



**THE DYNAMICS OF CONTEMPORARY
INTERNATIONAL LABOR
IMMIGRATION: THE CASE OF RIO
GRANDE DO SUL, BRAZIL**

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A DINÂMICA DA IMIGRAÇÃO LABORAL INTERNACIONAL CONTEMPORÂNEA: O CASO DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL/BRASIL

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ABSTRACT

The topic of international migration has gained prominence in the international political agenda due to the intensity and spatial scope of current flows of migrant, as well as the diverse ways in which the dynamics of social and economic integration of immigrants in destination territories has occurred. Within this context, employment dynamics, work-related bonds, and income play crucial roles. This article examines the labor dynamics and the profile of international immigrant workers in the formal labor market in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, in the historical series of 2010, 2014, and 2018. This study takes an exploratory approach with a quanti-qualitative nature, using secondary data from the Annual List of Social Information (RAIS). Additionally, a qualitative analysis is conducted focusing on the process of recent immigrant integration into the formal job market. The findings reveal that since 2010, Rio Grande do Sul has attracted a significant number of international labor immigrants, primarily male Latin Americans, who work mainly in manufacturing industries, services, and commerce. The distribution of international immigrants within the state has been uneven, with notable concentrations in the Coredes regions: Metropolitan Delta do Jacuí, Serra, Vale dos Sinos, Vale do Taquari, Sul, Produção, and Fronteira Oeste.

Keywords: International migrations. Labor dynamics. Rio Grande do Sul

RESUMO

A temática das migrações internacionais tem ganhado relevância na agenda política internacional tanto pela intensidade e abrangência espacial dos atuais fluxos de migrantes, quanto pelos diferentes modos como tem ocorrido a dinâmica de inserção social e econômica dos imigrantes nos territórios de destino. Nesse processo, a dimensão do emprego e dos vínculos e renda do trabalho são importantes elementos a considerar. Neste sentido, o artigo analisa a dinâmica laboral e o perfil dos trabalhadores imigrantes internacionais inseridos no mercado formal de trabalho no estado do Rio Grande do Sul – Brasil, na série histórica de 2010, 2014 e 2018. O trabalho caracteriza-se como um estudo exploratório, de natureza quanti-qualitativa, e foi realizado com base em dados secundários provenientes da Relação Anual de Informações Sociais (RAIS), seguido de análise qualitativa tendo como foco o processo de inserção dos imigrantes recentes no mercado de trabalho formal. Observa-se que desde 2010, o Rio Grande do Sul tem atraído um contingente significativo de imigrantes laborais internacionais, especialmente latino-americanos do sexo masculino, que atuam sobretudo na indústria de transformação, serviços e comércio. A distribuição dos imigrantes internacionais tem sido desigual no território sul riograndense, e os imigrantes têm se localizado notadamente nas regiões dos Coredes: Metropolitano Delta do Jacuí, Serra, Vale dos Sinos, Vale do Taquari, Sul, Produção e Fronteira Oeste.

Palavras-chave: Migrações internacionais. Dinâmica laboral. Rio Grande do Sul

INTRODUCTION

The subject of international migration is contemporary, complex, and challenging. With distinct characteristics over time and space, it is a phenomenon that is inherent to human history and, in general, closely linked to the core of the capitalist system in such a way that, during periods of dynamic economic transformations, motivations for migration and patterns of mobility and displacement also undergo changes.

In comparison to previous centuries, new dynamics have emerged in contemporary times. Whereas in the past, the flow of people across national borders followed a North-South and then South-North and East-West patterns, today this circulation happens in all directions, including South-South.

Brazil has become a destination for international migrants, particularly over the last decade. Between 2011 and 2018, the country received 774.2 thousand immigrants, primarily from countries in the so-called Global South. Among the Brazilian states that have received international immigrants during this period, Rio Grande do Sul ranks fourth in the number of work authorizations granted to immigrants, totaling 8,028 authorizations (CAVALCANTI *et al.*, 2019).



Considering this context, this study aims to analyze the profile and socio-spatial integration dynamics of international immigrant workers in the formal labor market in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. The analysis is based on secondary data obtained from the Annual List of Social Information (RAIS), provided by the Brazilian Ministry of Economy (BRASIL, 2019). The secondary data were organized according to the regionalization of the Regional Development Councils (Coredes) of Rio Grande do Sul, in order to observe the presence of international immigrants and how exactly their social integration occurs in the different regional development planning regions of the state.

Building upon the theoretical assumptions of Brettel and Hollifield (2015), who argue that migration encompasses all dimensions of social existence and therefore requires an interdisciplinary approach, this study seeks to understand the main characteristics and elements that explain the spatial distribution dynamics of contemporary international migrant workers in Rio Grande do Sul. Graphs and cartography were employed as analytical tools to illustrate the profile of immigrant laborers and the representativeness of medium-sized cities located in different regions of Rio Grande do Sul, which serve as focal points of greater concentration of international migrants with formal employment ties. The aim is to examine the extent to which the presence and activities of international migrants in these regions has contributed to the development process. Given the social and economic importance of the current international immigration trends in the state, it is argued that regional planning processes carried out by the Regional Development Councils should take into account the presence and contributions of international migrants.

This article is structured into four main parts, in addition to this introduction. Next, a brief literature review is provided on the current context, modes, and meanings of international migration. Subsequently, the methodological procedures used in the work are presented, followed by the results of our analysis, providing a detailed characterization of the volume of immigrants, their nationalities, demographic profiles, employment ties by economic sector, and regional distribution within the territory. Finally, the article concludes with some final considerations.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Population movements have been an integral part of human history. When considering only the contingent of the world population that crosses national borders, it exceeds 270 million people, which represents 3.5% of the world population. In 1970, this representation was 2.3% (POVOA NETO, 2020). Currently, the global population in a situation of international human mobility would constitute the fifth largest country in the world.

