

**IMPACTS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STIMULUS CHECK FOR THE
BLACK POPULATION**

***IMPACTOS DA IMPLEMENTAÇÃO DO AUXÍLIO EMERGENCIAL PARA A
POPULAÇÃO NEGRA***

***REPERCUSIONES DE LA APLICACIÓN DE LA AYUDA DE EMERGENCIA PARA LA
POBLACIÓN NEGRA***



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ABSTRACT: This article aims to analyze the impacts of the policy known as Stimulus Check (SC) on the impoverished and Black population of the country in different aspects of social life. Firstly, we will present some of the main consequences of the pandemic, followed by an understanding of how the income transfer policy was implemented in this context. To assess these impacts, we will use bibliographic research as the methodology and documentary analysis as the method. Based on recent literature on SC, journalistic reports, and IPEA analyses, this article will focus on the debate regarding the implementation of public policies and their intended and unintended effects. We conclude that the policy played a crucial role in mitigating the impoverishment of the most vulnerable segments of the population; however, it failed to incorporate a vulnerable portion of the population adequately and generated a series of implementation difficulties.

KEYWORDS: Pandemic. Stimulus Check. Covid-19. Black Population.

RESUMO: *Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar os impactos da política denominada Auxílio Emergencial (AE) na população empobrecida e negra do país em diferentes aspectos da vida social. Primeiramente, serão apresentadas algumas das principais consequências da pandemia, seguidas de uma compreensão de como a política de transferência de renda foi implementada nesse contexto. Para realizar uma avaliação desses impactos, utilizaremos a pesquisa bibliográfica como metodologia e a análise documental como método. Com base em literatura recente sobre o AE, reportagens jornalísticas e análises do IPEA, o foco deste artigo estará no debate sobre a implementação de políticas públicas e seus efeitos previstos e não previstos. Concluímos que a política desempenhou um papel fundamental na mitigação da situação de empobrecimento das camadas mais populares, no entanto, falhou em incorporar adequadamente uma parcela vulnerável da população, além de ter gerado uma série de dificuldades no processo de implementação.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Pandemia. Auxílio Emergencial. Covid-19. População Negra.*

RESUMEN: *Este artículo tiene como objetivo comprender qué impactos la política denominada Ayuda de Emergencia (AE) llevó a la población empobrecida y negra del país, en los diferentes niveles de la vida social. Primero, presentamos algunas de las principales consecuencias de la pandemia, para luego comprender cómo se comportó la política de transferencia de ingresos en este contexto. Para establecer un diagnóstico de estos impactos, adoptamos como metodología la investigación bibliográfica y como método el análisis documental. Con base en bibliografías recientes sobre la AE, artículos periodísticos y análisis del IPEA, el artículo se centra en el debate sobre la implementación de políticas públicas y sus efectos esperados e inesperados. Como resultados preliminares entendemos que la política fue fundamental para paliar la situación de empobrecimiento de las clases más populares, sin embargo, no logró incorporar adecuadamente a una porción vulnerable de la población, además de generar una serie de violaciones en el proceso de implementación.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Pandemia. Ayuda de Emergencia. Covid-19. Población Negra.*

Introduction

After three years since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, a sanitary crisis that has had a significant impact on the social fabric of several nations, the issue of social assistance has become increasingly relevant on the global stage. Previously, some currents argued that the virus would affect various segments of society equally, as it affected both the rich and the poor, white and black individuals, men and women. However, research has shown that gender, race, and class inequalities, for example, increase vulnerability to virus contamination and mortality and affect employment and income (MELO; RODRIGUES, 2021).

These mentioned impacts should not come as a surprise but rather be expected. They are subject to political interventions to minimize them, given that racial, social, and gender inequalities have historically shaped Brazilian society. With the issue of social protection in the spotlight due to the pandemic's effects, a series of policies have been implemented to reduce the unequal impacts of the crisis on populations. The most prominent policy in Brazil has been Stimulus Check (SC).

Therefore, our objective is to list and analyze some of the anticipated and unanticipated impacts (*blind spots*) of Stimulus Check (SC) on the black population, focusing on policy implementation. By examining the performance of Stimulus Check in the relationship between public policy and beneficiaries, we can understand the implications and evaluate how formulated guidelines are put into practice. It is important to emphasize that when the Covid-19 pandemic reached Brazil, it encountered a profoundly unequal society, and it is within this context that we must observe the effects of the crisis. In this sense, it is crucial to mobilize race and class categories as analytical tools. This allows us to understand the structural foundations that articulate the impacts of SC on the black population, one of the most affected segments by the pandemic.

