not yet investigated about the selection process and the validation of experiences, which culminate in the hiring or rejection of immigrant professionals.

It is therefore necessary to specify the understanding of this study about: 1) the legislation concerning immigrants seeking refuge; 2) the notion of inconsistent information; and 3) the stereotypes and their connections with racism and the development of the Brazilian labor market, points which were the basis both for building the instrument and for its analysis. The next paragraphs are dedicated to these explanations so as to subsequently present the procedures for the collection of responses.

The construction "immigrant seeking refuge" was chosen to substitute the generical "refugee"; it encompasses refugee status applicants and immigrants who were granted refugee status. Thus, this substitution comprises the immigrant who arrives in the country without passing first through a work or study visa procedure, commenced in the country of residence, and who might use the protection guarantees under Law No. 9,474 of 1997 (Lei nº 9.474, de 22 de julho de 1997), and even the permanence in the country after proving that their life is at risk due to persecution or serious human rights violations. The legislation establishes for these cases that refugee status will be granted to any individual who:

I - due to well-founded fears of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinions, he or she is out of his or her country of nationality and cannot or does not wish to rely on the protection of such country:

II - having no nationality and being out of the country where he or she had previously retained permanent residence, cannot or does not wish to return to such country based on circumstances mentioned in item I above;

III - due to severe and generalized violation of human rights, he or she is compelled to leave his or her country of nationality to seek refuge in a different country.

It also guarantees that any immigrant can apply for refugee status upon entering Brazilian territory and, after this application, will receive protection and access to the minimum documentation for permanence and work in the country (CPF and CTPS) until their situation is judged.

In discussing the information published about migration flows and the living conditions of immigrants seeking refuge, this study adopted the term “inconsistent information” for situations that differ from what the legislation provides. Thus, the debate is framed not by a total absence of information, or even the notion of distorted information (deliberately or not), but in terms of information that actually circulated but did not carry the different aspects of the question.

One of the studies that measured the production of content about the subject, published by the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA), called *Midiatização do refúgio no Brasil* (Media coverage of refuge in Brazil) (Viana, 2020), analyzed news stories in the country’s three main digital/printed newspapers – Folha de São Paulo, Estado de São Paulo, and O Globo –, between 2010 and 2018. The study indicated the increase in publications about the subject from 2014, practically tripling between 2014 and 2018 compared to what was collected between 2010 and 2013. The stories mostly associated the term “refuge” with four other terms: social work, documentation, housing, and labor market. When addressing social work, according to the study, the stories associated immigrants with food insecurity or financial hardship and, in the same classification, charity actions for immigrants were mentioned. The relationship between immigrants and documentation was marked by accounts of lack of documents or the difficulties obtaining them. As for the labor market, according to the author, mentions referred to difficulty finding a job, accounts of individual or family entrepreneurship, and the exploitation of immigrant labor. Thus, even with the purpose of publicizing the challenges faced by these people, these associations could also suggest that these immigrants lacked the minimum conditions to take on a formal job for being unable to obtain the documents necessary to their hiring. As the difficulties to obtain documentation were reported, would there be room for or interest in explanations about the legal work conditions for the immigrant seeking refuge and/or about which documents are easily issued for these people? Would there be room for differentiating the migration categories, or would they all be seen as people seeking better financial conditions? There is no data about these points, and it would not be possible to answer these questions directly, though it is feasible to use other strategies to understand how these news stories were received and interpreted by specific groups – in the scope of this study, recruitment professionals – and whether the information gaps were bridged, inferring about the consequences for immigrants seeking refuge, and this was one of the purposes of this study.

Finally, by relating the term “stereotype” with the terms “racism” and “labor market”, the study sought to come closer to their positioned and historicized meanings, taking into account the complexity that this combination requires. Thus, in every occurrence mentioned here about the term “stereotype”, it is not a matter of assigning it the meaning closest to “label” or “prejudgment”; the meaning used in these pages comprehends stereotype – mainly racial and against people of dark skin – as a historical construction sustained and disseminated in order to structure the privileges of people of European descent and demean and dehumanize people from other groups.

To work on this construction linked to racism and its consequences for the development of the Brazilian labor market, the works of the economist Mário Theodoro are indispensable (Theodoro, 2008, 2022). His reconstitutions of Brazilian economic history and his reflections about the period of formation of the Brazilian labor market show that, even after the exploitation of people of African descent abducted from their countries was made illegal, Brazil continued to segregate this population, not allowing their participation in paid, free work, and structuring incentives for the reception of European immigrants.

Such view, which values workers of European origin, did not take place spontaneously: between 1870 and 1930, it was extensively propagated that economic development would be achieved as the country got closer to the European phenotype, and to conduct this policy, theories were disseminated which associated intellectual capacity, creativity and productivity to white people, and deficiencies, crime and carelessness to black people and indigenous peoples (Bento, 2002; Jaccoud, 2008).

