

## COVID-19 and food and nutritional (in)security: action by the Brazilian Federal Government during the pandemic, with budget cuts and institutional dismantlement

COVID-19 e (in)segurança alimentar e nutricional: ações do Governo Federal brasileiro na pandemia frente aos desmontes orçamentários e institucionais

COVID-19 e (in)seguridad alimentaria y nutricional: acciones del Gobierno Federal brasileño en la pandemia frente a los recortes presupuestarios e institucionales

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### Abstract

*The COVID-19 pandemic poses one of this century's greatest public health challenges, with impacts on the health and living conditions of populations worldwide. The literature has reported that the pandemic affects the hegemonic food system in various ways. In Brazil, the pandemic amplifies existing social, racial, and gender inequalities, further jeopardizing the Human Right to Adequate Food (HRAF) and the attainment of food and nutritional security, especially among more vulnerable groups. In this context, the article aims to analyze the first measures by the Brazilian Federal Government to mitigate the pandemic's effects and that may have repercussions on food and nutritional security, considering the recent institutional changes in policies and programs. A narrative literature review was performed, and the information sources were the bulletins of the Center for Coordination of Operations by the Crisis Committee for Supervising and Monitoring the Impacts of COVID-19 and homepages of various government ministries, from March to May 2020. The actions were systematized according to the guidelines of the National Policy for Food and Nutritional Security. The analysis identified the creation of institutional crisis management arrangements. The proposed actions feature those involving access to income, emergency aid, and food, such as authorization for food distribution outside schools with federal funds from the National School Feeding Program. However, the setbacks and dismantlement in food and nutritional security may undermine the Federal Government's capacity to respond to COVID-19.*

*Food and Nutrition Security; COVID-19; Public Policy*

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## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic poses one of this century's most severe global health challenges, with direct and indirect impacts <sup>1,2</sup>. In Brazil, the first case was confirmed in February 2020, and as of July 1 there were 1,448,753 cases and 60,632 deaths (Ministério da Saúde. Painel Coronavírus. <https://covid.saude.gov.br/>, accessed on 01/Jul/2020). The insufficient scientific knowledge on the disease and its rapid spread created uncertainties concerning the definition of strategies to fight the pandemic.

In Brazil, one of the main measures has been social distancing, which has been the object of extensive debate due to its economic, social, and psychological repercussions <sup>2,3</sup>. Social distancing has been implemented to different degrees in Brazil's states and municipalities (counties). The skeptical stance by government authorities, including the President of Brazil, who does not believe in the efficacy of social distancing to control the pandemic <sup>4,5</sup> and has adopted a discourse at odds with the Ministers of Health <sup>6</sup>, besides the failure to adopt convergent action with common criteria among the three levels of government (federal, state, and municipal) in relation social distancing <sup>7</sup>, the turnover in Ministers of Health, and the absence of a permanent Health Minister (for 46 days, as of June 30, 2020) <sup>8</sup> can undermine the efficacy of this measure to fight the pandemic and to ensure the population's adherence.

Another key point is that social distancing as a necessary measure cannot be subordinated to economic logic, but must be tied to the guarantee of human rights <sup>2,9</sup>. The challenges are even greater in a country like Brazil, since little is known about the characteristics of transmission in a context of social and demographic inequality, with precarious housing and sanitation conditions, without regular access to water, in situations of crowding, high prevalence of chronic diseases, and widespread human rights violations <sup>2</sup>. Such rights include the Human Right to Adequate Food (HRAF) and the guarantee of food and nutritional security.

Food and nutritional security is known to be affected by the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, especially considering situations of social, economic, ethnic-racial, gender, and health-care access inequalities <sup>10</sup>. The *Global Report on Food Crises* <sup>11</sup> estimates that 135 million persons suffered from food insecurity in 2019, while an interview by economist Daniel Balaban of the World Food Program predicts that due to the economic effects and interruptions in the food chain resulting from COVID-19, this figure could reach 265 million persons in 2020 <sup>12</sup>. The pandemic affects the supply and demand of foods and reduces purchasing power and the capacity to produce and distribute foods, especially affecting more vulnerable communities.

The State's role is thus crucial for mitigating the pandemic's effects, with short, medium, and long-term measures to control not only COVID-19 itself but also the pandemic's consequences. The current article aims to analyze the first measures by the Brazilian Federal Government to mitigate the pandemic's effects and that have potential repercussions on food and nutritional security, considering the recent institutional changes in policies and programs.

