

Housing for older people

Country paper Brazil

Background paper to “Housing for older people globally: What are the best practices? An ILC Global Alliance Discussion Paper”



Introduction

Brazil is undergoing profound socio-economic transformation, hugely driven by demographic change. While a decline in mortality which started around 1940 has led to increased life expectancy, the more drastic change has followed a stark decrease in fertility.¹ These changes in mortality and fertility led to a rapid increase in the proportion of the older population (60+ years) in the total population, from 4.7 per cent in 1960 to 10.8 per cent in 2010.² By 2050, the figure is expected to increase to 29 per cent.³ At the same time, Brazil has experienced more rapid urbanisation than many other countries; according to the 2010 census, 84.4 per cent of all Brazilians already live in urban areas with an even distribution of people by age.^{4,5}

Types of housing and their suitability

The majority of older Brazilians live in general housing with family members. Of all single households in Brazil (only 12.1% of all households compared to, for example, 30.2% in the UK), 40 per cent comprise people aged 60+.⁶ Brazilian Census data from 2010 indicates that over 90 per cent of Brazilians live in houses, followed by 9.2 per cent in apartments.⁷ The longitudinal SABE study in the city of Sao Paulo⁸ confirms the same distribution of house versus apartment dwellers among older persons, even in this extremely dense metropolitan area. Further, these data show a tendency towards more precarious tenure, with 16.7 per cent of older renters in 2010 compared to 4.7 per cent in 2000. A very low percentage – less than 1 per cent of older Brazilians – lives in institutional care (specialist housing).⁹ Overall there is a major lack of specialist housing for older persons.

In terms of the physical nature of housing, in 2000 only 32.4 per cent of all older people lived in a dwelling that was considered “adequate,” i.e. a permanent dwelling with access to the general water supply and sewage systems, or a septic tank, and to waste collection, and no more than two people per bedroom.¹⁰ Large regional differences exist, with only 10.2 per cent of older people in the north of the country living in adequate housing compared to 45 per cent in the southeast.¹¹

In addition to the general lack of adequate housing, the current housing stock and new developments are not accessible for people with reduced mobility. A study on universal design revealed that out of 14 construction companies studied, only four had considered offering accessible housing, with the high cost of doing so cited as the main impediment.¹² While most older persons live in single-level housing which is more accessible for those with mobility impairments, the interior layout of the home is less likely to be accessible. Apartments have a similar advantage of providing all facilities on one floor and offering greater accessibility to common areas, via an elevator, but apartments themselves may not be fully accessible. In *favelas*, dwellings are often located on hillsides, and are accessed by narrow passages and steep stairs. Barriers to mobility, and consequent social isolation, are a major issue for older residents. Poorer houses are also more likely to be in areas which are prone to landslides and other natural disasters.¹³

While the physical nature of the housing is not favourable, older people in Brazil are still likely to live with their family and thus to receive family support. In Rio de Janeiro, for example, 77 per cent of older people live with others.¹⁴ This traditional pattern of family support is likely to change, however, with a decrease in family size and an increase in female labour market participation. Middle-class older persons have alternative support

through porters/doormen and domestic workers. However, the segment of older Brazilians who can afford informal carers or domestic workers is challenged by the increase in salaries of domestic workers, which rose 6 per cent in 2012 as a result of the adjustment in the minimum wage.¹⁵ Costs are likely to increase further following recent legislation limiting daily hours of work and providing overtime pay for domestic help.¹⁶

Policy on housing and the provision of specialist housing

Brazil's 1994 National Policy on Older Persons¹⁷ defined a number of actions to be undertaken by states to provide suitable housing for older persons, including the development of group dwellings; home adaptation of existing and new housing for decreased physical capacities; improvement of access to adequate housing; and reduction of architectural and urban design barriers. In keeping with the Constitution of Brazil of 1988 (art. 230)¹⁸, the 1996 Implementation Plan of the policy distinctly favours "ageing in place"; it specifies that group dwellings (*asilos*) are intended only for older people without family, for those who have been abandoned by the family, or for older people who cannot satisfactorily meet their needs for shelter, food, health and social participation.¹⁹ In 2006, Sections 37 and 38 of the Statute of the Older Persons²⁰ decreed the right of older persons to adequate housing, in both general housing and specialist housing. Any older person who lacks family support or shelter is legally entitled to shelter in a group facility, and all institutional facilities are required to maintain adequate facility, boarding and care standards. Regarding general housing, the Statute requires that no less than 3 per cent of publically subsidised housing units be reserved for older persons, and re-iterates the requirement to remove environmental barriers, to older persons' independence, both architectural and urban design.

Thus, the legal framework exists within Brazil for the provision of appropriate and affordable housing for older persons. However, implementation has lagged considerably, with the exception of the *Minha Casa, Minha Vida* (My House, My Life) social housing programme which does set aside 3 per cent of units for older persons and persons with disabilities.²¹ Moreover, provisions for institutional care are lacking both in normative terms as well as in terms of implementation. A study published in 2011 shows there to be are only 218 public care institutions for the 20 million older Brazilians, and that 71 per cent of all municipalities do not have long-term care institutions for older people.²²

Innovative housing models

With strong economic growth and social progress in Brazil, housing initiatives are emerging that either improve the inclusivity of general purpose housing, or specifically target older persons and disabled persons – many of the latter being old. Concentrated in the wealthier southern states, these initiatives mainly involve public housing subsidised by the state and municipality. In the State of Sao Paulo, 7 per cent of new housing units are built for households with a disabled person, according to the norms of universal design.²³ In the cities of Sao Paulo (Sao Paulo)²⁴ and Maringá (Paraná)²⁵, a few subsidised adapted apartment buildings have been constructed for low-income older persons. In 2011, also in Sao Paulo, the State has built a housing complex of 20 universally designed houses for low-income older people, including a social centre with computers to ensure digital and social inclusion.²⁶ Within the "Age-Friendly Sao Paulo"²⁷ state programme announced in 2012, engaged municipalities may elect to implement one or more specific housing initiatives intended to increase the stock of apartment buildings for older persons, to

promote adaptations to improve accessibility within existing units, and to stimulate construction of universal design social housing. To ensure that municipal commitments are followed by action, the State is monitoring implementation with objective indicators.

Besides measures to improve access to appropriate and affordable housing, initiatives exist to increase the age-friendliness of services that allow older persons to “age in place” in their current dwellings. With funding from the Bradesco insurance company in the cities of Rio de Janeiro²⁸ and Sao Paulo²⁹, the Age-Friendly Porter training programme educates porters in apartment buildings on issues such as falls prevention and accessibility of buildings, and empowers them to engage with building owners to reduce barriers and improve the facility for older people. A caregiver training course offered by the *Centro de Estudo e de Pesquisa do Envelhecimento* (Centre for Study and Research on Ageing) in Rio de Janeiro provides instruction on personal care and safety of older persons to a clientele that includes domestic workers.³⁰ A pilot project subsidised by the Santander Bank in a *favela* in Rio de Janeiro is training members of the community to become paid caregivers of vulnerable, mobility-impaired older persons.

In summary, the combination of demographic imperatives, a favourable economic and social context, and the existence of good models support current efforts in Brazil to provide appropriate and affordable housing for older adults.

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