It is worth stressing that this was not a migration policy aimed at expanding the technical or productive diversity of Brazilian workers or diversifying the goods offered, but to dismiss an entire ethnic group with the argument that the racial characteristics of the majority of residents in Brazil would preclude economic development. And such justifications were extensively propagated in universities and decision-making environments, influencing the investments in attracting Europeans who decided to establish permanent residence in the country.

Considering this deliberate effort, initiated decades ago, it is argued here that current analyses about the Brazilian labor market need to encompass racism as an organizer of its inequalities (Theodoro, 2022). It is not a matter of discussing racism and racial stereotypes as mere occasional obstacles, but rather keeping in mind that this is a historical construction extensively propagated which still determines which professionals should be viewed as more qualified, in a manifestation of power that structures the social relations that privilege people of European descent (Almeida, 2019; Theodoro, 2022). Even though each person may not recall when and how they associated such characteristics to different peoples, it must be pointed out and debated that this association was constructed and propagated with a purpose of favoring one people in relation to another and that it has been perpetuating itself since the slavery period.

Regarding the methodological design of this research, it used a quantitative approach, with a questionnaire that was sent to recruitment and selection professionals at companies in the São Paulo Metropolitan Area – a public that was not until them invited to answer about the condition of immigrants and the opportunities they are offered to enter the country's formal labor market. This exploratory research proved adequate to capture broader views still not available which can later provide the basis for qualitative studies that might delve into the motivations, values, conflicts, and experiences of recruitment practice in what concerns the migration issue, and gain further insights into the stigmas, stereotypes and information flaws which could potentially interfere with the validation of experiences and, consequently, with the hiring of immigrants seeking refuge.

Regarding the sample, it was necessary to use a convenience sample as there was no databases combining information about human resources (HR) professionals and about HR departments, which would allow the use of random sampling. Even the Ministry of Labor's official databases do not specify the activities of human resources professionals, which precluded the definition of strata for their positions. To bypass this difficulty reaching recruitment professionals, we sought the collaboration of well-known professionals in this field who had more than 100,000 followers in social media like LinkedIn and Facebook, who agreed to use their influence to encourage others to respond the online questionnaire. These supporters publicized the study's purposes and the electronic address of the questionnaire, and around 600 people answered their call and responded the questionnaire during the two months it was active. Because of the means used, it is known that the presented data cannot be generalized and that the analyses are restricted to respondents.

The study was delimited to the São Paulo Metropolitan Area as in 2017, the year the study was planned, the area was home to 52% of the people with refugee status, indicating that recruitment and selection professionals in this location saw more frequently applicants who were immigrants seeking refuge and, consequently, the debate on the subject would be more established among them (CONARE, 2018).

The final version of the online questionnaire had 20 close-ended questions² – some questions allowed multiple marks while others limited the response to a single option. The questions were divided into three groups, besides the questions dealing with the respondent's identification: 1) knowledge of hiring procedures; 2) debate about refuge in the work environment; and 3) perception about competencies and characteristics of refugees and applicants for refugee status. Given some possible

² In the two questions organized as a matrix, each line was counted as a question, since in another format they might be presented one at a time. The questionnaire can be found in the Appendix to this article.