The forms of migration, as well as the stimuli for this “way of being and existing in the world” (HANDERSON, 2018), vary over time and space. In the case of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, international migratory flows date back to the 19th and 20th centuries when the arrival of Europeans of Portuguese, German, Italian, Spanish, among other origins predominated. These had the aim of populating the lands in southern Brazil based on small family-owned properties, as part of a policy of “whitening” the population at the time (SEYFERTH, 2001). In contemporary times, the diversity of areas of origin of migrating peoples has expanded. Latin Americans, Africans, and Asians contribute significantly to the composition of groups seeking to live in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. According to UEBEL (2015), the migration boom of the 21st century places Brazil and, within it, Rio Grande do Sul on the international agenda of migrations as established destinations and routes. As in the past, today is no different, and the reception and settlement of immigrants is not homogeneous across space, and the search is for places that offer opportunities for integration.

Increasingly, spatial economies have become differentiated due to specialization, accentuating inequalities. These contradictory processes gestate at the core of the world-system, which gained viability from the 1970s with the configuration of what Milton Santos (2006) called the technical-scientific-informational milieu. The growing integration of science, technology, and innovation into productive systems, as well as territories, privileges the economic and political insertion of luminous spaces, thereby facilitating the flow of their products into the globalized world. During this period, the flow of resources, goods, information, and people intensified, simultaneously reducing distances between territories.

In this context, certain regions make the uses of their territories more dynamic in the framework of the social division of labor, thereby promoting more employment opportunities. This dynamism is also related to the history of these spaces and the uneven accumulation of time.



More than historical-geographical legacies, these spatial differentiations are perpetually being reproduced, sustained, undermined, and reconfigured through political, economic, and socioecological processes that occur in the present moment (HARVEY, 2004).

Within the world-system and its international division of labor, in Brazil, enterprises focused on agricultural commodities for export have been stimulated since the conservative modernization period and have gained strength in the 21st century (DELGADO, 2012), including in this dynamic the mobilization of a cheap labor force (CASTLES; MILLER 2004; ALMEIDA, 2009).

Within a context of permanent reproduction and reconfiguration of spatial differentiations (HARVEY, 2004), the presence of international labor in small and medium-sized cities in the state of Rio Grande do Sul is strongly related to industrial activities linked to agricultural businesses. With globalization, there has been a repositioning of urban spaces inside the hierarchy of economic, political, regional, national, and global powers, in which small urban centers, or “downscaled cities”, play a part in the process. Around the globe, international immigrants are increasingly becoming significant actors in the economic and political restructuring of cities (SCHILLER; ÇAGLAR, 2011), a phenomenon present, for example, in the Vale do Taquari region in Rio Grande do Sul since the second decade of the 21st century (CAZAROTTO; MEJÍA, 2018).

Pereira (2019) studied the transformations of small and medium cities in the state of São Paulo associated with the activities of Brazilian agricultural business within the context of changes resulting from globalization and the integration of immigrant labor into the dynamics of the international division of labor. In a similar line of analysis, Baeninger (2012) states that, as localities become integrated into the global market logic, there is a redefinition of development dynamics and constitution of the labor market, an increased intensity and diversity of migration, and alterations in the distribution of migration spaces. The routes and directions of national and international migratory flows have changed, and “small and medium-sized cities have become an important part of regional dynamism” (BAENINGER, 2012, p. 60).

According to Demétrio (2017), transformations in local and regional economies based on the export of agricultural commodities, produced within urban-regional arrangements, create productive spatial circuits inserted into transnational spaces of commodity production.



In this sense, some of the transnational productive spaces have also become transnational spaces of migratory diaspora. The construction of a global labor market and transnational citizenship are hallmarks of the current world-system. The international migrant is now understood in the context of their multiple relationships – family, economic, organizational, religious, and social – both locally and globally. As they establish themselves in a place and maintain strong connections with their homeland, while having multiple affiliations, they contribute not only to their own development but also to that of the host locality (RAMOS, 2012).

International human mobility, including the labor force, accompanies the major restructuring of capitalism that began in the 1970s, characterized by the productive restructuring within urban centers (PIORE, 1979). In the 21st century, these changes connect all systems of cities of different scales, but capital is selective and concentrates in places where the technical conditions exist.

Furthermore, in the globalized world, there is increasing pressure on companies and countries to remain competitive, and one solution has been to reduce costs. To Sassen (2010), this variable can contribute in giving rise to conditions that demand the recruitment of immigrant workers at low wages, which is only reinforced by the weakening of labor unions.

When analyzing the phenomenon of international migration in the 1970s, French geographer Pierre George examined the category of foreign workers. He explained that they fill gaps detrimental to the functioning of the economic system while seeking to secure a means of livelihood for themselves and their families, as they have little to no hope of doing so in their country of origin. They are temporary immigrants, brought in through a contract in the labor market (GEORGE, 1977, p. 13). According to the author, receiving countries benefit from a workforce created outside their borders and have an abundant labor supply for jobs that nationals may not be willing to perform.

Damiani (2011) argues that migration needs to be understood not only as human movement, but also as the geographical irradiation of an economic system. In the past, it served the reproduction of the workforce on rural properties, and today it serves national and transnational companies. Sayad (1998) also argues that the main reason behind the permanence of a foreigner in the immigration location is work; therefore, their presence is of a temporary nature. Work is what allows the immigrant to exist. Not just any work, but work specifically for immigrants.



According to Piore (1979), immigrants adapt more easily to the conditions of the intensive labor market. Many local workers reject such positions because they often offer low wages, low status, and limited possibilities for career advancement. However, these positions are attractive to immigrants when they envision the possibility of earning more than in their home country. The author referred to this type of job position as secondary, differentiating it from primary positions, which he characterized as more skilled, and possessing promotion and career mechanisms. Piore (1979) also analyzed that employers and job positions are strategic elements in explaining massive immigrant flows.

This theoretical framework contributes to understanding the reality of recent international migratory flows to Rio Grande do Sul, considering the dynamics of labor integration into the formal labor market.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The aim of this study is to conduct an exploratory study that combines quantitative data obtained through statistical methods with qualitative analysis, focusing on the process of integrating recent immigrants into the formal labor market in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. According to Gil (2019, p. 26),

exploratory research is conducted with the objective of providing a general, approximate understanding of a particular phenomenon. This type of research is particularly useful when the chosen topic is underexplored, and [...] the final outcome of this process becomes a clearer problem that can be further investigated using more systematic procedures.