We adopted a qualitative methodological approach to understand the impacts of public policy implementation. Our analysis focused on two main impact dimensions: socio-economic and sanitary. Our goal was to identify the effects of this policy on the black population, considering these two dimensions. The data were treated using the Public Policy Analysis approach, emphasizing the race/color perspective. This approach allowed us to explore the reflections that involve the literature on necropolitics, which address the policies of "letting die" and "letting live", as pointed out by Mbembe's studies (2016). These reflections are particularly relevant in understanding how the Brazilian government managed the sanitary crisis. We conducted a literature review to gain a broader understanding of how the theme of social

protection gained prominence due to the pandemic and how countries created new public policies and adapted and strengthened existing ones.

Due to the recent and complex nature of the phenomenon, we sought to encompass research focusing on the relationship between SC, the black population, and Covid-19. To achieve this, we reviewed research produced with this focus from three different data sources: *Scientific Electronic Library Online* (SciELO), *Google Scholar*, and *Academia.edu*. The objective was to find bibliographic references that already addressed the relationship between the aid provided by the Federal Government, its impacts, and the black population. The research was limited to the period between March 2020 and June 2022. All databases used the exact keywords. For the focus on public policy, the expression "Stimulus Check" was used, while in the context of ethnic-racial relations, the expressions "black population" and "Covid-19" were employed.

After reading the abstracts of the articles, we adopted the criterion of excluding studies that presented a relationship or mention of the Stimulus Check and the black population but primarily focused on the health aspect related to Covid-19, tangentially addressing the topic of the SC's public policy or not. From the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) database, we utilized the following documents: *Social Policies Bulletins: monitoring and analysis n. ° 28* (2021) and *n. ° 29* (2022), which provide consistent data on the impacts and changes experienced by the vulnerable population during the pandemic. These bulletins were selected from the reports produced by IPEA due to their emphasis on the social effects of the pandemic, specifically related to economic activity and racial equality during the studied period. Each bulletin includes a chapter dedicated to this specific theme. Additionally, a survey of the legal document that establishes the policy design, referring to Law n. ° 13,982 (BRASIL, 2020a), was conducted, as well as an analysis of articles in national newspapers that addressed the implementation issues of this policy in Brazil.

The article is divided into four sections. In the first part, we emphasize that the effects of the crisis were exacerbated for the most vulnerable groups in the population, resulting in a differential impact of the Stimulus Check on the black population, taking into account the persistent historical conditions of racial inequality in Brazil, which have been deepened in recent years. In a second moment, we contextualize the emergence of the SC policy, the conventional term used to refer to the emergency income transfer policy implemented in Brazil, investigating the social context presented in the face of the Covid-19 phenomenon.

In the third part, the impacts of the SC on the black population were presented and analyzed, as well as the role played by this policy in mitigating or amplifying the economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The consequences of discontinuing the benefit and a series of social issues that affected the black population were highlighted. Finally, the article concludes with final considerations, emphasizing that although the Stimulus Check was crucial in alleviating the most severe impacts of the pandemic, its implementation was marked by disorganization, weak criteria, and a lack of adequate activation of the already minimally established social protection network in the country. This resulted in difficulties and disorder in accessing the benefit.

The Racial inequality in the pre-Covid-19 era

Almeida (2018, p. 66, our translation) states, "Brazil is a typical example of how racism becomes a technology of power". Therefore, the historically unequal and racialized socioeconomic structure of the Brazilian population directly impacts the social conditions of the black segment. Through this assertion, Almeida (2018) expands the reflection on how race affects black people in Brazil, highlighting that it is an intrinsic issue in life, being connected to the process of reproducing social structures at individual, institutional, and structural levels. Racism acts as a conditioning and structuring factor in the lives of black people, and as an ideology, it shapes how they experience the world around them. Thus, racism, as a historical and political process, creates social conditions that enable systematic discrimination against racially identified groups, whether directly or indirectly.

It is within this context of structural racism, historically constructed in Brazilian society, that the black population becomes particularly vulnerable to the Covid-19 pandemic and its deleterious effects. Both in terms of health impacts and economic consequences, which can lead to mortality from hunger, poverty, and lack of access to minimum health conditions, it is observed that structural racism disproportionately segregates black people in accessing fundamental social rights, such as healthcare, education, housing, and employment. This segregation generally makes upward social mobility and overcoming intergenerational poverty unfeasible or challenging (ALMEIDA, 2018; MARINS, 2017).

In this context, when the Covid-19 pandemic hit Brazil, it encountered a society deeply marked by inequality, which had a decisive impact on the effects of the crisis. The Health Operations and Intelligence Center (NOIS), through the compilation of statistical data related

to structural racism during the pandemic, developed a technical report that examined disparities in the proportion of deaths and recovered patients in hospitalizations for Covid-19 in the country, taking into account demographic and socioeconomic variables. The study encompassed 29,933 cases, including records of fatalities and recovered individuals (NOIS, 2020).