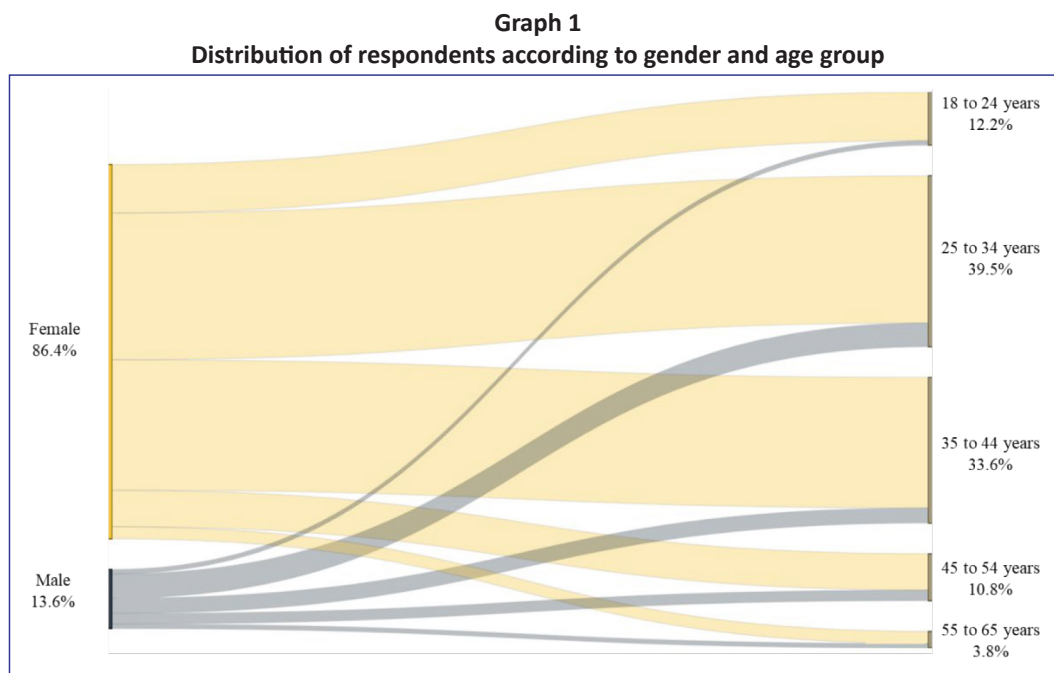
limitations from the collection of data via online questionnaires, discussed in Andrade (2020) and in Ilieva, Baron and Healey (2002), factors that might weaken the analyses were considered, and adjustments were made accordingly: 1) the distribution of questionnaires did not suffer from underrepresentation as the researched group has full access to the internet as part of their work; and 2) there was no misdirection about the public, whether in terms of respondents' position or location, since the instrument included questions that served to delimit the studied group, and only questionnaires that indicated a position related with "recruitment and selection" and a city in the São Paulo Metropolitan Area in the fields "function" and "work location" were validated – these questions were used for questionnaire validation. Thus, of the 600 questionnaires responded, 287 were ratified which were fully completed and followed the delimited points, while the ones responded by professionals in other occupations or from other locations were removed.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT PROFESSIONALS ABOUT HIRING PROCEDURES AND THE CHARACTERISTICS AND EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONALS

This section initially characterizes the respondents according to gender, age group, position, and the size of the firm they work for. Subsequently, their knowledge about hiring procedures and their perceptions about characteristics of immigrant professionals are presented.

Of the 287 respondents, the majority (86.4%) self-identified as female. With regard to age group, 39.5% of participants were aged 25-34 years, followed by those aged 35-45 years (33.6%).

Graph 1 presents this and other data about respondents' gender and age group³.



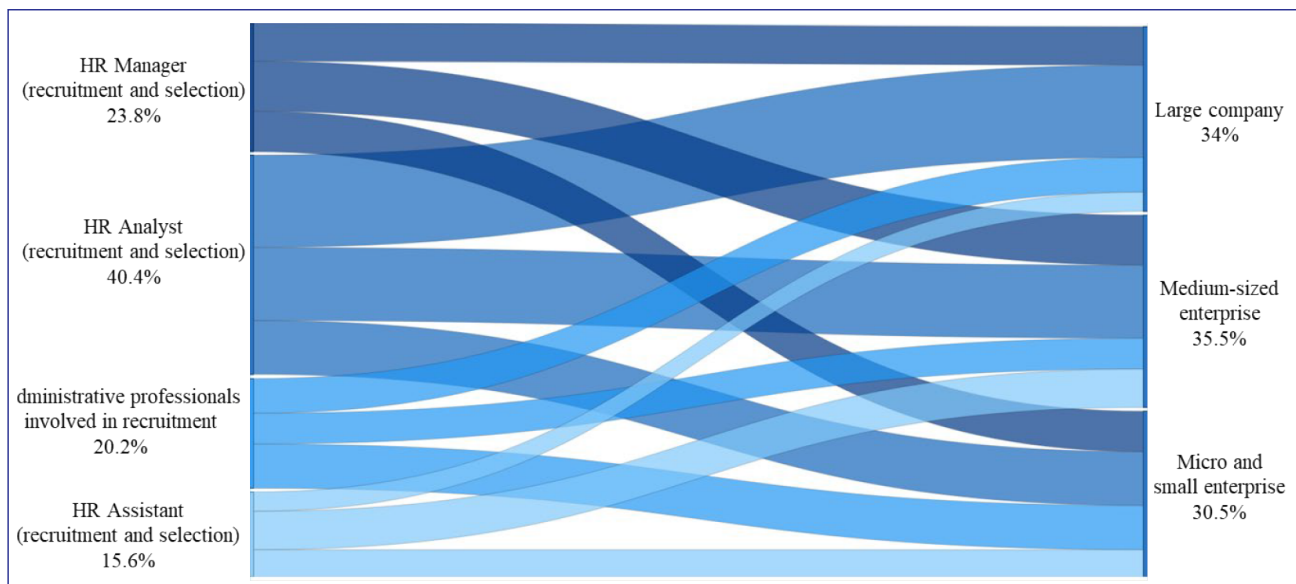
Source: Elaborated by the author.