Empirical research that analyzes the specificity of labor market integration and socioeconomic status of international immigrants in the state of Rio Grande do Sul are still limited. Therefore, this study explores secondary data collected from the Annual List of Social Information (RAIS), provided by the Brazilian Ministry of Economy (BRASIL, 2019), with the purpose of understanding the arrival of international immigrants and their employability during the historical series of 2010, 2014, and 2018.

Data collection took place between 2019 and 2020, but the data pertains to the period between 2010 and 2018. The data were organized in electronic spreadsheets, from which tables, graphs, and maps were created and will be presented in the next section.



The cartography of the spatial distribution of formal employment ties of foreign immigrant workers in Rio Grande do Sul from 2010 to 2018 was constructed based on the information present in the RAIS for each municipality in the state. The following intervals were used: Zero immigrants, 1 to 45 formal contracts, 46 to 154 formal contracts, 155 to 307 formal contracts, 308 to 1,170 formal contracts, and 1,171 to 3,798 formal contracts. The Jenks (1963) optimization, a classification method known as “natural breaks”, was used to define the classes. This method minimizes the sum of the variances within each class, meaning that data were divided in classes which limits possess relatively large differences in values. The statistical calculation for this classification was automatically performed using the QGIS geoprocessing software, based on the 2010, 2014, and 2018 data from RAIS. For data analysis, on the maps, we considered municipalities that had formal work contracts for international immigrants.

The approach used in this study also included an analysis on how international immigrants integrate into the labor market in Rio Grande do Sul, aiming to highlight not only absolute growth in terms of quantity, but also relative growth in terms of proportion, and in which cities these occurred.

In the next section, we present the profile and analysis of the labor dynamics of international immigrant workers in the formal labor market in the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

STATEWIDE PANORAMA OF THE LABOR DYNAMICS OF INTERNATIONAL IMMIGRANTS

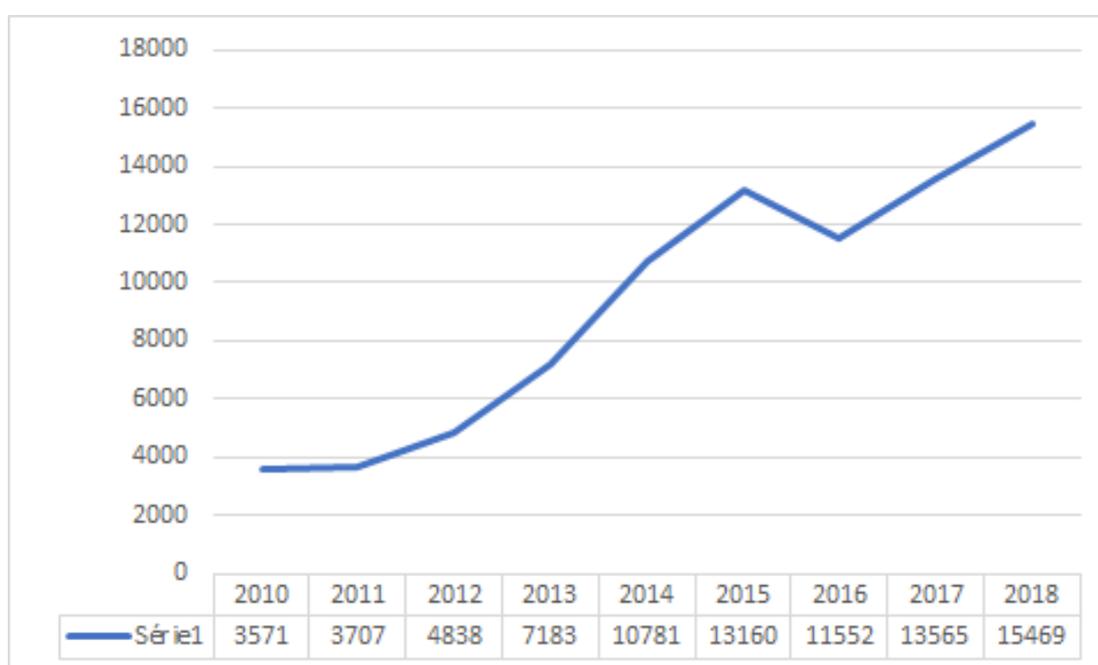
Since 2010, Rio Grande do Sul has attracted a significant contingent of immigrant workers, except for 2016, with an average yearly growth rate of 17.7%. This rate is higher than the national rate (10.6% in the same period), highlighting that the state has been one of the preferred destinations for immigrants seeking work opportunities. In 2018, it ranked fourth among states with the highest number of registered foreign workers (10.9% of the total), following São Paulo, Santa Catarina, and Paraná, respectively. Together, these four states employ 73% of all immigrants in the country.

In 2010, the first year of the historical series under analysis, the number of international immigrants with formal employment contracts was only 3,571, a figure that remained stable in 2011. However, from 2012 onwards, the rate of increase in immigrant labor became significant, with



steady and accelerated growth between 2012 and 2014. In 2015, this growth rate slowed down but was still significant. In 2016, there was a decline in the number of employment contracts as many workers returned to the international migration flow. This decline may be associated with several factors, such as disappointments with initial expectations, the economic and political crisis faced by the country since mid-2014, and the devaluation of the Brazilian *real*¹. After 2017, however, the number of formal employment contracts once again started to increase, reaching 15,469 in 2018 (Graph 1).