## Methodological procedures

This is an empirical study with analysis of bibliographic sources and documents. To identify actions by the Federal Government for mitigation of the pandemic's effects with potential repercussions on food and nutritional security, we analyzed the bulletins of the Center for Coordination of Operations by the Crisis Committee for Supervising and Monitoring the Impacts of COVID-19 (CCOP in Portuguese) on the website of the Office of the Chief of Staff (<https://www.gov.br/casacivil/pt-br>), besides the homepages of various government ministries, from March to May 2020. Next, the actions were organized systematically according to the guidelines of the Brazilian National Policy for Food and Nutritional Security (PNSAN). All the actions identified in the above-mentioned period that could have repercussions on food and nutritional security were included in the current study.

A narrative literature review was also performed, analyzing scientific articles and position papers by civil society organizations on the recent institutional changes in public policies and programs in food and nutritional security in Brazil, in addition to Brazilian and international documents focusing on the relationship between COVID-19 and food and nutritional security <sup>10,13,14,15</sup>, adopted as the

theoretical framework for the analysis of the actions by the Brazilian Federal Government during the pandemic. Narrative reviews aim to describe and discuss the “state of the art” on a topic from the theoretical or contextual point of view. This kind of review does not present a methodological reproduction, but contributes with pertinent questions and collaborates with the updating of knowledge on a given topic in a short time period <sup>16</sup>.

The articles and documents were collected non-systematically from March to May 2020. We searched scientific databases and institutional homepages, such as Google Scholar; SciELO; Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); Committee on World Food Security (CFS); FIAN International and Brazil; and Brazilian Forum on Food Sovereignty and Security (FBSSAN). Newspaper articles were also consulted to identify current issues on the topic.

## Results and discussion

The pandemic is evolving, and little is known about its dynamics, duration, and geographic scope, making it difficult to measure its impacts. However, we know that social distancing measures can impact access to income and have short, medium, and long-term effects on the regularity of production, access, availability, supply, and prices of foods, and consequently on the guarantee of food and nutritional security and the HRAF <sup>17,18,19,20</sup>. The ways governments and institutions respond politically to the pandemic can have profound implications for guaranteeing the HRAF. Political responses through actions with no linkage between various government sectors and little basis in scientific data can exacerbate the pandemic’s social, economic, and health impacts <sup>19</sup>.

The Brazilian Federal Government’s measures in response to the pandemic in the period analyzed here involved the creation of institutional arrangements, as shown in Box 1.

One of the first acts was the establishment of the GEI-ESPII on January 30, 2020, aimed at proposing, monitoring, and linking measures to prepare for and confront public health emergencies <sup>21,22</sup>. A few days later, Brazil declared a Public Health Emergency of National Concern <sup>23</sup>. The Crisis Committee was created more than a month later <sup>24</sup>. Besides the institutional arrangements, a number of initial actions were taken to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 and which can impact food and nutritional security (Box 2).

Several actions that are arranged systematically in Box 2 will be discussed in this section.

### **Promotion of universal access to healthy and adequate food, with priority for families and persons in situations of food and nutritional insecurity**

The emergency assistance establishes exceptional social protection measures for informal workers, individual micro-entrepreneurs, self-employed, and unemployed Brazilians <sup>25</sup>. Emergency aid in the amount of BRL 200.00 (USD 40.00) was proposed initially, but after negotiations involving political groups and a vote in the Chamber of Deputies, the amount was tripled, for three months <sup>26</sup>. On June 30, 2020, President Jair Bolsonaro issued *Decreto n. 10,412*, extending the emergency aid for two more months <sup>27</sup>. Beneficiaries of the *Bolsa Família* Program can receive the emergency assistance as long as it is more advantageous, and during this period *Bolsa Família* will be suspended, despite targeting families in situations of greater social vulnerability.

Countries all around the globe have adopted direct income transfers in response to the economic crisis <sup>28</sup>, which has huge implications for food and nutritional security, for example for persons that work as informal laborers or in services, restaurants, and retail. These workers may face loss of jobs either through social distancing or economic downturn. Although farmers have a demand for their production, interruptions in the food chains and farm produce markets can alter farming families’ means of subsistence, as well as the production and availability of foods. These situations have direct implications for people’s access to food and water <sup>15</sup>.

This context calls attention to the Presidential veto against expanding the aid to include workers that are not included in the Federal Government’s Single Registry for Social Programs <sup>29</sup>. The veto increases the risk of food and nutritional insecurity and hunger in groups historically excluded from the perspective of the right to food. Meanwhile, the Federal Government approved the assistance for

**Box 1**

Institutional arrangements under the Brazilian Federal Government for mitigation of the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on food and nutritional security, January to May 2020.