³ For this representation, a Sankey diagram was used. It should be noted that the age group percentages (on the right) are the total ones, including both male and female respondents.

All respondents were asked about the position they occupied at the time of responses, and it was found that the majority worked as a recruitment and selection analyst, in 40.8% of responses, followed by recruitment and selection managers, in 23.3% of responses. As for company size, most respondents indicated that they worked at medium size companies (35.5%), followed by those working at large companies (34%). These stratifications by position and company size were not planned because there was no detailed data about the number of assistants, analysts or managers at the firms, though we consider that the predominance of more experienced profiles, i.e., analysts and managers, contributes for this study by showing the perceptions and professional knowledge of professionals with more influence on decisions about which candidate is selected, rendering a portrait that is closer to companies' regular decision-making.

Graph 2 shows what the respondents indicated about position and company size and illustrates their distribution.

Graph 2
Positions indicated by respondents and the size of the companies they work for

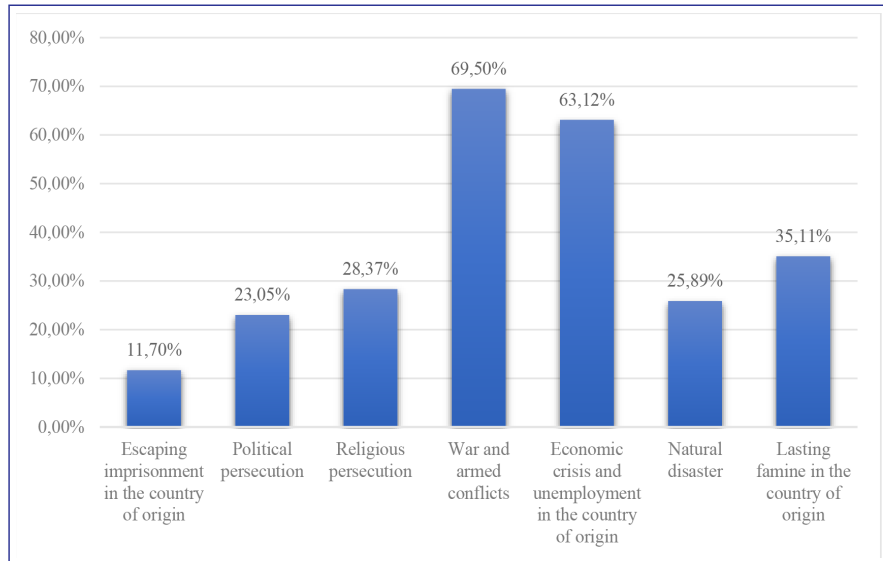


Source: Elaborated by the author.

Regarding the construction of the online questionnaire, in addition to the identification questions, three blocks of questions were designed in order to capture respondents' impressions: 1) knowledge of specific legislation and hiring procedures; 2) debate about refuge in the work environment; and 3) perception about competencies and characteristics of refugees and applicants to refugee status.

In the first block, the responses to the questionnaire about the criteria for granting refugee status suggest that most of the participant HR professionals do not master the legislation that sets the conditions which ensure refugee status to an immigrant: it was perceived that at least 63.1% of respondents confuse refugees with impoverished immigrants (Graph 3), since marking the item "economic crisis and unemployment in the country of origin" evidences that these respondents associate seeking refuge with economic migration, although they also marked the item "war and armed conflicts" (it should be noted that each respondent could mark up to three options in their response, thus the percentages do not total 100%). It is evidenced in the surveyed group that "armed conflicts" are consolidated as a cause for seeking refuge, though there is still the association of refuge with economic issues – unlike the national regulation, which restricts refugee status for those who: 1) have suffered persecution (less mentioned in this inquiry); 2) were at risk of death for living close to armed conflict zones; or 3) were subject to severe human rights violation.

Graph 3
Perception of respondents about the criteria for granting refugee status



Source: Elaborated by the author.

Recruitment and selection professionals were questioned about their knowledge of procedures for hiring refugees⁴ and, combining two response groups, it was found that 90.9% do not master such procedures for hiring professionals in this migration condition (Table 1). The sum of those who declared “not knowing” and “knowing partially” shows that it is not a consolidated information that hiring a professional who was granted refugee status follows the same procedures as with a Brazilian professional, according to the previous question that the term “refugee” is associated with other conditions and motivations for migration – a situation that might be detrimental to the professional during a selection process, possibly on the supposition of more bureaucracy and risks for the recruiter.

Table 1
Respondents’ knowledge of the legal procedures for hiring an immigrant seeking refuge

	%
Declares knowing the hiring procedures	9.06%
Declares not knowing the hiring procedures	63.07%
Declares knowing partially the hiring procedures	27.87%

Source: Elaborated by the author.