Graph 1 | International immigrants in the formal job market in Rio Grande do Sul – 2010 to 2018

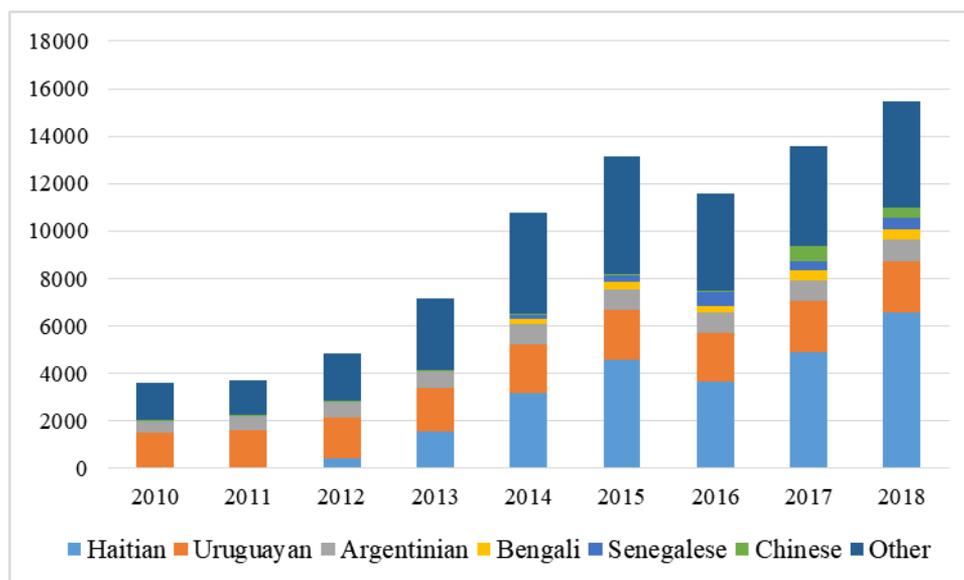


Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the RAIS, 2010-2018.

In 2018, the main foreign nationality in the formal labor market in Rio Grande do Sul was Haitian, accounting for 42% of the total, followed by Uruguayan at 14%. The data indicates that Haitians, Uruguayans, Argentinians, Senegalese, Bengali, and Chinese are among the main nationalities within the rankings of formal labor market integration in the state, representing 70.1% of the total (Graph 2). In 2010, the main nationalities were Uruguayan, Argentinian, Chilean, Paraguayan, and other Latin American nationalities, which together represented 67.1% of the total.

1 According to data from Banco Central (2020), the average exchange rate in January 2012 was R\$ 1.79 for each US dollar. By December 2015, the average exchange rate had risen to R\$ 3,87 per US dollar. It is also worth mentioning that in September 2015, this rate reached R\$ 4,19 per US dollar, indicating a significant appreciation of the US dollar against the Brazilian real during the mentioned period.

Graph 2 | Main nationalities of immigrants in the formal labor market in Rio Grande do Sul – 2010 to 2018



Source: Annual List of Social Information (RAIS). Survey data.

It is important to highlight that the profile of immigrants in terms of nationality changed during the analyzed period. In 2010, there were no records in the RAIS of labor immigrants of Haitian origin. In the following year, there were 2 records; from 2014 onwards, the Haitian nationality surpassed Uruguayan, which had been leading the ranking until then. It is worth mentioning that the Haitian nationality constitutes the only group of immigrants that, for humanitarian reasons, was protected by Resolution No. 97, of January 12, 2012, of the National Immigration Council (CNIg) (TONHATI *et al.*, 2016). Haitians were granted a special, humanitarian visa, granted to individuals who had no criminal records. This regular immigration channel enabled them to obtain a work permit and an Individual Taxpayer Registry (CPF, *Cadastro de Pessoa Física*).

In terms of gender, as shown in Graph 3, male foreign workers predominate throughout the analyzed period. In fact, the number of male workers increased during the period compared to female workers. In Rio Grande do Sul, the percentage of female immigrants in the labor market decreased significantly between 2011 and 2015, from 35% to 24%. However, gradually, the percentage increased in the following years. In 2018, 28% of registered immigrants in the formal labor market in Rio Grande do Sul were women.

Graph 3 | Proportion of migrants in the formal labor market in Rio Grande do Sul, by gender – 2010 to 2018



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the RAIS, 2018.

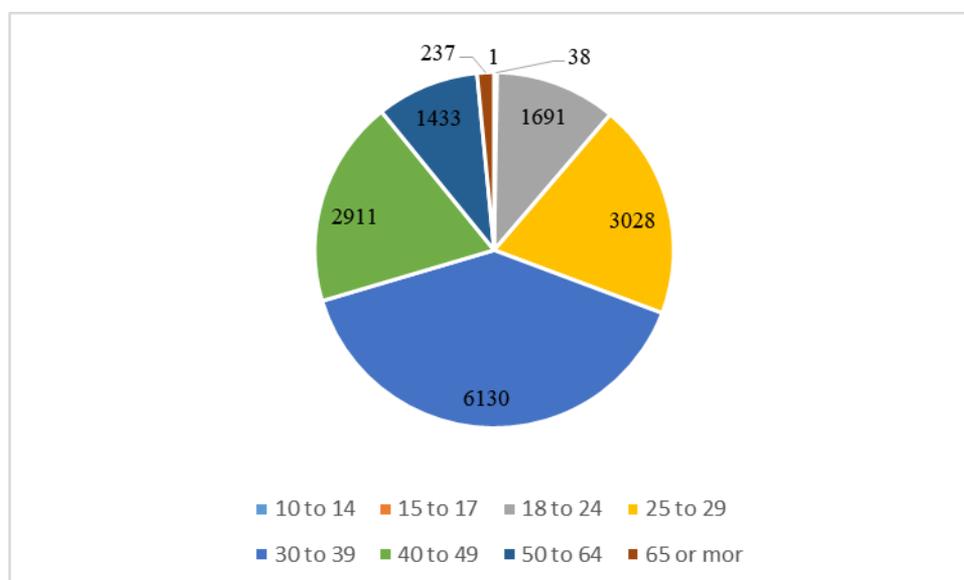
These data corroborate what Cavalcanti (2019, p. 59) presented, stating that “the profile of the workforce that entered the country [from 2011 to 2018] was mostly composed of men—especially until 2014, when the labor market was experiencing strong dynamism”.