Institutional arrangements by the Federal Government to mitigate effects from COVID-19	Objectives and composition
<p>Inter-Ministerial Executive Group for Public Emergency of National and International Concern (GEI-ESPIL). <i>Decree n. 10,211</i>, January 30, 2020 <sup>21</sup>, and <i>Decree n. 10,238</i>, February 11, 2020 <sup>22</sup>.</p>	<p>Established to propose, monitor, and link measures to prepare for and confront public health emergencies. The composition was altered by a subsequent Decree and consists of the Ministry of Health (coordinator), Office of the Chief of Staff, and other government ministries and agencies.</p>
<p>Crisis Committee for Supervision and Monitoring of the Impacts of COVID-19. <i>Decree n. 10,277</i>, March 16, 2020 <sup>24</sup>.</p>	<p>Coordinated by the Chief of Staff, an agency for linking government action and advice to the President, consisting of heads of government ministries and agencies, in addition to the Coordinator of the Center for Emergency Operations in Public Health under the Health Surveillance Secretariat of the Ministry of Health, with its actions coordinated by the GEI-ESPIL.</p>
<p>Crisis Committee (CC-AGRO-COVID19). <i>Ruling n. 123</i>, March 30, 2020 <sup>81</sup>.</p>	<p>Under the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Supply, the Crisis Committee was created with the purpose of monitoring and proposing strategies to minimize the impacts of coronavirus on agricultural production and food supply. This ruling provides that it is the responsibility of the CC-AGRO-COVID19 <i>"to analyze production, marketing, infrastructure, society's perceptions, and agricultural products; analyze scenarios and produce diagnoses and back the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Supply administration; analyze and monitor issues with potential risk, prevent the occurrence of crises, and link the administration in case of severe and imminent threat to produce supply and agricultural inputs; and propose actions that contribute to the maintenance of supply to the Brazilian population"</i>.</p>
<p>Solidarity Council for the Fight Against COVID-19 and its social and economic effects. <i>Decree n. 10,311</i>, April 3, 2020 <sup>82</sup>.</p>	<p>The Council aims to orient the execution of actions funded by donations earmarked for the fight against COVID-19. It consists of representatives of the Office of Chief of Staff and government ministries and agencies. The first measure was to determine the use of funds from the Solidarity Contributions Fund, through which physical and legal persons can make financial donations.</p>

Source: prepared by the authors.

## Box 2

Measures by the Brazilian Federal Government for mitigation of the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on food and nutritional security, January to May 2020.

Brazilian National Policy for Food and Nutritional Security (PNSAN) guidelines	Measures identified
Promotion of universal access to adequate and healthy food, with priority for families and persons in situations of food and nutritional insecurity.	Establishment of Emergency Basic Income ( <i>Law n. 13,982</i> , April 2, 2020 <sup>25</sup> ).
	Advance release of emergency aid for persons that applied for the Noncontributory Regular Pension (BPC).
	Adjustment of provisions in the Brazilian National School Feeding Program (PNAE) for the program's continuity during the pandemic ( <i>Law n. 13,987</i> , April 7, 2020 <sup>43</sup> ) and advance release of the Brazilian National Fund for Development of Education (FNDE) financial transfer from the PNAE to the states and municipalities.
	Financial support for small and medium-sized companies to guarantee maintenance of workers' salaries.
	Emergency transfer of Federal funds for operationalization of measures to increase food and nutritional security for users of the Brazilian Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS) ( <i>Ruling n. 385</i> , May 13, 2020 <sup>49</sup> ).
	Additional emergency measures in the management of the <i>Bolsa Família</i> Program ( <i>Ruling n. 387</i> , May 15, 2020 <sup>36</sup> ).
Promotion of supply and structuring of sustainable and decentralized systems with an agroecological base in food production, extraction, processing, and distribution.	Creation of WhatsApp channel to communicate agricultural losses due to COVID-19 (Food Losses Hotline).
	<i>Ruling n. 116</i> , March 26, 2020 <sup>83</sup> , ruling on services, activities, and products classified as essential by the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Supply for full functioning of the food and beverage production chain, to ensure food supply and food security for the Brazilian population during the state of public calamity resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.
	Drafting of guidelines for good practices in open-air food markets.
	Publication of safety guidelines for meat packing plant workers.
	<i>Resolution n. 4,801</i> <sup>57</sup> authorizing for farmers, including family farmers, the extension of farm loan repayment deadlines; hiring Financing for Guarantee of Farmers' Prices (FGPP) with rural credit funds for storage and marketing; creates special credit lines to back the costs of the National Program to Strengthen Family Farming (Pronaf) and the National Program to Support Medium-Sized Farmers (Pronamp), with subsidized interest rates.
	Monitoring the principal food supply establishments (Brazilian National Supply Company, Central Supply, supermarkets).
	Drafting guidelines for sectors related to food supply (harvest, transportation, and marketing).
	Opening of special credit in the amount of BRL 500 million for purchase of family farming produce through the Food Purchases Program (PAA) ( <i>Executive Order n. 957</i> , April 24, 2020 <sup>53</sup> ).
	Extension of Declarations of Fitness for Pronaf (DAPs) for six months, by the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Supply ( <i>Ruling n. 24</i> , March 24, 2020 <sup>84</sup> ).
	Creation of a direct online channel on the gov.br portal with the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Supply for representations by the agricultural and livestock sector aimed at receiving requests for action due to the pandemic.
	Hiring of farm credit in eight months by farmers.
	Release of credit line for small businesses, cooperatives, and informal workers.
	Publication of <i>Normative Instruction n. 29</i> , April 23, 2020 <sup>59</sup> , which establishes requirements for marketing of animal products, inspected by a public consortium of municipalities.
	Determination of emergency measures for procedures pertaining to concession, control, and inspection of farm credit operations ( <i>Resolution n. 4,810</i> , April 30, 2020 <sup>57</sup> ).
Change of rules in the Harvest Guarantee for verification of losses due to drought in municipalities, by Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Supply, and advance authorization of payment of Harvest Guarantee.	
Establishment of permanent processes of food and nutritional education, research, and training in food and nutritional security and the human right to adequate food.	Publication of educational materials by the Health Surveillance Secretariat and Primary Healthcare Secretariat in the context of the pandemic with recommendations on food and nutrition, such as: planning meals and food purchases, hygiene and care with vegetables and greens, breastfeeding, nutrition in the elderly.