In the second block of questions the recruiters were also asked about this perception of greater bureaucracy and risk (Table 2). In their responses on how they perceived the subject in the work environment, 84.98% said that their colleagues consider the hiring procedures more complex, and 82.18% believe that their colleagues confuse the hiring of non-resident foreigners with that of refugees. Only 37.09% mentioned that their colleagues know where to find information about hiring non-Brazilian professionals.

⁴The question’s statement used the term “refugees”, albeit imprecise, as it was expected that it would be better understood by the target public.

The crisis of refugees was a subject among work colleagues, according to the responses of 56% of the surveyed professionals. Still in this set of questions, it is worth highlighting the number of professionals who demonstrated fear of audits by the Ministry of Labor and avoid hiring a refugee: 50.55% of the surveyed professionals believe that their colleagues avoid hiring refugees or immigrants and mention fear of audits as the reason.

Table 2
Mentions to behaviors and knowledge of work colleagues

Contexts presented to respondents	Mentions of agreement (%)	Mentions of disagreement (%)
Confuse hiring non-resident foreigners (who are still in their countries and need a work visa)	17.82%	82.18%
Believe that the legal procedures for hiring refugees are more complex	15.02%	84.98%
Know where to find information about hiring non-Brazilian professionals	62.91%	37.09%
Have said that they know the humanitarian crisis involving refugees	44%	56%
Have said that they fear audit by the Ministry of Labor and therefore avoid hiring a refugee	49.45%	50.55%
Have been interested in recommending hiring a refugee, but the hire was blocked by other organization levels	41.64%	58.36%

Source: Elaborated by the author.

After inquiring about knowledge of hiring and the presence of the subject in the work environment, in the third block, the survey sought to capture the stereotypes linked to professionals from different parts of the world. Checking the frequency of these views about immigrants was highly challenging. Considering the possibility of biases in a direct question, the study chose to design a question model which did not reveal directly that stereotypes were being approached. Thus, the inquiry was formulated as a matrix, where the statement contained the following description: “Mark characteristics and behaviors that, in your opinion, most represent professionals from each region of the world.” Seeing the matrix, the respondent would (or would not) mark characteristics and behaviors (column) with the origin of the hypothetical worker (line). The columns listed the following characteristics/behaviors: “ease of learning new functions”; “physical strength”; “ability to lead”; “accepts lower wages in the beginning”; “ability to communicate in English”; “agility in manual tasks”; “ability to work in a team”; and “creativity”. The lines referred to the places of origin of the hypothetical workers: Central America; North America; South America; Africa; Asia; Europe; and Middle East. In this question, based on its design as a matrix, both responded and non-responded items were counted, which allowed to infer how respondents perceived the frequency of particular characteristics/behaviors. This question model allowed capturing subjective notions about immigrants which are possibly sources of veiled (or even inconsistent) discrimination during recruitment and selection.

Table 3 presents the general mentions captured, evidencing the most common associations with professionals of each region.

Table 3

Perceptions of recruiters about the professional characteristics of immigrants according to their geographic origin

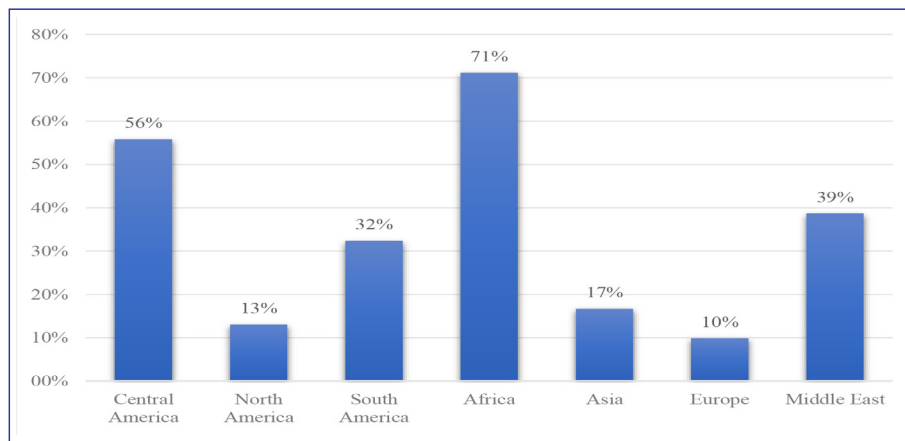
Region	Ease of learning new functions	Physical strength	Ability to lead	Accepts lower wages in the beginning	Agility in manual tasks	Ability to work in a team	Creativity
Central America	34.7%	55.9%	7.2%	66.2%	48.6%	27.9%	18.5%
North America	45.5%	13.1%	43.2%	14.4%	14.4%	27%	30.2%
South America	51.4%	32.4%	27%	41.9%	35.6%	45.5%	41%
Africa	35.1%	71.2%	11.3%	62.2%	48.2%	31.5%	20.3%
Asia	47.7%	16.7%	28.4%	25.7%	40.1%	26.6%	37.8%
Europe	51.4%	9.9%	49.1%	9.5%	14%	33.8%	36.5%
Middle East	38.7%	38.7%	20.7%	53.6%	45%	29.3%	24.3%

Source: Elaborated by the author.

