

In Brazil, Hope Springs for a Month

Contributed by Brazzil Magazine
Sunday, 05 September 2004

The Brazilian consumer is a little more optimistic now than a month ago and believes that growth will continue. That was what a just-released survey by the Getúlio Vargas Foundation found out.

According to the survey, Consumer Expectations, the number of those interviewed who believed the economic situation had improved rose from 12.5% in July to 16.8% in August.

And adding that percentage to those who think the situation is stable, the result rose from 66.6% in July to 72.1% - the second highest it has ever been (the survey began in October 2002).

Expectations for the next six months were also better. The number of those interviewed who were pessimistic fell from 20.7% in July to 14.2% in August. And those who thought things were going to improve rose from 39.4% to 42.4%.

The survey visited 1,464 households in 12 state capitals between August 5 and 20. In the past the Consumer Expectations survey was quarterly, but now it is monthly.

Earlier this year, Brazil's government statistical bureau (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística) (IBGE), released its 2002 Household Survey (Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílio) (PNAD/2002) in which the residents of some 110,000 homes were interviewed.

The survey found that the vast majority of Brazilians, 87.6%, live in houses. Only 11.8% live in apartments. Fully 91% of the houses were built with brick and mortar, although many homes in the North region were wooden structures.

A total of 74% of the homes the survey visited were owned by the residing family, with 17% of the families visited renting their homes. Another 9% lived with other people or family.

A total of 89.3% of the families interviewed said they had satisfactory water services (running water piped into their homes). The highest level of satisfaction with water services were in the cities of São Paulo and Curitiba.

According to the survey, in 2002, 87.1% of residences had daily garbage collection, up from 76% in 1992.

With regard to jobs, the survey found that 29.1% of youths between the ages of 18 and 19 only worked and did not study. A total of 23.8% of youths between the ages of 15 and 24 had jobs with wages of up to a Brazilian minimum wage (US\$83 per month), while 16.1% of them had jobs with salaries of over two minimum wages.

There are striking disparities in educational opportunities among Brazilians. For example, the survey found that only 11.7% of Brazilian children aged up to three had access to daycare facilities.

Things improve in elementary education (ages 7 to 14 with an attendance rate of 96.9%) because it is mandatory and the government provides incentives, such as the School Scholarship program which pays parents to keep their children in school.

The high school attendance rate is around 75% for youths from low-income families, and rises to 97% for those from upper-class backgrounds.

Almost all those interviewed during the survey, 99.4%, said they had public illumination and electricity. Of those, 91.4% said they had a refrigerator, 89.9% had color television. But only 18% had a freezer, and 38.1% had a washing machine.

The survey also showed that the digital gap still exists in Brazil. Although slightly over 60% of all homes have hard line telephones, only 16.3% of the households surveyed had computers, and out of those only 12% had an internet link.

Income distribution is another problem that persists. The survey found that in spite of government attempts to reduce disparities a total of 40% of Brazilian households have to get by on half a minimum wage per month (US\$ 41.50) per person.

At the other extreme, 10% of Brazilians live on more than 9.6 minimum wages per month (almost US\$ 8,000).

The survey studied statistics and found that the number of marriages in 2002 was down 4%, compared to 1992. It also found that people are getting married at a later date.

In 1992, the average age women got married was 23.7 and men 27. In 2002, that had risen to 26.7 and 30.3, respectively. On the downside of marriage, separations were up 30.7% and divorces 55.9%, during the same period. The average length of a marriage in Brazil, according to the survey, is 10.5 years. The average age that women get a divorce is 35, and men 37.7.

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