(continues)

**Box 2 (continued)**

<b>Brazilian National Policy for Food and Nutritional Security (PNSAN) guidelines</b>	<b>Measures identified</b>
Promotion, universalization, and coordination of food and nutritional security activities targeted to maroon communities ( <i>quilombolas</i> ) and other traditional peoples and communities as provided in Article 3, section I, <i>Decree n. 6,040</i> , February 7, 2007 <sup>85</sup> , indigenous peoples, and agrarian reform settlements.	Donation of food baskets and kits to specific population groups.
Strengthening of food and nutritional activities at all levels of healthcare, linked with other food and nutritional security activities.	Drafting of recommendations by the General Division of Food and Nutrition (CGAN) for the state and Federal District Secretariat, aimed at contributing to health and food and nutrition security in the context of the pandemic.
Promotion of universal access to safe water in sufficient amounts, with priority for families in situations of water insecurity, for food production in family farming, and for fishing and aquiculture.	No activities were identified.
Support for initiatives to support food sovereignty, food and nutritional security, and the human right to adequate food at the international level and international negotiations based on the principles and guidelines of <i>Law n. 11,346</i> of 2006 <sup>86</sup> .	No activities were identified.
Monitoring the attainment of the human right to adequate food.	No activities were identified.

Source: prepared by the authors.

mothers under 18 years of age<sup>29,30,31</sup>. The veto against family farmers condemns part of this rural population to precarious living conditions and further jeopardizes the food supply<sup>32</sup>.

The emergency aid was soon nicknamed the “corona voucher” by the Brazilian populace, giving it a pejorative connotation, as something perishable and stigmatizing, not from the perspective of a citizen’s right and the duty of the State beyond an emergency stipend for the more vulnerable<sup>33</sup>. Daily news stories tell of problems in the process of guaranteeing this right, with long lines of people trying to withdraw the emergency aid at the offices of the Caixa Econômica Federal (the Federal Savings and Loan Bank), when such crowding is contrary to World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines<sup>34,35</sup>.

Thus, the pandemic reveals and amplifies Brazil's existing inequalities and the need to create universal basic income policies.

The study also identified the advance authorization of emergency aid to persons who applied for the Noncontributory Regular Pension (BPC in Portuguese) and changes in the management of the *Bolsa Família* Program, aimed at avoiding crowding of people applying for changes and inclusions in the registries<sup>36</sup>. The programs' expansion is suggested in the document by the FBSSAN<sup>10</sup>, in order to augment families' income and allow access to food. According to Burlandy<sup>37</sup>, income transfer programs can impact the beneficiaries' nutritional wellbeing and enable the purchase of non-food items such as the purchase of household appliances and utensils that allow storing and processing foods at home. Despite the positive effects of the *Bolsa Família* Program<sup>38,39</sup>, Brazil's current Administration has preferred to search for irregularities and cancel benefits based on the cross-analysis of databases<sup>40,41</sup>. In 2020, the budget for the *Bolsa Família* Program was BRL 29.5 billion (USD 7.3 billion), less than the BRL 32 billion (USD 8.4 billion) earmarked for the program in 2019<sup>42</sup>. Such measures directly affect Brazil's most vulnerable population groups in terms of access to income and can exacerbate the pandemic's effects on food and nutritional security.