As can be seen, mentions to “physical strength” were much more concentrated in African (71.2%) and Central American (55.9%) professionals, highlighted in Graph 4. Also in this item, hardly any mentions are made to professionals from Europe, indicated by 9.9% of respondents.

Graph 4

Mentions to physical strength among immigrant professionals according to geographic origin

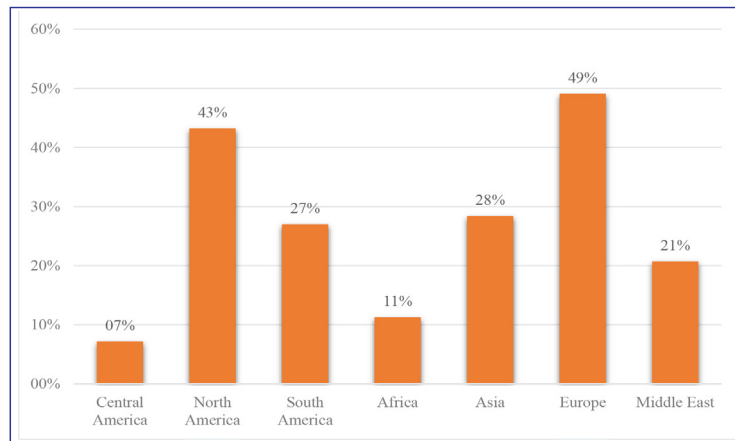


Source: Elaborated by the author.

Also noteworthy are the mentions about accepting lower wages: the respondents consider that Africans (62.2%) and Central Americans (66.2%) would be more willing to accept lower wages and that a much smaller number of Europeans would submit to this condition. This data connects with mentions to the “refugee” condition in the first block and allows inferring a rationale that links the perception of a refugee as an impoverished immigrant ready to accept less favorable conditions to ensure their sustenance. If the mentions to Europeans illustrate an opposite perception (9.5%), respondents possibly do not associate them with extreme poverty, and since they are not in great vulnerability, they are supposed to be in a better situation to negotiate wages.

If the mentions to “physical strength” and “lower wages” are more related with Africans and Central Americans, when the reference is “ability to lead”, the data reverses completely, and the mentions are concentrated in Europeans (49.1%), with little allusion to Africans (11.3%) and Central Americans (7.2%), as illustrated in Graph 5.

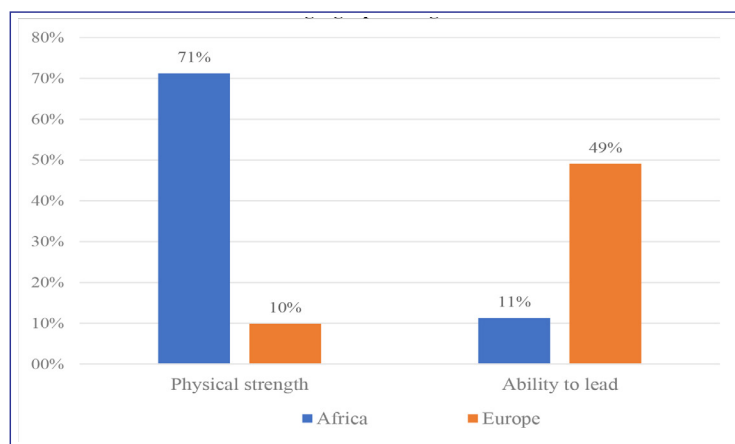
Graph 5
Mentions to “ability to lead” for immigrant professionals according to geographic origin



Source: Elaborated by the author.

The direct comparison between the mentions to “physical strength” and “ability to lead” (Graph 6) demonstrates the disparity in the perception of competencies between the different ethnic groups and points to the necessary reflection about how these mentions materialize in the business organizations on an everyday basis.

Graph 6
Comparison between the mentions to “physical strength” in immigrant professionals according to geographic origin



Source: Elaborated by the author.

While these responses cannot be generalized for the entire group of recruiters, it cannot be ignored that they point to a scenario in which African professionals, mainly, and professionals from other non-European peoples, tend to be restricted a few unskilled, low-paying activities. They also evidence the urgency to discuss the perpetuation of stereotypes, not considering that they might have emerged spontaneously and/or might be just personal conceptions of the respondents.