The research identified that the fatality rate in Brazil is very high and is primarily influenced by inequalities in access to treatment. The percentage of black and mixed-race patients who died (54.78%) was higher than that of white patients (37.93%). According to Nilma Lino Gomes, overcoming racism requires effective confrontation, which occurs when the State recognizes the reality and explicitly argues against it (GOMES, 2003). This recognition is crucial as a premise for adopting government policies that address racial inequalities as a public problem in any context. However, during the government of Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022), before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, this prioritization was not a central aspect of the government's agenda.

Structural racism, as an organizing axis of society and social relations, must be recognized as fundamental for developing and implementing social and economic policies, going beyond affirmative action. Since the Durban Conference (2001), the Brazilian State has recognized the need for affirmative policies to mitigate the structural inequalities in Brazilian society. In a post-slavery society like ours, being the last country to abolish the enslavement of black people in 1888, racism permeates daily all social relationships, from interpersonal connections, subjective desires, and sociability subjectivity to organizations (SANTOS; SILVA, 2022).

Destigmatizing racist practices in the Brazilian social structure requires efforts from the entire society, involving governmental and non-governmental organizations, the black movement, and other social activities. It is important to emphasize that public policies are essential in combating social inequalities and can be implemented universally or targeted (SOUZA, 2006). From the 2000s onwards, the adoption of affirmative measures for Black individuals, both for access to higher education and for positions in public service, has been observed, along with other initiatives to confront racism (IPEA, 2021). This example serves to emphasize that targeted public policies, with the Black population as the target audience or primary beneficiaries, are not new and, therefore, can be formulated and implemented even in exceptional contexts, such as the pandemic.

Regarding the symbolic-ideological stance of the Bolsonaro government, according to the Social Policy Bulletin (BPS) n.º 28 (2021) from IPEA, there has been a dismantling of the institutional framework aimed at confronting racism. The two years preceding the Covid-19 pandemic helped us understand why Black individuals, women, and vulnerable populations were the most affected by the impacts of the economic and health crisis. According to Scalon (2011), the historical misallocation of resources in Brazil allows us to understand the complexity and dynamics of racial and social inequalities existing in the pre-pandemic period and how the effects resulting from the crisis disproportionately affect different segments of the population.

In this regard, BPS n.º 28 (2021) points out that this disqualification of racial inequality is an attempt to mitigate structural racism as a public problem that structures society and should be addressed through public policies. What occurs, therefore, is an attempt to construct a reactionary narrative of racial democracy³, in which Brazil, as a mixed-race country, would not have racism as a structural problem but rather as an isolated issue. The idea of racial democracy abstractly upholds the values of equality between white and Black individuals, disregarding the social inequalities among different ethnic-racial groups as a public problem to be confronted.

To further clarify the scenario presented above, data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) for 2019, one year before the pandemic, reveal that the Black or mixed-race population represented 57.7 million people in Brazil's workforce, compared to 46.1 million people of white race. This means that Black and mixed-race individuals accounted for a 25.2% higher percentage compared to white individuals. However, the distribution by economic sectors shows that Black and mixed-race individuals predominantly occupy jobs with lower financial returns, such as in Agriculture (60.8%) and Civil Engineering (62.6%). It is essential to highlight that the highest percentages of employed workers without education or with incomplete schooling (incomplete high school) were found in the areas above (IBGE, 2019).

Regarding unemployment, the same report indicated that the Black or mixed-race population had the highest joblessness rate compared to the White people, and even with the same level of education, the rate is consistently higher among Black and mixed-race individuals (IBGE, 2019). Another significant data point relates to the average monthly income of

³ From a sociological perspective, racial democracy is a false construction of an imagined national past, a false ideology sustained by the alleged absence of racial prejudice and discrimination in Brazil, which was mainly established after the publication of "Casa-Grande e Senzala" by Gilberto Freyre (2019).

employed individuals. The White group (\$576,00) had a payment that was 73.9% higher than that of Black or mixed-race individuals (\$331,00). When analyzing racial, class, and gender inequalities, the research showed that Black and mixed-race women earned less than half of what White men rated (44.4%). The demographic map of Brazil indicated that Black or mixed-race individuals faced more significant restrictions in accessing the Internet (23.9%), basic sanitation (44.5%), education (31.3%), housing conditions (15.5%), and social protection (3.8%). In comparison, all these values are higher than the percentages recorded for White men and women (IBGE, 2019).