The design of the Brazilian National School Feeding Program (PNAE) did not provide for the exceptional situation of a health emergency. With schools closed, students were left unassisted and the program's purchase of produce from family farming was compromised. Thus, *Law n. 13,987* was passed, determining that the Brazilian National Fund for the Development of Education (FNDE) should maintain the transfer of funds to states and municipalities, authorizing their use for purchase of foods and distribution to the students' parents or guardians, maintaining the requirement of purchases from family farming<sup>43,44</sup>. These Federal funds cannot be used for direct income transfers to the families or to cover the administrative costs of food distribution.

Mismatches have been occurring in the law's enforcement in the local contexts, and some states and municipalities are not even employed strategies to guarantee this right<sup>45,46</sup>. Considering that the purchase of family farm produce for the PNAE represents a virtuous convergence of public policies, the foods supplied to the students' families should comply with this rule<sup>47</sup>. Valadares et al.<sup>47</sup> suggest that given the need for states and municipalities to adjust their food distribution logistics, the FNDE should consider increasing the funds, since the increasing cost of executing the program due to the necessary adjustments during the pandemic could compromise the program's continuity in a context of budget constraints. The documents consulted in preparing this article emphasize the need for continuity of the PNAE, highlighting the program's role in guaranteeing the Human Right to Adequate Food, especially during the pandemic<sup>10,13,14</sup>.

Emergency Federal Government funding was authorized with the purpose of increasing the response capacity by the Brazilian Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS in Portuguese) in assisting families and individuals in situations of vulnerability and social risk due to COVID-19, promoting food purchases with priority for foods high in protein for elderly persons and persons with disability assisted at the Service for Institutional Assistance and the Service for Special Social Protection for Persons with Disability, Elderly, and their Families<sup>48</sup>. Another emergency transfer of Federal funds was also authorized for the operationalization of measures to increase food and nutritional security for users of the SUAS<sup>49</sup>. Despite the lack of clarity on the use of these funds, the Ministry of Citizenship states that it is intended to serve vulnerable families and individuals. According to Santarelli et al.<sup>40</sup>, since the Temer Administration and increasingly under Bolsonaro, there has been a constant cutback in programs for food and nutritional security. The network of public infrastructure for food and nutritional security is no longer a priority for the current Federal Government, which is not issuing calls for bids for decentralization of funds to the states and municipalities (which have shut down their services as a result). There was also a budget cut in the food baskets program.

### **Promotion of food supply and structuring of sustainable and decentralized systems based on agroecology for the production, extraction, processing, and distribution of foods**

The Executive Orders that have been issued<sup>50,51,52,53</sup> include *n. 957* of March 2020, which establishes special credit in the amount BRL 500 million (USD 110 million) for the purchase of family farm produce by the Food Purchases Program (PAA in Portuguese)<sup>53</sup>. According to the Ministry of Citi-

zenship, 85,000 farm families will be benefited, in addition to 12,500 organizations and 11 million socially vulnerable families that will receive the food<sup>54</sup>. The authorization of credit for the PAA comes after intense mobilization by organized civil society, which identified the need for immediate funding in the amount of 1 billion BRL (USD 220 million) for the program<sup>55</sup>.

The pandemic has clearly revealed the budget and institutional dismantlement of programs for food and nutritional security. Examples include the dismantlement of the Brazilian Ministry of Agrarian Development by the Temer government, followed by Bolsonaro's extinction of the National Secretariat for Food and Nutritional Security (SESAN in Portuguese), which was the strategic agency for inter-sector coordination of the PNSAN and decentralization of the Brazilian National System for Food and Nutritional Security (SISAN in Portuguese), as well as administrative changes and budget cuts in key programs like the PAA<sup>40</sup>.

According to Valadares et al.<sup>47</sup> (p. 7), the budget cuts “make it practically impossible for small farmers to count on the ‘market’ solution to survive economically”, when such solutions may cause production losses and farmers’ indebtedness, thereby jeopardizing the food supply. The authors further state that the resumption of the PAA should prioritize the modality of purchases with donation of foods, associated with the distribution of food baskets and the supply to the social assistance network. Thus, although funds were transferred to the program, it is uncertain whether this measure will be sufficient, given the dismantlement of the PAA and of the Brazilian National Supply Company (CONAB in Portuguese), since the government agricultural stockpiles were eliminated under the Bolsonaro Administration<sup>56</sup>. According to Menezes & Burity<sup>32</sup>, the measures in the PNAE and PAA were insufficient to serve the farmers that should have been benefited.