The term “perpetuation” must be used both to emphasize the circumstances of these responses and to refer back to the reflections presented earlier about the formation of the Brazilian labor market: as warned by Bento (2002), Jaccoud (2008), and Theodoro (2012, 2022), this origin was founded on the investment in ‘whitening’ policies that praised the European phenotype and dehumanized people of African descent and indigenous peoples soon after slavery became unfeasible. Over decades, theories were disseminated about the physiological and intellectual constitution of Africans compared to Europeans; public resources were invested to enable the entry of Italians only because of their skin color, and it was propagated that Brazilian

economic development was linked to the success of such whitening. The current responses of the recruiters demonstrate that this policy of valuing characteristics of European descent and devaluing experiences and behaviors of non-white peoples had persistent effects, and it is the case at hand that racism and the stereotypes built to privilege a social group can have effects, still today, on opportunities to enter a profession and on overcoming inequalities.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY TO UNDERSTANDING THE PRODUCTIVE INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS AND THE PARTICIPATION OF THE DIFFERENT ACTORS IN THIS PROCESS

With the purpose of capturing, among recruitment and selection professionals, the technical and subjective circumstances that might interfere with the validation of experiences and qualifications of immigrants seeking refuge, this study contributes for the field of administrative sciences and the field of migration studies by demonstrating that: 1) the inconsistent information in the business environment can raise the perception of risk for hiring immigrants, undermining these candidates even before their competencies are analyzed; and 2) the perpetuation of stereotypes related with professionals of African and/or indigenous (South and Central Americans) origin has possibly interfered with the perception of qualifications and competencies and with the allocation of these professionals, limiting them to low-paying, unskilled and non-leadership occupations.

Data from the first block of questions indicates that the participant recruitment professionals did not master the essential information about immigrants seeking refuge, confusing the criteria for legal status documentation, and ignoring that the procedures for hiring these persons would be the same as those for Brazilians, since the Brazilian legislation allows the issuing of a Work and Social Security Card for these professionals. It was also shown that while the respondent recruitment professionals are sensitive to the vulnerable condition of immigrants seeking refuge, they were not given or did not internalize the information that might contribute for the productive integration of these immigrants.

Along with these points, in the second block, the study captured how information circulated in the work environment, revealing other aspects of its inconsistency: if most of the recruiters consider that there are risks for the company in case some hiring procedure is misconducted, this possibly reflects on the refusal to include these people into selection processes. Even though totally unfounded, the mere existence of this suspicion and concern is enough to interfere directly with the selection process: it is not just a matter of analyzing the candidate's competencies, but one of assessing whether it is wise to initiate a hire that may harm the company and the recruiter's career. In this case, the mistaken information harms the immigrant professionals even before any evaluation of their competencies. Their experience would not even undergo assessment and would not be validated on account of barriers that were not even discussed. Therefore, it can be inferred that the greater exposure to the subject, as presented in the section about the theoretical choices, did not cover essential information about permanence criteria and hiring procedures.

This study advances in the comprehension of the phenomenon by showing that the information about immigrants seeking refuge needs to be enhanced and deepened and that the mere exposure to the subject, even if frequent, has not ensured an understanding of the legislation about it. This is not a trivial finding for two reasons: 1) the points questioned are part of recruiters' scope of activities, and therefore such information should be better disseminated; and 2) the circulation of inconsistent information has direct effects on the perception of risk and workload, affecting directly the hiring chances of immigrant professionals.

The key points in the first two blocks raise a relevant discussion for the administrative sciences, emphasizing that business organizations also need to reflect about the quality of the information circulating in their facilities if they wish to avoid internal losses during selective processes, and to think about their integration in the society since they contribute to perpetuating social inequality.

In the third block of questions, a scenario was also perceived in which competencies are largely overlooked and the aspects not controlled by the immigrant professional can be barriers to the validation of their experiences. It will never be possible to quantify the selection processes in which a professional of African origin ended up not being considered for a position of coordinator or manager, though data suggests that it can happen very frequently.

The attributes associated with professionals from the different regions evidence a mark that is far from overcome in Brazil: racism and its effects as organizers of inequalities. Certainly, none of the respondents would declare that they follow race stereotypes to define who occupies unskilled functions or leadership functions, though data shows that this way of defining is in force. The discrepancy in the mentions to physical strength and ability to lead clearly materializes that race stereotypes are unnamed presences in selection processes, entailing effects that the official demographic data released each year insistently bring into our view. Although this unnamed presence is known, its materialization, based on data presented here, is nonetheless appalling.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR NEW STUDIES

In sum, this study advances in understanding the productive integration of immigrants seeking refuge by bringing into discussion, in view of the presented data, that business organizations are not neutral in this cycle of delivery of social protection: if on the one hand they do not actively promote the protection of immigrants, on the other, they can fail to validate professional experiences by failing to reflect about the information circulating in their environments or about the stereotypes they maintain, concentrate or even promote.