According to the account of a Haitian immigrant in the present research, in the city of Lajeado, “the men have managed to save money from 2 to 3 years of work and brought their family members”. He also narrates that currently many women are unemployed, as “the husbands saved money to bring them along, but companies do not hire them.” One of the reasons given by the companies is that the women start working and soon become pregnant. They have been separated for a long period and, when reunited, want to start a family as a way to compensate the time apart.

Baeninger and Peres (2017) also observed that among the elements of Haitian immigration to Brazil is the lower presence of women in the migratory flow, although they have also noted that in recent years, there has been an increase in the migration of women with permanent visas, as indicated by the data on employed labor in Rio Grande do Sul. Additionally, the authors observed that Haitian women entering Brazil do not have sole roles as spouses or daughters.

Regarding the age group of international immigrants with formal employment in Rio Grande do Sul, the highest concentration in 2018 was found in the 30 to 39 age range, accounting for 40% (Graph 4). However, the sum of the groups ranging from 18 to 49 years of age accounts for 90% of all individuals, demonstrating that, in terms of age, they are similar to the authorizations granted between 2011 and 2018 in Brazil, where 92.6% of the granted authorizations were directed at individuals in the range of 20 to 49 years of age (CAVALCANTI, 2019). This fact points to the labor profile of this population, with a promising age composition for a state or region. It is a workforce created outside national borders that benefits the receiving country by providing an abundant labor force for jobs that nationals are unwilling to perform (GEORGE, 1977).

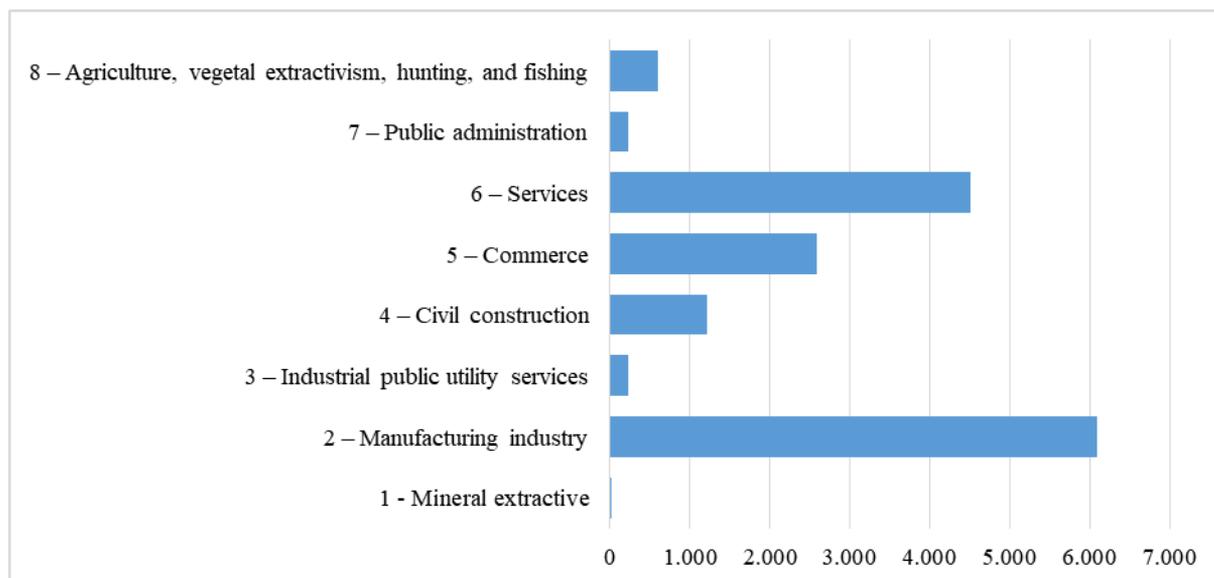
Graph 4 | Age groups of international migrants with formal employment in Rio Grande do Sul in 2018



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the RAIS, 2018.

Regarding the activity sectors, the data from Graph 5 indicate that, in 2018, 39% of formal foreign workers in Rio Grande do Sul were employed by the manufacturing industry, followed by 29% in services, 17% in commerce, and 8% in construction. On the other hand, the sectors of public utilities and public administration employ the least foreign labor.

Graph 5 | International immigrants with formal employment in Rio Grande do Sul, by activity sectors, in 2018



Source: Annual List of Social Information (RAIS). Survey data.

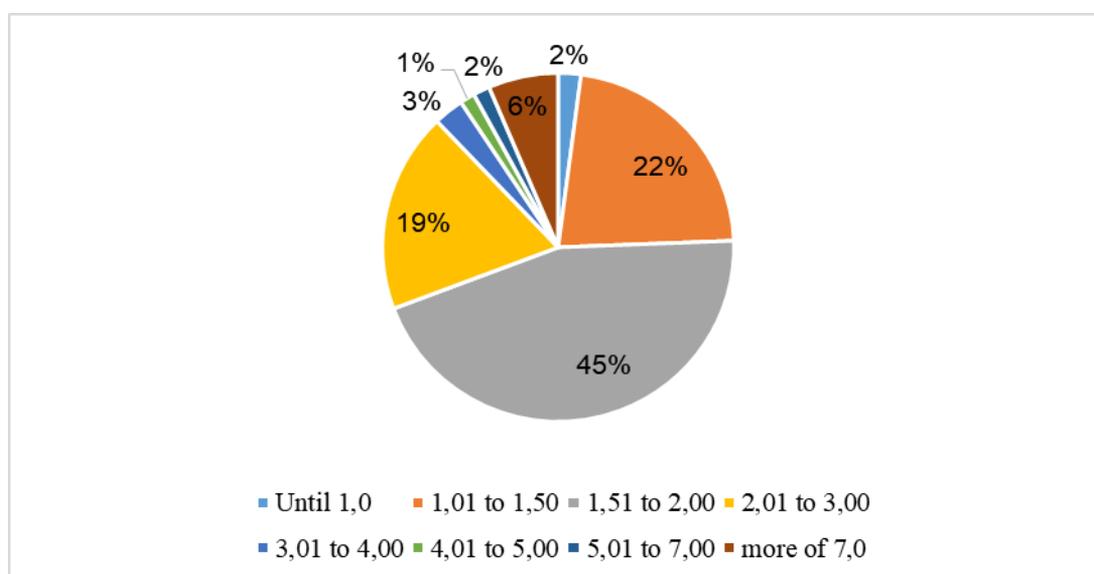
However, when we observe regional particularities (Figure 2, presented in the next section), we can notice distinct characteristics. For example, in the Corede Sul, Corede Fronteira Oeste, and Corede Metropolitano Delta do Jacuí, 89.7%, 86.9%, and 86.5% of labor immigrants in 2018, respectively, were linked to activities in the tertiary sector (public utilities, civil construction, commerce, services, and public administration). On the other hand, in Vale do Taquari, Serra, and Corede Produção, the majority of international immigrants were employed in the manufacturing industry (82.6%, 64.1%, and 61.7%, respectively). In Corede Campos de Cima da Serra, 63% of labor immigrants were involved in agriculture, vegetal extractivism, hunting, and fishing.