Given the above, it is crucial to recognize the role of racism in consolidating Brazilian issues to develop public policies to reduce racial inequalities. However, in the past five years, we have observed a contrary movement where measures to combat racism have been gradually reduced and their scope mitigated, as the Institute of Applied Economic Research reported in 2021. The compiled data reveals a process of dismantling anti-racist policies and promoting racial equality in Brazil, which follows three main directions. Firstly, there is a reduction in institutional capacities, affecting politics' organizational and administrative spheres. Secondly, a symbolic-ideological movement has emerged, strengthened since 2019, in which a systematic and institutionalized discourse regresses to the thesis of racial democracy, denying the existence of structural racism. This represents an attempt to delegitimize the issue of racism as a public matter to be addressed by the Brazilian state. Thirdly, there is a strategy of dismantling by *default*, where decision-makers do not openly declare their intention to end the policy but employ tactics of neglect, lack of assistance, and inaction (IPEA, 2021).

Furthermore, in the Plano Plurianual (PPA) from 2020 to 2023, the Federal Government made few mentions of promoting racial equality, indicating that the fight against racism was no longer a priority in managing the Federal Executive during the Bolsonaro administration. This results in the hollowing out of public policies, representing an attempt to erase the accumulation of initiatives built in the past two decades in areas such as education, health, and labor, as well as in the organization and functioning of the state itself to address structural racism (IPEA, 2021; SANTOS; SILVA, 2022).

In light of this panorama, the Social Policy Bulletin (BPS) emphasizes that:

It is noteworthy, in the analysis of the current Plano Plurianual (PPA), the absence of any broader mention of policies or actions to be developed for the Black population within the program of the Ministry of Women, Family, and Human Rights (MMFDH), to which the subject matter is linked through the National Secretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality Policies (SNPIR) (IPEA, 2021, p. 358, our translation).

The interruption of the anti-racist agenda mentioned above-raised concerns not only due to the lack of policies and actions aimed at promoting racial equality but also due to the silence of the now-extinct Ministry of Women, Family, and Human Rights (MMFDH), both in the media and in the public sphere in general.

What we can observe from this context is a dual movement of delegitimizing racial issues as structuring elements of social relations in Brazil, denying decades of consolidated studies that prove the existence of racial inequality in the country (HENRIQUES, 2001; SANTOS, 2005; FERNANDES, 2015). At the same time, there is a weakening of the system of policies to combat racism and procedures focused on Black populations. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit Brazil, it manifested in a dismantling social protection system, where levels of unemployment and poverty were already alarming. The health crisis had devastating effects on the healthcare system and various areas of social life. The impacts of the situation were differentiated according to the affected social groups.

The basic income in Brazil: The Stimulus Check

As discussed in the previous topic, dismantling public structures in Brazil contributed to the unequal impact of the pandemic on different societal groups. In the face of this situation, social movements and the opposition in the Federal Chamber exerted pressure on the Bolsonaro government due to its apparent lack of concern for protecting the most vulnerable from the pandemic's impacts. This led to the need to adopt specific policies to alleviate the effects of Covid-19.

Under intense pressure, considering the measures taken by world leaders who implemented specific policies not only in the health sector but also in the economic sphere and strengthened their social protection systems based on existing policies, the Senate approved the Stimulus Check (SC), established by Law n. ° 13,982 of 2020. It was a basic income intended for low-income families, individual microentrepreneurs, informal workers, and the unemployed, aiming to mitigate the main impacts caused by the economic crisis triggered by the health crisis.

To understand the implementation of a public policy like the SC, it is essential to consider the State not as a unitary entity but as a sphere where interactions occur among different agents and institutional actors with distinct competencies in the production of a policy of significant scopes, such as the SC. We will not delve into the purely procedural basis of the

implementation of Stimulus Check here but will highlight the critical points of its performance aligned with this article's objective.

In the case of the Stimulus Check, the Ministry of Citizenship (MC) played a central role in the implementation of the policy, being responsible for "managing the SC for all beneficiaries" (CARDOSO, 2020, p. 1054, our translation). The Ministry of Economy (ME), at the time, collaborated "jointly with the Ministry of Citizenship in defining the criteria for identifying the beneficiaries of the SC" (CARDOSO, 2020, p. 1054). Additionally, the Caixa Econômica Federal (CEF) was used by the Federal Government to make the payments, and payroll sheets were approved to enable the operationalization of the Stimulus Check (CARDOSO, 2020; SANTOS; SILVA, 2022).

