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Brazil’s shorter workweek forces bars and restaurants to adapt without special labor rules

Abrasel says payroll costs could rise at least 20% starting Dec. 16, a shift that could lift menu prices more than 10%

Friday, November 20, 2026



Brazil’s new rules for the shorter workweek leave bars and restaurants without a sector-specific labor regime, a change that the restaurant and bar association Abrasel said will force businesses to adjust staffing and could raise menu prices.

Abrasel said Decree 13,173, signed by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on Thursday, November 19, regulates Constitutional Amendment 141/2026 but does not include any special provisions for food service businesses. According to the association, bars and restaurants will have to adapt to a 42-hour workweek starting December 16, even though the sector often depends on extended coverage across peak meal and evening hours.

The decree sets the new basis for calculating hourly pay and also establishes rules for 12-hours-on, 36-hours-off schedules, known in Brazil as 12x36 shifts. Abrasel said none of the articles in the text deals specifically with the operating model of bars and restaurants, where staffing needs can vary sharply by day and time.

Paulo Solmucci, Abrasel’s executive president, said the decree did not reduce the impact of the end of the 6x1 schedule, a system in which employees work six days and take one day off. He said the group expects labor costs to rise sharply as businesses try to maintain service with fewer weekly working hours per employee.

Abrasel estimates that payroll costs alone will rise by at least 20% if establishments want to keep the same level of coverage after December 16. Solmucci said that increase reflects the need to cover one less day of work and could be even harder to manage if employers struggle to find additional workers.

Based on those assumptions, Abrasel said menu prices could rise by more than 10%. The association said 7 to 8 percentage points of that increase would come directly from higher payroll costs. The rest, it said, would come from outsourced services and from higher prices charged by suppliers of goods and services that also face higher labor expenses. Abrasel presented those figures as projections, not as costs already recorded across the sector.

The group said the labor change is reaching businesses at a difficult moment. Citing its October national survey, Abrasel said 37% of companies had not managed to raise prices in the previous 12 months, 26% were operating at a loss, and 37% had overdue payments. The association used those figures to argue that many operators have little room to absorb a jump in labor expenses without either raising prices, cutting margins or changing opening hours.

Abrasel also said some businesses are already reacting in different ways, although it did not provide a broader market count. Solmucci said some establishments have begun increasing prices, while others have decided to close one day a week. He also said many business owners remain uncertain about how to reorganize schedules under the new limit.

The dispute is part of a wider debate in Brazil over how to implement the shorter workweek in sectors that rely on long operating hours and rotating teams. For hospitality businesses, the main issue is not only the legal reduction in weekly hours but also how to preserve coverage at lunch, dinner and late-night periods without adding too many workers or losing service quality.

According to Abrasel, Solmucci also criticized remarks he attributed to Lula that the decree would generate controversy and that some business owners might fail to follow the law. Solmucci said the government moved forward without enough dialogue with employers and without fully weighing the economic effects on labor-intensive service businesses. Abrasel said it had expected the decree to include some mechanism to ease the transition for bars and restaurants, but that no such measure appeared in the final text.