Furthermore, these data corroborate what was observed by Baeninger and Peres (2017), who emphasized that in Brazil, although the number of formal positions occupied by Haitian immigrant has increased, many still find themselves in precarious activities or even unemployed, as the majority (75%) work in the production of industrial goods and services, repair and maintenance, general services, or sales, earning up to two minimum wages.

In Rio Grande do Sul, approximately 69% of migrants earned up to two minimum wages in 2018. Regarding average wages, Graph 6 indicates that 45% of international immigrants with formal employment in Rio Grande do Sul received between one and a half and two minimum wages. In

that year, the national minimum wage was R\$ 954.00, which means this group earned between R\$ 1,431.01 and R\$ 1,908.00. Additionally, 22% earned from one to one and a half minimum wages (from R\$ 954.01 to R\$ 1,431.00), and 19% received from two to three minimum wages. According to data from the Continuous National Household Sample Survey (PNAD), for the third quarter of 2019, the average income of workers aged 14 and over in Brazil was R\$ 2,223.00 (IBGE, 2019). In contrast, 6% received more than seven minimum wages.

Graph 6 | Average remuneration, in minimum wages, of international immigrants with formal employment in Rio Grande do Sul - 2018



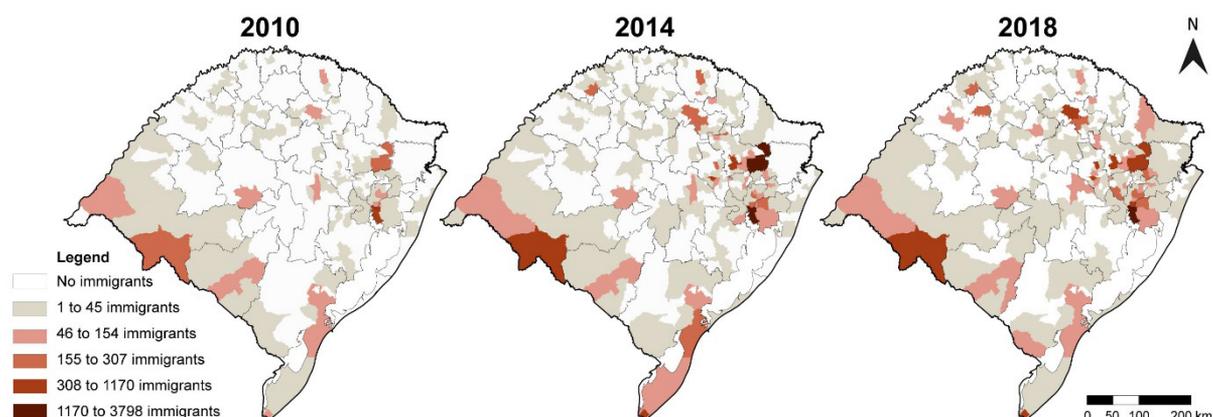
Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the RAIS, 2018.

In short, in Rio Grande do Sul, the demographic profile of international immigrants with formal employed consists of mostly men, in what is considered an economically active age range between 18 and 49 years old, and who are mainly employed by the manufacturing industry, services, and commerce sectors.

SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF INTERNATIONAL LABOR IMMIGRATION IN RIO GRANDE DO SUL: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN THE PERIODS OF 2010, 2014, AND 2018

In search of work and new living conditions, Rio Grande do Sul has become a destination for a significant contingent of international immigrants. According to data from the RAIS, the spatial integration of international immigrant workers is not uniform among municipalities and among different Coredes regions in the state. Over the analyzed period, the dynamics have changed, and the characteristics of specific activity sectors maintain a close relationship with the economic characteristics of each region. Some municipalities that make up the Coredes Metropolitano Delta do Jacuí, Vale do Rio dos Sinos, Serra, Vale do Taquari, Sul, Produção, and Fronteira Oeste, have stood out in hiring immigrant labor (Figure 1).

Figure 1 | Distribution of international immigrants with formal employment in the municipalities and Coredes regions of Rio Grande do Sul – 2010, 2014, and 2018



Source: Annual List of Social Information (RAIS). Survey data.

According to data from RAIS, in 2010, there were 3,571 formal employment contracts for foreigners in Rio Grande do Sul. In 2014, this number was 10,681, and in 2018, it had increased to 15,467. Porto Alegre was the city that employed the most workers in 2018, with 3,798 job positions. When combined with other cities in the Coredes Metropolitano Delta do Jacuí and Vale do Rio dos Sinos, such as Canoas (which ranked third with 589 employment contracts), São Leopoldo, Novo Hamburgo, Esteio, Cachoeirinha, Gravataí, among others, it formed the largest area employing foreign labor, accounting for 40.2% of immigrants. This is different from 2014, when it employed 33.1%, and from 2010, when it employed 44.0%.

In second place is the city of Caxias do Sul, with 1,170 formal jobs for international immigrants. When combined with other municipalities in the Serra Coredes, such as Bento Gonçalves, Garibaldi (sixth place in the municipal ranking with 494 registered contracts), Farroupilha, Flores da Cunha, Serafina Corrêa, and Guaporé, among others, they represented 16.9% of the formal jobs for immigrants in the state of Rio Grande do Sul in 2018. Although this number is significantly less than in 2014, when the municipality of Caxias do Sul employed 1,424 workers and the Serra region represented 26.6% of the international workforce in the state, in 2010 it represented only 10.5% for the whole state.