The target audience of the SC consisted of low-income families, Bolsa Família beneficiaries, individuals already registered in the Cadastro Único (CadÚnico), individual microentrepreneurs (MEIs), informal workers, and those who became unemployed due to the pandemic. To qualify for the aid, these individuals needed to meet the following conditions:

(i) be over 18 (eighteen) years old; (ii) not have an active formal employment; (iii) not be the recipient of a social security or welfare benefit, or receive unemployment insurance or federal income transfer program, except for the Bolsa Família program as provided in paragraphs 1 and 2; (iv) have a monthly per capita family income of up to 1/2 (half) of the minimum wage or a total monthly family income of up to 3 (three) minimum wages; (v) not have received taxable income above R\$ 28,559.70 (twenty-eight thousand, five hundred and fifty-nine reais and seventy cents) in the year 2018; and (vi) be engaged in one of the following activities: a) individual microentrepreneur (MEI); b) individual contributor to the General Social Security System who contributes under the terms of the central provision or item I of paragraph 2 of Article 21 of Law n.º 8,212, of July 24, 1991; or c) informal worker, whether employed, self-employed, or unemployed, of any nature, including inactive intermittent workers, registered in the Cadastro Único for Federal Social Programs (CadÚnico) until March 20, 2020, or who, according to self-declaration, meets the requirement of item IV (BRASIL, 2020a, online, our translation).

An analysis of the law reveals inclusive criteria, such as being an individual microentrepreneur (MEI), an individual contributor to the Social Security System, and an informal worker, as well as exclusionary criteria, such as age, income, active formal employment, and ownership of social security benefits, unemployment insurance, or federal income transfer programs, except for the Bolsa Família Program (PBF). These conditionalities, advocated by Rego and Pinzani (2013), although not the central point of criticism of the income

transfer policy, limit its effectiveness and contradict the idea of universal income (LAVINAS, 2004; SUPLICY, 2007).

Regarding the amount of the SC, the payments ranged from \$ 124,00 to \$ 248,00 per month for individuals in situations of greater vulnerability. The assistance adopted a payment model used in other social programs, such as the Bolsa Família Program (PBF), based on the beneficiary's birth month. Implementing payment in cycles, carried out by Caixa Econômica Federal (CEF), aimed to reduce long queues at branches throughout Brazil⁴. One of the conditionalities of the SC was that single mothers would receive double the amount (\$ 248,00) (BRASIL, 2020b).

Discussions around the value of the benefit generated mobilization from the political opposition to the Federal Government in the Chamber of Deputies, arguing that the proposed amount was disproportionate compared to other countries such as the United States, Uruguay, and Germany (MARINS *et al.*, 2021). After pressure from lawmakers, Congress approved the payment of three installments of \$ 124,00. As established in the text of the Law, a maximum of two individuals per family could receive the assistance. After approval by Congress, the Ministry of Citizenship worked with an estimate of reaching up to 54 million Brazilians.

However, the reality encountered was quite different. It was initially projected to reach between 75 and 80 million people, but the number of applications for assistance reached nearly 110 million Brazilians⁵. The significant uptake by the population even surprised government officials, such as Pedro Guimarães, then-president of Caixa, who expressed astonishment in a press conference given to various media outlets on April 20, 2020, stating that "25% of the Brazilian population were 'invisible' until two weeks ago" (BACCHIEGGA; FREITAS; VASCONCELLOS, 2022, our translation).

Regarding the operationalization of the SC, the Cadastro Único⁶ (Unified Registry) was the instrument used for the "identification and socioeconomic characterization of low-income Brazilian families" (CARDOSO, 2020, p. 1056, our translation). It became the principal means by which the Federal Government identified citizens who would initially be eligible to receive Stimulus Check. Caixa Econômica Federal (CEF) was the operator of the CadÚnico and was

⁴An article titled "Agências da Caixa têm filas no 1º dia de pagamento do novo auxílio emergencial" published on April 6, 2021, by CNN Brasil. The article can be accessed at: <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/business/sem-possibilidade-de-saque-para-o-auxilio-agencias-da-caixa-amanhecem-com-filas/>. Access in: 10 Feb. 2023.

⁵Official data regarding Stimulus Check can be accessed at <https://auxilio.caixa.gov.br/>. Access in: 10 Feb. 2023.

⁶The Cadastro Único (Unified Registry) was created in 2001 under Decree n.º 3,877 and regulated by Decree n.º 6,135 of 2007 as an "instrument for the identification and socioeconomic characterization of low-income Brazilian families" (CARDOSO, 2020, p. 1056) It is used for the selection of beneficiaries and the integration of social programs by the Federal Government.

also responsible for the payment of the SC. It is essential to highlight that CEF is also accountable for the Bolsa Família Program (PBF) cost, demonstrating the use of existing instruments to implement the SC (CARDOSO, 2020). According to Pinto (2020, p. 11, our translation), the CadÚnico, as a "provenly useful instrument in managing income transfer policies for the target audience", proved essential for the transition of benefits for thousands of Brazilians, in this case, the transition from the PBF to the SC.