This study has touched sensitive points of companies' functioning and has brought into debate what the participation of companies (or the lack thereof) might be in a wider cycle of social protection and integration of immigrants seeking refuge. It is noted that the perpetuation of stereotypes has no exclusive impact for the hiring company, which, by choosing badly or based on questionable premises, fails to hire good professionals and limits its own profit opportunities. The data leads to reflecting whether companies' functioning is restricted to the role of a passive receptor of professionals or if it is imbricated in a larger process, which may facilitate or raise barriers to the social protection and social and productive integration of people in high social vulnerability. While one may think that companies' participation cannot be understood as humanitarian, and while it is widely propagated that companies contribute to overcoming poverty, for example, by offering work positions, still one can imagine this relationship from another perspective: in regarding themselves as objective in their procedures, they fail to understand the stereotypes that their teams carry, and thus not only do they fail to perform humanitarian work, but they can also harm it. While companies are not expected to also engage directly in activities of social protection, prioritizing its productive and profitable activity, an unreflective functioning, which perpetuates race stereotypes, can be an obstacle to the social protection and integration of immigrants seeking refuge and to other groups in high social vulnerability.

Future studies can continue the exploratory stage of construction of such knowledge by expanding the respondent base, investigating, and comparing the circulation of information and subjective perceptions among recruiters from different locations.

Further research with a qualitative approach can capture the motivations, values, conflicts, and experiences of professional recruitment practice in aspects touching the migration question in order to gain further insights into the stigmas, stereotypes and flawed information that might potentially interfere with the productive integration of immigrants seeking refuge. The data of this study can also inform analysis about diversity and inclusion in public and private organizations.

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Leandro de Carvalho
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2848-7386>

Holds a Ph.D. in development and society from the University of Brasília (UnB); assistant professor in the Graduate Program in Human Rights and Citizenship at the University of Brasília. E-mail: leandro.carvalho@unb.br

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

Leandro de Carvalho: Conceptualization (Lead); Data curation (Lead); Formal Analysis (Lead); Investigation (Lead); Methodology (Lead); Resources (Lead); Validation (Lead); Visualization (Lead); Writing- original draft (Lead); Writing- review & editing (Lead).

APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

A version of the online questionnaire that was posted on the platform www.onlinepesquisa.com

The questionnaire was presented in a single page, and no rules on classification or the advancement of questions were programmed. Each respondent saw the questions with this font and these visual elements.

The first page contained a brief presentation of the study's intentions and the researcher's contact details. Then they were directed to the questions, listed as I present in the following pages.

In your opinion, which situations define the refugee status in Brazil?

- Escaping imprisonment in the country of origin
- Economic crisis and unemployment in the country of origin
- Political persecution
- Natural disaster (floods, drought, earthquakes, etc.)
- Religious persecution
- Lasting famine in the country of origin
- War and armed conflicts

Do you know the legal procedures for hiring a refugee?

- Yes
- No
- Partially

Manifest your agreement or disagreement regarding the statements below:

My colleagues in the area...	Agree	Disagree
"...believe that the legal procedures for hiring refugees are more complex"	()	()
"...know where to find information about hiring non-Brazilian professionals"	()	()
"...confuse the hiring of non-resident foreigners (who are still in their countries and need a work visa) with the hiring of refugees (who already have the documents and permanent residence in Brazil)"	()	()
"...have said that they fear audit by the Ministry of Labor and therefore avoid hiring a refugee"	()	()
"...have said that they know the humanitarian crisis involving refugees"	()	()
"...have been interested in recommending hiring a refugee, but the hire was blocked by other organization levels"	()	()

Mark the characteristics and behavior that in your opinion most represent professionals from each region of the world:

Don't worry about right or wrong answers. To answer this question, it is not necessary to have worked with professionals of other nationalities.

	Ease of learning new functions	Physical strength	Ability to lead	Accepts lower wages in the beginning	Ability to communicate in English	Agility in manual tasks	Ability to work in a team	Creativity
Central America								
North America								
South America								
Africa								
Asia								
Europe								
Middle East								

What is your function in the process of filling a vacancy?

- HR assistant (recruitment and selection)
- HR analyst (recruitment and selection)
- HR manager (recruitment and selection)
- Administrative professionals involved in recruitment and selection
- Leader or manager in other areas of the company, but you decide on hires for your team/department
- HR professional in other areas outside recruitment and selection
- A professional not involved in any of the HR areas

What is the size of the company you work for?

- Microenterprise
- Small enterprise
- Medium-sized enterprise
- Large company

In what city and state do you work?

- São Paulo - capital or metropolitan area
- São Paulo – non-capital city
- Another state? Type in here ____

What is your age?

- 18 to 24 years
- 25 to 34 years
- 35 to 44 years
- 45 to 54 years
- 55 to 65 years
- Over 65 years

Gender:

- Male
- Female