*Resolution n. 4,810* provides for emergency farm loan procedures<sup>57</sup>. Maluf<sup>17</sup> highlights the need to create an emergency credit line for farmers, with subsidized interest rates. Strengthening and promoting family farming are considered essential for ensuring that small farmers will have support networks to maintain their capacity to produce and supply food crops<sup>10,13,14</sup>.

Brazil's agribusiness sector continues to grow and is considered essential by the government for economic recovery<sup>58</sup>. Two news items in the bulletins stand out in the context. The first is a videoconference by the Minister of Agriculture with “agricultural attachés”, a position related to the expansion of agribusiness and crisis management, seeking to sell a positive image of Brazil as an international food supplier, which shows the concern and focus on the impact of the crisis on Brazilian agribusiness. The second news item emphasizes the concern over the drop in beef prices from February to March this year, followed by *Normative Instruction n. 29*<sup>59</sup>, which facilitates trade in animal products, inspected by a public consortium of municipalities. Importantly, the Federal Government continues to authorize the release and marketing of new pesticides: in May, 22 more substances were authorized, totaling 150 new authorizations this year alone<sup>60</sup>. Until recently, Brazil was an international reference in family farming policies, while it now adopts a rural development model with record authorizations of pesticides, posing serious threats to the country's food sovereignty<sup>40,41,61,62</sup>.

Changes were identified in the rules of the Harvest Guarantee (*Garantia-Safra*) for verification of crop losses due to drought and for advance payment by this program<sup>63</sup>. These measures are specific to Brazil's semiarid region (which suffers frequent droughts) and help mitigate the negative effects of this natural disaster<sup>64</sup>. The intervention itself does not change the conditions of poverty and historical inequality in the semiarid region and needs to be combined with other policies to guarantee human rights, including access to food, water, and land.

### **Establishment of permanent processes of food and nutritional education, research, and training in food and nutritional security and the human right to adequate food**

A document was identified that was organized by the General Division of Food and Nutrition (CGAN in Portuguese) of the Brazilian Ministry of Health, with recommendations on food and COVID-19<sup>65</sup>. Importantly, the pandemic and social distancing affect individuals differently, with different determinants of food and nutritional security. One issue that can cause food and nutritional insecurity is the increased consumption of ultra-processed foods<sup>66,67</sup>, for example, due to the difficulty in access to fresh foods, lack of cooking skills, or the uneven sexual division of household labor, particularly affecting women, who can become more dependent on such products in a new scenario of domestic



chores. Part of this agenda can be the target of food and nutritional education, aimed at supporting individuals in the development of cooking skills. According to documents by the CFS and the *International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems* (IPES-Food), COVID-19 will influence food and nutritional patterns and various forms of malnutrition. Persons will tend to consume more ultra-processed foods as the result of interruptions in the supply chain and panic in food purchases. They may also reduce their consumption of fruits, vegetables, and greens, less available in conventional food chains<sup>15,18</sup>. A study in Brazil by Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA in Portuguese) points to another pattern in vegetable consumers' behavior. For most interviewees (72.5%), vegetables were available for purchase, in the period prior to the pandemic and social distancing. However, this situation varies according to family income and region of the country, where individuals with higher earnings and those in South and Southeast Brazil have greater access to vegetables<sup>68</sup>.

**Promotion, universalization, and coordination of food and nutritional security measures targeted to quilombola communities and other traditional peoples and communities, indigenous peoples, and land reform settlements**

The donation of food baskets has been adopted, especially for Roma, indigenous, and river-dwelling communities and fishing villages. Initiatives were also identified with the distribution of food and water to families in situations of vulnerability. Despite the lack of clarity in the information in bulletins and homepages of various government ministries, we identified announcements of public purchases of staple foods such as pasta, powdered milk, beans, flour, soybean oil, manioc flour, cornflakes, corn meal, and rice, all for the Brazilian Ministry for Women, Family, and Human Rights for distribution of food baskets to traditional communities, and operationalized by CONAB. We found no mention of the supply of fruits, vegetables, and greens or produce from family farming.