Amid the need for social distancing imposed by the current pandemic situation, Caixa Econômica Federal (CEF) launched the mobile application "CaixaTem", which became the primary registration method for potential beneficiaries of the Stimulus Check who were not previously registered in the Cadastro Único or beneficiaries of the Bolsa Família Program (PBF) - these individuals were referred to as "invisible" by the then-president of the institution. Caixa also implemented transfers to special accounts, creating a digital social savings account that could be accessed through the mentioned application.

After the first three months of implementing the aid, the government issued a decree on July 1, 2020, to extend the benefit for an additional two months, maintaining the exact value of \$ 124. After five months, there was another extension of the benefit, with the weight reduced by half, establishing installments of \$ 62. In 2021, after the issuance of decrees that ensured the continuity of payments, beneficiaries waited for four months until the resumption of disbursements. A new regulation was established for the cost of Stimulus Check in 2021, including limitations on eligibility, allowing only one person per family to receive the benefit. The values ranged from up to \$ 77 for single mothers heading households to \$ 31 for individuals living alone, while families with more members or that already had two beneficiaries in 2020 received \$ 51 per installment (MARINS *et al.*, 2021).

During the implementation of the Stimulus Check policy amidst the pandemic, constant bureaucracy, and the reduction in the number of beneficiaries were persistent uncertainties in this policy. In Brazil, hit by an economic crisis aggravated by the virus, these implementation issues directly impacted the Black population, as will be analyzed in the next section. These problems were related to three converging aspects: I) slow administrative procedures regarding the Stimulus Check, indicating the government's willingness to deny the severity of the pandemic systematically; II) technical obstacles in the effective implementation of the program; and III) the weight of social and racial inequalities in promoting assistance to the most vulnerable segments, disparities that, it is worth noting, already existed in the country for

decades but were exacerbated during the pandemic (BACCHIEGGA; FREITAS; VASCONCELLOS, 2022; SANTOS; SILVA, 2022).

The emphasis on the negationist discourse of the Bolsonaro administration, in addition to undermining the symbolic foundations for State actions in the fight against racial inequalities, contributes to the advancement and intensification of impacts on the historically vulnerable population, predominantly black in Brazil, in the face of the dismantling of public policies in the field of racial equality. Finally, it is essential to highlight that, due to registration problems, duplication, and understanding of the application and payment schedule, the way the SC was implemented has generated a series of impacts for its beneficiaries, which will be analyzed in more depth and with an emphasis on the racial issue that follows.

The impacts of Stimulus Check on the Black population

In this section, we will address the impacts of SC on the black population, considering the intersections with gender and class markers. For an analysis of this nature, it is necessary not only to recognize but also to consider the conditions of vulnerability to which the Brazilian black population is structurally and daily subjected in various areas of social life, ranging from access to essential sanitation services to inequalities in employment opportunities and underrepresentation in institutions and positions of power.

Before delving into the analysis of the impacts of the Stimulus Check, it is important to highlight some data: until 2014, poverty was declining in Brazil due to the advancement of redistributive social policies, such as the Bolsa Família program, real wage gains, and expanded access to education (SOUZA, 2021). However, starting in 2015, with the effects of the economic crisis⁷ this trend reversed, and poverty began to increase annually. In 2021, with the compounded impact of the pandemic and the mismanagement of its adversities, Brazil reached the historic milestone of 14.5 million families living in extreme poverty, defined as those with a monthly income of up to \$ 18 (IPEA, 2021). This translates to 70 million Brazilians living in misery⁸. Among black individuals, 73% experienced a reduction in income during the

⁷In this context, we are referring to the global economic crisis that originated in 2008 and had its amplified effects felt in Brazil from the mid-2010s onwards.

⁸ Currently, approximately 14.5 million Brazilian families are living in extreme poverty. (Source: IG Economia). Available at: <https://economia.ig.com.br/2021-05-23/registre-extrema-pobreza-14-5-milhoes-familias-miseria-brasil.html#:~:text=Em%20abril%20deste%20ano%2C%2014,de%2040%20mil%C3%B5es%20de%20pessoas>. Accessed in: 10 Abr. 2022.

pandemic, compared to 60% of white individuals; 49% were unable to pay bills, in contrast to 32% of white individuals.

