

Your World, My World

Country Profiles

Brazil



Photo: Julio Etchart/Oxfam GB

Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world - more than 35 times bigger than the UK. Brazil's people come from all over the world. Many are descendants of Portuguese colonisers who first arrived in Brazil in 1500. Others are descended from slaves who were brought from Africa to work on sugar and coffee plantations during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The smallest ethnic group is the indigenous Indians, the original inhabitants of Brazil, who were almost wiped out by the Portuguese, particularly by the diseases that they brought with them.

Brazil's landscape consists of low plateaux, surrounded by plains. The Amazon rainforest, most of which lies in Brazil, is the largest in the world, covering 3.3 million square kilometres. It is home to two million species of animals and birds (over half of the world's species), and unique indigenous communities. If the destruction of the forest is not halted, it will all have disappeared by 2020.

In addition to timber, Brazil is rich in other natural resources such as gold, minerals, oil, and natural gas. These have allowed Brazil to industrialise, but development has brought problems. The government borrowed money from the richer countries of the North to build factories and dams. Today the country has a huge debt and struggles to repay the money it has borrowed.

In Brazil, there are also huge gaps between the rich and poor. Land distribution is grossly unfair, with one per cent of landowners owning almost half the land. This inequality has fuelled bitter conflict and added to the burden of the poor.

Poverty forces many families to move to cities in search of work and better standards of living. They usually move to shanty towns, or favelas, where services such as sanitation, and opportunities for health care and education are poor.

Migration has led to the rapid growth of cities. The population of greater São Paulo is 20 million and Brazil has at least 14 cities of over one million people.

Capital	Brasília
Population	191.3 million
Area	8,547,403 sq km
Language	Portuguese (official)
GNI per capita	\$3,000
Life expectancy	72 years
People per doctor	485
Literacy	88% male, 89% female
Percentage of population with access to safe water	89%
Urban population	85%

Ethiopia



Photo: Rhodri Jones/Oxfam GB

Ethiopia, the most mountainous country in Africa, is about five times the size of the UK. Almost three-quarters of the country is higher than Ben Nevis. In the east, Ethiopia's low-lying Red Sea coast is one of the hottest, driest places on earth.

Ethiopia is one of the oldest independent nations in Africa and was only colonised for brief periods by Italy. The country has been a crossroads of civilisations and peoples for thousands of years. The earliest human skeleton, which is over three million years old, was found in Ethiopia's Rift Valley. It is said that the Queen of Sheba travelled from Ethiopia to meet King Solomon.

Ethiopia's people belong to many ethnic groups. Two-thirds are of Amhara or Oromo descent, but there are almost 100 ethnic groups. There were Christians in Ethiopia more than 14 centuries ago, long before the religion arrived in northern Europe. Today 40 per cent of Ethiopians are Christians, and 40 per cent Muslims. Traditional African religions also play an important part in people's lives.

Only 17 per cent of the population live in urban areas. Most people live in the countryside, living from the land. Most live in the cooler highlands, which have the best agricultural land, and where wheat, barley, and a local grain teff, are grown. Many farmers in the south-west produce coffee for export. Coffee got its name from the Kaffa region of Ethiopia where it has been grown and drunk for thousands of years.

For much of the last 30 years, Ethiopia has been gripped by a civil war, as rebel groups in different regions have fought against central control. War, drought and an oppressive government made Ethiopia one of the world's poorest nations in the 1980s. This combination of factors led to famine on several occasions. In 1983-5, millions of Ethiopians were forced to leave their homes and flee to refugee camps. Up to 300,000 people died.

Since a democratic government was elected in 1995, Ethiopia's economy has gradually recovered. As one of the world's poorest countries, Ethiopia's debts were cancelled in full in 2006. At the end of 2006 there was increasing tension in the Somali region of Ethiopia. There are hopes that a lasting peace can be found.

Capital	Addis Ababa
Population	81.2 million
Area	1,104,300 sq km
Language	Amharic (official), Arabic, and at least 100 local languages
GNI per capita	\$110
Life expectancy	49 years
People per doctor	33,333
Literacy	49% male, 34% female
Percentage of population with access to safe water	22%
Urban population	17%

India



Photo: Rajendra Shaw/Oxfam GB

India has a coastline of more than 6,400 kilometres, with vastly different landscapes, from the Himalayas in the north to the lush coconut groves of Kerala in the south. Most of India lies in the tropics, and so stays warm throughout the year. However, it also has the largest area of snow and glaciers outside the polar regions.