**Gaps in action by the Federal Government**

The systematic analysis of the actions based on the guidelines of the PNSAN allowed identifying gaps. No actions were identified for the right to water, especially the One Million Cisterns Program (P1MC in Portuguese), which has suffered a drastic budget cut since the Temer Administration. The program's disconnection and weakening resulting from budget cuts and the reduction in the number of cisterns, affect access to water both for human consumption and farm production<sup>40,69</sup>. Guaranteed access to safe water was identified as a central issue in the documents analyzed here<sup>10,14</sup>.

As for the guideline providing for dialogue with the Brazilian Unified National Health System (SUS in Portuguese), we identified the publication of *Memorandum n. 3*, with recommendations by the CGAN to the State Health Departments aimed at contributing to health and food and nutritional security in the context of the pandemic<sup>70</sup>. Recent measures may compromise nutritional care: the new financing model for basic healthcare<sup>71</sup>; the repeal of provisions establishing the parameters and budgeting of the Expanded Center for Family Health and the lack of accreditation of new teams by the Brazilian Ministry da Health<sup>72</sup>; and already during the pandemic, the establishment of the Agency for the Development of Primary Healthcare<sup>73</sup>, in the form of a legally incorporated nonprofit organization, which has been identified as having a legal structure similar to that of the so-called "social organizations"<sup>74</sup>.

There was a clear lack of actions to monitor the HRAF. The documents used as the theoretical reference<sup>14,15</sup> point to the importance of governments collecting and sharing data, as well as supporting studies on the impact on food systems, the guarantee of food and nutritional security, and measures to contain the impacts on the HRAF. The institutional setbacks and budget cuts in the food and nutritional security agenda<sup>75,76</sup>, already identified during the pre-pandemic period and not reversed during the current health crisis, were also expressed in the extinction of the National Council for Food and Nutritional Security (CONSEA in Portuguese), as one of the first acts by the current Federal Administration, when this agency's mission was to propose guidelines to ensure HRAF<sup>77</sup>; the inoperability of the Inter-Ministerial Chamber for Food and Nutritional Security (CAISAN in Portuguese); failure to hold the 6th National Conference on Food and Nutritional Security; and the lack of the III National Plan on Food and Nutritional Security (PLANSAN in Portuguese), which defines

the planning and execution of the PNSAN. All these measures jeopardized monitoring of violations of the HRAF in the context of the pandemic by the Federal Government, whose institutional arrangements proposed thus far failed to guarantee or were not meant to monitor the HRAF. Further in relating to guaranteeing and monitoring the HRAF, *Ruling n. 683* of March 19, 2020, provides on the establishment of a technical committee to draft initiatives for the promotion and defense of human rights during the pandemic. However, no institutional mechanism in the ruling is directly responsible for the HRAF<sup>78</sup>.

This scenario of setbacks, including a freeze of social expenditures and social security and labor legislation reforms, is bound to affect access to food by poor Brazilians, placing Brazil back on the FAO Hunger Map<sup>79</sup>. This situation – linked to the current pandemic – will make the 2030 Agenda even more challenging. No mention was identified of repealing *Constitutional Amendment n. 95*<sup>80</sup>, the so-called “ceiling on expenditures”, which affects primary spending. Such a repeal of the budget freeze on social spending is identified in the FBSSAN document<sup>10</sup> as strategic for confronting the pandemic’s consequences.

The study’s limitations include difficulty in accessing detailed information on the actions in the Bulletins and homepages of the various government ministries, since the information was presented in very abridged form, which can limit the analysis of the measures’ potentialities and difficulties.

## Final remarks

Some brief remarks are in order on the Brazilian Federal Government’s capacity to respond to COVID-19 and the setbacks in recent years. The first refers to the capacity for emergency responses to the pandemic with what was left of the SISAN after so much undermining and dismantlement, in addition to budget cuts. Would the authorization of emergency credit lines be capable of reversing this scenario? Given the extinction of the CONSEA and the inoperability of the CAISAN, another issue is to organize action and monitor the pandemic’s impacts on food and nutritional security in an organized way. A further challenge lies in civil society’s participation in planning and monitoring the HRAF, which is currently limited to the possibility of financial transfers at the Federal government level. The idea here is not to exhaust the discussion on the setbacks, but to emphasize that the inter-sector perspective and involvement by different institutional actors and civil society (aspects so central to the consolidation of SISAN) have been intentionally dismantled.

Actions proposed thus far by the Brazilian Federal Government to mitigate COVID-19’s effects lie in emergency measures focused mainly on access to income and foods. However, the guarantee of the HRAF and the attainment of food and nutritional security require not only inter-sector linkage and coordinated emergency measures aimed at attenuating the effects of crises, but medium and long-term measures that can effectively guarantee the Constitutional right to food. The population’s feeling of insecurity towards uncertainties during the pandemic is exacerbated by the country’s ongoing political crisis, besides the contradictory orientation emanating from the Executive Branch.