The Stimulus Check had a cushioning effect. In 2021, the low-income population was left without assistance from January to March. Regarding employment in the labor market, the IBGE reported that in 2021, there were 12.0 million unemployed individuals and 4.8 million discouraged workers, with an unemployment rate of 11.1%. In comparison, according to the Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies (DIEESE), from 2020 to the first quarter of 2021, there were 14.8 million unemployed individuals, and the number of people out of the workforce reached 9.2 million (SANTOS; SILVA, 2022). Brazilian black families experienced reduced income during the worst moments of the pandemic⁹.

In April of the same year, the payment started to be exclusively made through the Caixa application, which hindered access to resources for families who faced difficulties using the internet. The value of the benefit was reduced to an average of \$ 51, ranging from \$ 31 for individuals living alone to \$ 51 for households with more than one person and \$ 77 for single mothers. The number of beneficiaries decreased from 68.2 million in 2020 to 45.6 million in 2021. Black women were the most affected: before the pandemic, poverty affected 33% of black women, 32% of black men, and 15% of white women and men. With the assistance reduction in 2021, these indicators rose to 38%, 36%, and 19%, respectively. Due to the more vulnerable position of black women in the labor market, they are severely impacted during a crisis (IPEA, 2021).

Stimulus Check, or its absence, had a significant impact on black populations economically and in other aspects of life, especially considering that we were facing a health crisis. The policy did not have an effective online support channel, which meant that any bureaucracy required people to expose themselves to the virus by seeking in-person assistance (DIEESE, 2021). The following is a compilation of the leading implementation problems and how they affected the poorest black populations in the country:

I) Filas and overcrowding at Caixa Econômica Federal branches: Thousands of people across Brazil crowded at CEF branches and Social Assistance Reference Centers (CRAS) in an attempt to resolve registration issues. Promoting and implementing public policies involves formulating them based on consistent data and understanding how their implementation will

⁹ Balanço indica que 2021 foi o ano mais letal da pandemia no país 31/12/2021. G1 Jornal Nacional. Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/jornal-nacional/noticia/2021/12/31/balanco-indica-que-2021-foi-o-ano-mais-letal-da-pandemia-no-pais.ghtml>. Accessed in: 10 Feb. 2023.

unfold. Defining the target audience to develop the most appropriate implementation strategy subsequently is a crucial aspect of any public policy.

II) As a public policy implemented amidst a pandemic, the State failed to organize the bureaucrats who could assist in the implementation process. Difficulties in accessing the internet or owning a *smartphone*, coupled with the requirement for CPF regularization with the Federal Revenue Office, led to thousands of people exposing themselves to the coronavirus while attempting to resolve registration issues. Following these incidents, the Federal Revenue Office announced the automatic regularization of CPF-related pending matters.

III) The lack of familiarity with digital technologies among the most vulnerable population is another significant problem. This results in low adherence to online registration by a group that likely needs the most assistance. According to Bulletin number 5 of the series "COVID-19: Public Policies and Society's Responses" (USP, 2020), it is estimated that at least 7.4 million eligible people in Brazil do not have internet access in their homes. In this sense, the Stimulus Check excluded at least 6.1 million potential beneficiaries. Digital exclusion is a phenomenon that directly affects the poor and black populations in Brazil, as evidenced during the pandemic¹⁰, and it had a significant impact on an income transfer policy designed to be accessed through the Internet¹¹.

IV) Another problem was the delay in making decisions regarding the aid payment. The policy implementation involved a negotiation process between Congress and the Executive, with the economic team of the Ministry of Economy initially suggesting a value of \$51 per person, claiming it was more than enough to cover the costs of a monthly basic food basket. These impasses delayed the definition of rules, guidelines, and values for the aid, while several other countries worldwide have already provided direct payments to beneficiaries.

V) The reduction in the value of the Stimulus Check in 2021 exacerbated the social and economic vulnerability of the black population. In different states, this population was more affected by mortality caused by the coronavirus, poverty, and hunger. According to Santos *et al.* (2020), dismantling public policies for racial equality during the Bolsonaro administration's handling of the pandemic contributed to an overrepresentation of the black population in the

¹⁰Negros e pobres sofrem com exclusão digital durante a pandemia. Available at: <https://forbes.com.br/forbes-tech/2020/05/negros-e-pobres-sofrem-com-exclusao-digital-durante-a-pandemia/>. Accessed in: 13 June 2022.

¹¹Desigualdade digital é maior entre negras e indígenas. Available at: <https://www.convergenciadigital.com.br/Inclusao-Digital/Desigualdade-digital-e-maior-entre-negras-e-indigenas-60511.html?UserActiveTemplate=mobile>. Accessed in: 10 June 2022.

number of Covid-19¹² deaths, another lamentable indicator. The lack of data prevents a detailed analysis of the social and economic context of the poorest segments of the population in the post-pandemic period after the end of the Stimulus Check. However, based on the still limited data on the economic effects of the reduction in the value of SC since 2021, we can infer a possible deepening of poverty, especially among the black population.