In many parts of India there is a rainy season between June and September, known as the monsoon (meaning seasonal wind). The monsoon brings very heavy rain, and in some areas, flooding.

India is one of the most important industrial countries in the world. It has a huge computer industry and its own space programme. It produces enough food to feed its people, and is the largest democracy in the world.

India is the second most populated country in the world, after China. Although two thirds of people live in the countryside, the number of people living in cities is growing rapidly. Despite being a very rich country, many people in India live in poverty. The country's programmes to fight poverty are the largest in the world, but they do not reach all who need them.

Religion is an important part of people's life in India. Hinduism is practised by 83 per cent of the population, while 11 per cent are Muslim. There are also Buddhist and Christian minorities. There are 18 officially recognised languages in India (of which Hindi is the most widely spoken) and over 700 minor languages and dialects.

Capital	New Delhi
Population	1.1 billion
Area	3,287,590 sq km
Language	Hindi. There are 17 other official Indian languages, of which English is not one, although it is widely spoken.
GNI per capita	\$620
Life expectancy	65 years
People per doctor	1,961
Literacy	73% male, 48% female
Percentage of population with access to safe water	86%
Urban population	29%

Russia



Photo: Sarah Errington/Oxfam GB

Russia is the largest country in the world and is so large that it stretches over two continents. It spans 11 time zones and is almost twice the size of the USA.

The north of Russia is in the Arctic Circle. Here you can travel almost half-way around the world and still be in Russia. Further south there are large areas of plains. Land in the south is called the steppe. This used to be all grassland but its soil is so fertile that most of it is now used for farming wheat, barley and maize.

Siberia lies in the east and is rich in natural resources such as timber, oil, natural gas, and minerals. Not many people live here because the climate is so bitter. In winter the temperature can drop to minus 60°C and snow lies from September to May. Summer is short but very warm (reaching 30°C).

Russia is heavily industrialised and in the past little attempt was made to control pollution. Today waste from factories has destroyed people's health and the landscape. Deforestation and soil erosion also threaten large areas of countryside.

Until 1991, Russia was part of the Soviet Union. The Communist Party, which formed the government, had great control over people's lives. Religious activities were not allowed, but many people kept their faiths. The most common religion is Orthodox Christianity, but there are also Muslim, Protestant and Jewish minorities.

Although their lives were restricted, Communism brought security to many people. Child-care, health and education services, housing and work were all provided. Today Russians have many new freedoms, but, whilst some people have become very wealthy, poorer people have found themselves much worse off in many ways.

Capital	Moscow
Population	141 million
Area	17,075,400 sq km
Language	Russian
GNI per capita	\$3,400
Life expectancy	65 years
People per doctor	240
Literacy	100% male, 99% female
Percentage of population with access to safe water	96%
Urban population	73%

The United Kingdom

England, Scotland, and Wales make up the island of Great Britain, and with Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom.

Although the UK is relatively small, the landscape varies widely - from the rugged coastline of Northern Ireland and the remote, often snow-capped mountains of the Scottish Highlands, to the green valleys of South Wales, and the flat, fertile fields of the East Anglia region of England.

The UK is heavily industrialised. Environmental pollution, especially air pollution, is a serious problem. Farming is highly mechanised although patterns are changing. There is now a growing movement that supports environmentally-friendly, or organic, production.

The UK has a long history of migration. In the past, immigration has been encouraged. Today, many different ethnic groups live in Britain and eight per cent of the population is non-white (2001 census).

Although Christianity is the dominant religion, there are strong Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, Hindu and Jewish communities in the UK.

Most people in the UK live in towns. Today, the numbers of people living in the larger cities is falling as people move out into smaller towns and commute to work.

The UK is ranked eighteenth in the world in terms of human development, which looks at measures such as health, education, and income. Yet there are many people living in poverty, and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Poverty is a fact of life for nearly one in three children in the UK.

Capital	London (Scotland, Edinburgh - Wales, Cardiff)
Population	60 million
Area	244,100 sq km
Language	English (official), but Welsh, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Gaelic, and other languages are also spoken
GNI per capita	\$33,630
Life expectancy	79 years
People per doctor	603
Literacy	99% male, 99% female
Percentage of population with access to safe water	99%
Urban population	89%

All statistics taken from the World Guide 11th ed. 2007, published by New Internationalist Publications and the Human Development Report 2006.