According to Mocellin and Hérica (2018), the city of Caxias do Sul, from 2010 onwards, experienced migratory flows marked by the presence of predominantly Haitian and Senegalese international migrants motivated by the search for work. Haitians began arriving in Caxias do Sul in 2010 after the earthquake in Haiti. Senegalese migrants arrived in the region in 2012. They work in sectors such as metal-mechanic industry, meatpacking plants, construction, and various services. One characteristic of this migration is that it is mainly comprised of young individuals who are better able to adapt to the labor market and consequently send remittances to their country of origin. However, the (informal) street vending sector often becomes an alternative for this group, as it is a common practice in their home countries.

In fourth place, in the same year, the city of Lajeado, located in the Corede Vale do Taquari, had 515 formal employment contracts for international immigrants. When combined with the jobs registered in the surrounding cities belonging to the same regional Corede, namely Encantado, Arroio do Meio, Estrela, and Poço das Antas, the urban cluster accounted for 8.4% of the formal jobs for foreigners in the state, totaling 1,301 job positions. In 2014, the Vale do Taquari region accounted for 7.9% of the formal jobs for foreigners in Rio Grande do Sul, which is quite different from 2010, when it employed 4.3% of this population.

According to Cazarotto and Sindelar (2020), labor immigrants were attracted to the Vale do Taquari region by the manufacturing industries associated with the agricultural and food chains, especially in animal slaughter, meat processing, and dairy processing, due to the lack of local labor, as well as by the services sector. Particularly, during the years of 2012 and 2013, Haitian immigrants were recruited by local organizations in the state of Acre. Additionally, immigrants have taken up jobs that local residents find undesirable due to their perceived precariousness and low remuneration.

The city of Chuí, located on the border with Uruguay, ranks fifth in the ranking of cities with the



highest number of formal jobs for international immigrants (a total of 509 contracts in 2018). The city is part of the Corede Sul, which also ranks fifth in the state, totaling 877 contracts. Other cities that also stand out in the region are Pelotas, Rio Grande, and Jaguarão. The main nationality of immigrant workers in the region is Uruguayan, which can be explained by the proximity of the region to the country of Uruguay. Furthermore, the cities of Chuí and Jaguarão contain several duty-free shops, employing workers from the cities of Chuy and Rio Branco (neighboring cities on the Uruguayan side of the border).

The city of Passo Fundo, part of the Corede Produção, had 424 registered jobs (ranking seventh among municipalities in 2018), together with cities in its surrounding region in the Coredes Nordeste and Norte, such as Marau, Tapejara, as well as Erechim and nearby cities such as Estação, rank sixth in terms of urban clusters with formal employment links. They accounted for 7.9% of the formal job positions occupied by international immigrants in the state, totaling 1,217 formal jobs. In 2014, this cluster represented 8.4% and, in 2010, 4.8%. The contemporary integration of international migrant labor in Passo Fundo and surrounding cities (Marau, Tapejara, and Erechim), in the north-central region of Rio Grande do Sul, has been studied by Tedesco (2018) and Bertolini *et al.* (2016).

This selection of cities is due to the presence of agricultural-industrial networks – meatpacking plants where immigrants seek work, since 2007, such as in the case of Senegalese immigrants, with Passo Fundo being the epicenter. Upon arrival in the region, they circulate through this set of cities through networks of contacts with friends and family. This fact was narrated by a Senegalese migrant who stated, “I had a friend in Erechim, where I worked for a year in a construction company; then a friend told me to come to Tapejara, where there was work” (...) he also mentioned having a brother who resided in Erechim (BERTOLINI *et al.*, 2016, p. 71). According to the authors, since 2010, the municipality of Tapejara has been receiving hundreds of African immigrants, mainly from Senegal, to work in local industries. For Tedesco (2018), approximately 30% of the 1,100 Senegalese immigrants in this network of cities work in the Halal production lines, a symbolic field that modern and highly competitive markets, such as food, carry. This activity also carries a deep connection between the economic dynamics and the religious principles of Islam. In this sense, being a Muslim immigrant becomes a resource, or a type of social capital in service of economic and entrepreneurial capital – establishing new relationships between society and traditions.