Finally, while the Stimulus Check was essential for the subsistence of a significant portion of the population, for household economies, and for the consumption of low-income black families, its implementation issues, reduction in value, and its end without proper coordination with other income transfer policies and without the stability of the national economy may have exacerbated the poverty situation and the inability to meet basic needs such as food and healthcare.

Final Considerations

In addition to a bibliographic review of research focused on analyzing and generating knowledge about the impacts of the pandemic, this study aimed to gather data highlighting the Stimulus Check disorganized and poorly technical implementation. We first reflected on the pandemic context and its consequences to understand how these adversities affected a specific population group more significantly.

The effects of Covid-19, both in the realm of public health and socio-economic aspects, were differentiated depending on variables such as gender, race, and social class of each individual. Regional inequalities, informal forms of work, people with disabilities, older people, and healthcare professionals, who constituted groups particularly vulnerable to the risks of contagion and the new social dynamics outlined by the pandemic, demonstrate that the intersection of social markers in Brazil is crucial to understanding how the pandemic differentially affected specific segments of society. In other words, poverty in Brazil has characteristics of color, gender, and social class. In this article, we understand that the impacts of the pandemic are directly related to historically established and multifaceted inequalities experienced daily by the black and vulnerable population.

As a case study, we addressed the implementation of the public policy of Stimulus Check and highlighted its intended effects, such as expanding the country's social protection

¹² Negros morrem mais pela Covid-19. Available at: <https://www.medicina.ufmg.br/negros-morrem-mais-pela-Covid-19/>. Accessed in: May 2022.

network in the face of the health crisis, providing income support to families directly affected by containment measures such as lockdowns and social distancing, and ensuring access to a minimum level of human dignity. Additionally, we also emphasized the unintended effects, such as difficulties in accessing the most vulnerable target population due to the *online* and *smartphone-exclusive* registration process, the instability of the website for registration, the queues and crowds during registration and benefit collection, which created a risk of contagion during a critical period of the pandemic, initial difficulties related to SSN regularization, delays in decision-making for the payment of the aid - the law was sanctioned on April 2, 2020, and the first installment was paid at the end of April - restrictions on money movement in accounts, initially disallowing withdrawals or transfers, and the inadequacy of human resources, particularly in the Centers of Reference for Social Assistance (CRAS), to cope with the high demand during the pandemic.

The most concerning aspect is the set of unexpected effects. It is essential to note the limitations of the social protection strategy adopted by Brazil. Firstly, by focusing on coverage, the Federal Government established eligibility conditions that excluded populations that could have been included, particularly the black population. Secondly, although access to non-contributory social protection has helped mitigate the increase in extreme poverty and poverty during the pandemic in Brazil, it has not been able to provide subsidies to sustain this situation for an extended period.

The constant difficulties in uncertainty and insecurity have increased, amplifying and accelerating daily hardships in various spheres. An example of this is the food insecurity faced by these workers, as with lower incomes and employment uncertainty, "the health of socioeconomically vulnerable population groups tends to be further aggravated, especially those residing in risk areas and comprising the mass of unemployed or underemployed individuals in Brazil" (OLIVEIRA; ABRANCHES; LANA, 2020, p. 3-4, our translation).

We acknowledge that, despite all the implementation issues faced by the primary income policy, it was essential during the period it was in effect, preventing thousands of people from experiencing misery and hunger during a critical time of social isolation. However, in the face of the structural racial inequalities that permeate Brazilian society, it was crucial for the Federal Government, through its bureaucratic and political institutions, to adopt a stance of confronting these disparities. The absence of specific public policies for the black population during the pandemic, despite social indicators showing how this population was most affected

in terms of both mortality and unemployment, has been described by some authors as the exercise of necropolitics (SANTOS *et al.*, 2020).

Although it is a non-targeted policy, the contradictory effects of implementing the Stimulus Check impacted the black population. Additionally, we emphasize the difficulty of accessing data related to this policy and mention that, through the research directory "Desigualdade, Interseccionalidade e Política Pública", we requested data on SC beneficiaries segmented by race, gender, and class in 2021, but did not receive a response.

We hope this article can contribute to research on minimum income and policies focused on combating racial inequalities. Furthermore, we wish for the debate on these issues to advance and promote progress in academic studies and the practical implementation of public policies. It is crucial to have greater transparency and access to information to understand and address racial inequalities more effectively and equitably.

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