It is curious, to say the least, that the current official discourse against social distancing, claiming a possible increase in hunger in Brazil, appears in an Administration which just months ago denied that hunger even existed in the country. While the food and nutritional security agenda had been strengthened in Brazil in the last 15 years, in the last three it has been dismantled with the extinction of the CONSEA and other setbacks, such as the elimination of policies to incentivize family farming, access to water, and food supply, directly affecting the attainment of food and nutritional security and HRAF.

Finally, this moment of pandemic focuses attention on Brazil largest problem, namely social inequalities. These exacerbate the effects of COVID-19 on the population’s living conditions. It is thus necessary to conceive, discuss, and draft national public policies based on the economy and social protection, but which are linked to the guidelines of the PNSAN from the perspective of the HRAF.

## Contributors

T. M. A. Alpino, C. R. B. Santos, and D. C. Barros participated in the study's conception and planning, data collection and analysis, writing the text, and revision and approval of the final version. C. M. Freitas participated in the study's conception, data analysis, writing the text, and revision and approval of the final version.

## Additional informations

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## Resumo

A pandemia por COVID-19 representa um dos maiores desafios da saúde pública deste século, causando impactos na saúde e nas condições de vida das populações em todo o mundo. Tem sido apontado pela literatura que a pandemia afeta de diversas formas o sistema alimentar hegemônico. No Brasil, a pandemia amplifica as desigualdades sociais, raciais e de gênero já existentes, comprometendo ainda mais a garantia do Direito Humano à Alimentação Adequada (DHAA) e a concretização da segurança alimentar e nutricional, especialmente entre os mais vulneráveis. Nesse contexto, este artigo tem como objetivo analisar as primeiras ações, em âmbito federal, do governo brasileiro para a mitigação dos efeitos da pandemia que podem repercutir na segurança alimentar e nutricional, considerando as recentes mudanças institucionais das políticas e programas. Foi realizada uma revisão narrativa da literatura e utilizados como fontes de informação os boletins do Centro de Coordenação de Operações do Comitê de Crise para Supervisão e Monitoramento dos Impactos da COVID-19 e homepages de ministérios setoriais, de março a maio de 2020. As ações foram sistematizadas segundo as diretrizes da Política Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional. Foi identificada a criação de arranjos institucionais para o gerenciamento da crise. Dentre as ações propostas, destacam-se aquelas relacionadas ao acesso à renda, como o auxílio emergencial, e a alimentos, como a autorização para a distribuição de alimentos fora do ambiente escolar com os recursos federais do Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar. No entanto, os retrocessos e desmontes na área de segurança alimentar e nutricional podem comprometer a capacidade de resposta do Governo Federal no contexto da COVID-19.

Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional; COVID-19; Política Pública

## Resumen

La pandemia por COVID-19 representa uno de los mayores desafíos de la salud pública de este siglo, causando impactos en la salud y condiciones de vida de las poblaciones en todo el mundo. Se ha señalado por parte de la literatura que la pandemia afecta de diversas formas el sistema alimentario hegemónico. En Brasil, la pandemia amplifica las desigualdades sociales, raciales y de género ya existentes, comprometiendo todavía más la garantía del Derecho Humano a la Alimentación Adeuada (DHAA) y la concretización de la seguridad alimentaria y nutricional, especialmente entre los más vulnerables. En este contexto, el objetivo de este artículo es analizar las primeras acciones, en el ámbito federal, del gobierno brasileño para la mitigación de los efectos de la pandemia que puedan repercutir en la seguridad alimentaria y nutricional, considerando los recientes cambios institucionales de las políticas y programas. Se realizó una revisión narrativa de la literatura y se utilizaron como fuentes de información los boletines del Centro de Coordinación de Operaciones del Comité de Crisis para la Supervisión y Monitoreo de los Impactos de la COVID-19 y homepages de ministerios sectoriales, de marzo a mayo de 2020. Las acciones se sistematizaron según las directrices de la Política Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional. Se identificó la creación de soluciones institucionales para la gestión de la crisis. Entre las acciones propuestas, se destacan aquellas relacionadas con el acceso a la renta, como el apoyo de emergencia, y de alimentos, como la autorización para la distribución de alimentos fuera del ambiente escolar con los recursos federales del Programa Nacional de Alimentación Escolar. No obstante, los retrocesos y recortes en el área de seguridad alimentaria y nutricional pueden comprometer la capacidad de respuesta del Gobierno Federal en el contexto de la COVID-19.

Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional; COVID-19; Política Pública

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