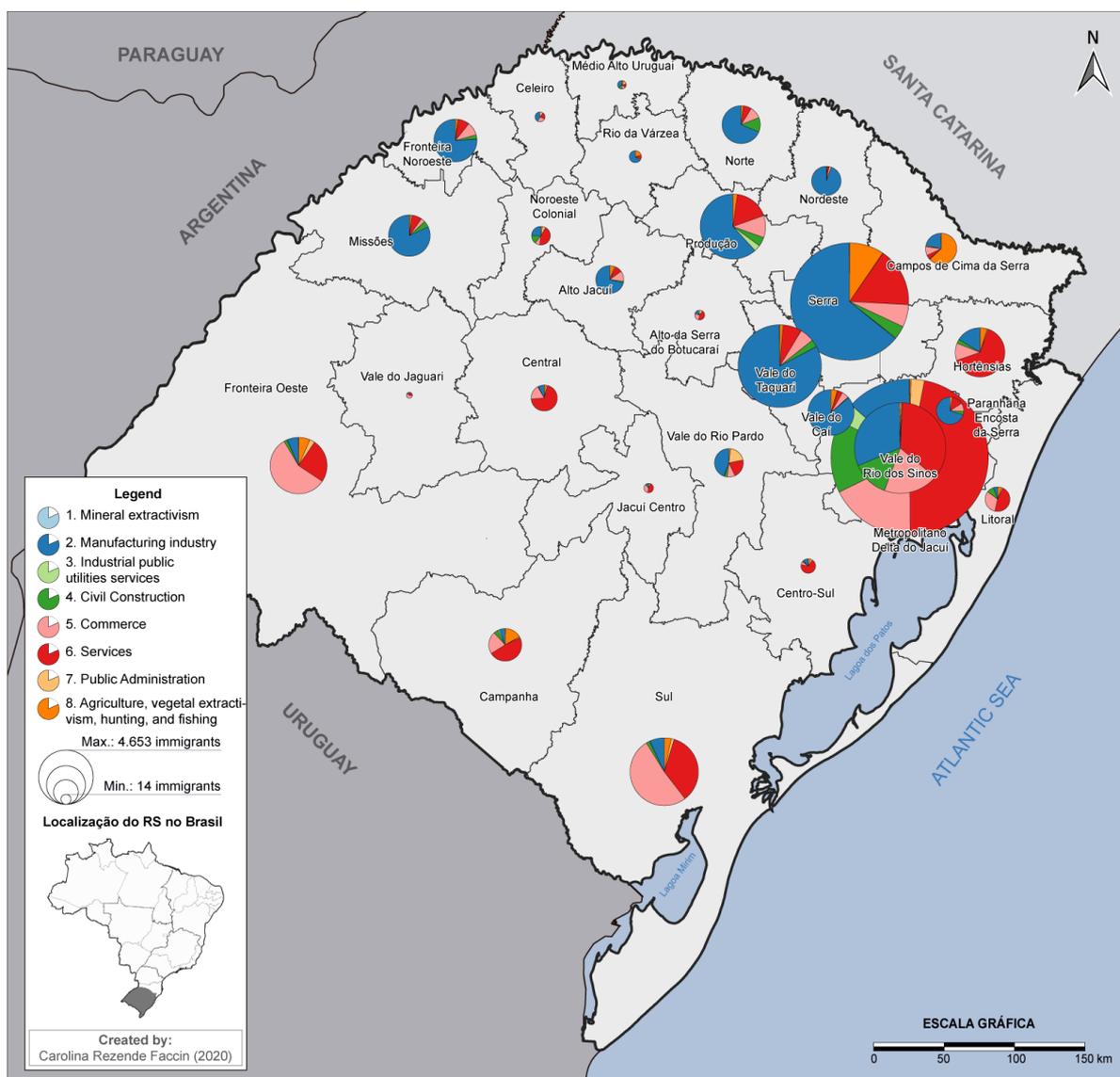
Thus, it can be noted that important changes occurred during the historical series of 2010, 2014,



and 2018. The city of Porto Alegre and its surrounding region always led in terms of absolute number of formal jobs for international immigrants. However, in relative terms, other regions of the state stood out, such as Caxias do Sul and its surrounding region, but mainly Lajeado and Passo Fundo and their respective regional surrounding cities. Therefore, over the years, the numbers found in the RAIS database indicate the internalization of immigrant labor, with a focus on their integration into small and medium-sized cities with formal employment links in the manufacturing sector, especially in poultry and swine industries.

Figure 2 shows in more detail the integration of international immigrant laborers, with formal employment links, according to the Coredes regions, including sectors of activity.

Figure 2 | Integration of international immigrant labor in Coredes by activity sector in 2018



Source: Annual List of Social Information (RAIS). Survey data.

In 2018, in the Corede Metropolitano Delta do Jacuí, which employs the most immigrant labor in the state, the sectors of service, commerce, and civil construction were the ones that hired them the most formally. The Corede Vale dos Sinos follows the same trend in terms of sectors, including 31% working in the manufacturing industry. Moving on to the axis that includes Coredes Serra, Vale do Taquari, Produção, Norte, and Nordeste, the predominance of formal jobs for immigrants remains in the manufacturing industry, with the main employer being the agro-industrial meat processing industry – meatpacking plants. In the Sul and Fronteira Oeste regions, formal employment links for immigrants are strongly related to the trade or commerce sector. Therefore, it can be observed that formal employment links reflect the characteristics of regional economies.

When considering the distribution of formal employment links to international immigrants, according to the Coredes regions, changes occurred in the concentration of jobs in the analyzed historical series of 2010, 2014, and 2018. In 2010, the Vale do Sinos stood out with 1,421 formal jobs, followed by Sul with 562, Serra with 374, and Vale do Taquari with 154. In 2014, the Corede Serra accounted for 2,874 job positions, Metropolitano Delta do Jacuí accounted for 2,765, Vale dos Sinos for 807, and Sul for 738. In 2018, Metropolitano Delta do Jacuí had 4,653 jobs, the Serra region had 2,616, Vale dos Sinos had 1,566, and Vale do Taquari had 1,301.

FINAL REMARKS

This article addressed the spatial labor dynamics and the profile of international immigrants in the labor market of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. The search for employment and new living conditions has driven human mobility worldwide. Rio Grande do Sul, which in the past had been a place for the settlement of European immigrants, now in the 21st century welcomes immigrants from the so-called Global South. With formal employment relationships, 70% of immigrants are of Haitian, Uruguayan, Argentinian, Senegalese, Bengali, and Chinese nationalities. Furthermore, over the analyzed period, the state of Rio Grande do Sul has consistently experienced growth in the number of immigrants entering the labor market, except for 2016.

Regarding labor dynamics, it was observed that employability is strongly related to regional economic peculiarities. In the regions of Metropolitano Delta do Jacuí and Vale dos Sinos, the focus



is primarily on the service and trade sectors. In the Coredes Serra, Vale do Taquari, Produção, Norte, and Nordeste, formal employment is predominantly found in the manufacturing sector, particularly in the meat processing industry. In the Sul and Fronteira Oeste regions, the commerce sector leads in terms of formal employment for immigrants.

The data from the RAIS database indicates a trend of immigrant labor market decentralization and internalization, with a significant integration of immigrants in small and medium-sized cities and formal employment in the manufacturing sector, particularly in poultry and swine industries. In terms of the profile of immigrants, the majority consists of male workers of economically active age, mainly working in the manufacturing industry, followed by services and other sectors.

The presence and contributions of international immigrants in Rio Grande do Sul, as observed through formal employment relationships, demonstrate the social and economic relevance of these individuals to the development process of this state.



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