
Work, Inequalities, and Precarization: Impacts on Brazil in Times of COVID-19 Pandemic

Travail, inégalités et précarisation : les impacts sur le Brésil en période de pandémie de COVID-19

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/interventionseconomiques/14459>

DOI: [10.4000/interventionseconomiques.14459](https://doi.org/10.4000/interventionseconomiques.14459)

ISBN: 1710-7377

ISSN: 1710-7377

Publisher

Association d'Économie Politique

Electronic reference

Paulo Cesar Greenhalgh de Cerqueira Lima and Paulo Renato Flores Durán, "Work, Inequalities, and Precarization: Impacts on Brazil in Times of COVID-19 Pandemic", *Revue Interventions économiques* [Online], 66 | 2021, Online since 11 June 2021, connection on 13 June 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/interventionseconomiques/14459> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/interventionseconomiques.14459>



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Revue Interventions économiques

Papers in Political Economy

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This text was automatically generated on 9 June 2021.

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1. Introduction

- 1 The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the new coronavirus (Sars-Cov-2), was formally acknowledged by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020. The first case of contamination in Brazil was identified on February 26, 2020. After a period of mitigation in September/October, the health situation in the first months of 2021 was aggravated.
- 2 The Brazilian government has declared a State of Public Calamity for fiscal reasons : to exempt the federal government from meeting the fiscal targets required by law. On March 22, 2020, the government enacted the primary measure for obtaining or maintaining minimum conditions of survival of the poorer classes of society during the pandemic. Such initiative contributed to the survival of large contingents of people with no income or those living in extreme poverty. During the March to December period, the government distributed the so-called emergency aid monthly to about 68 million people, corresponding to 57.4 % of the minimum wage of R\$ 1,045.00 (or US\$ 106.38, at the average exchange rate in May/2020). The emergency aid was higher than the amount granted by Bolsa Família, a federally funded federal program created in the early 2000s, which benefited 14.283 million families regularly in June 2020.
- 3 With the announced objective of maintaining companies and jobs, the federal government's second important initiative was the possibility of suspending employment contracts or reducing working hours and wages for up to four months and

guaranteeing the maintenance of employment in subsequent months, corresponding to the months of suspended employment. These and other measures, which were made possible by the declaration of the “state of calamity”, allowed companies to take actions that contradicted the CLT, the Consolidation of Labor Laws, in force since 1943 (a point further detailed in Section 3). Examples include individual employer-employee arrangements that were not part of the work contracts, without disclosure to trade unions, and the transfer of workers from company facilities to home office (and vice versa) without consulting them.

- 4 Those two examples are the ones that most interest us because they encompass items implying the most profound changes – even if valid only during the year 2020 – in the monetary conditions of survival in the “informal world” of labor.
- 5 Such public policies required the improvement of existing registrations of formal or informal workers. The result was the emergence of an unforeseen number of “invisible individuals”, that is, millions of informal workers who were not included in the official records but who met the criteria to be considered for the emergency aid and claimed it.
- 6 At this point, we shall make a digression : although it is not included in the scope of this paper, it will be fundamental to fully understand the measures adopted by the federal government. It is related to the political aspects of the Brazilian central government’s behavior, which is responsible for the Unified Health System – SUS, and the Ministry of Health, in the management of the struggle against the pandemic. See, for instance, the Head of State’s tone and denial strategy, minimizing the Covid-19 pandemic, criticizing social distancing measures, the compulsory use of masks in public places, and his disrespect for isolation measures (with disrespectful comments such as “life goes on,” “it is nothing but a mere cold,” and so on)¹. In other words, his public support for recommendations that were not prescribed by the WHO or by the scientific community resulted in feelings of uncertainty and difficulty when it comes to the collective confrontation of the pandemic. The resignation of two Health Ministers in a row, the appointment of a third one, an Army General, and the upper echelons’ militarization undermined the Health Ministry plans and decisions regarding the supply of ICU equipment and oxygen balloons. The plans for acquiring vaccines became public after pressures from society, but until this date, planning proved incompatible with reality². The initiative of the government of the State of São Paulo (“ignored” by the President because it came from a political opponent), after direct negotiations with the Chinese government, led to the concrete supply, in January 2021, of a limited number of vaccines, with partial local production in São Paulo scheduled to start February/ March/2021³.
- 7 This is the context in which substantial changes in working conditions and dramatic changes in workers’ situations developed in several aspects of life. The increase in the unemployment rate in November/20 (14.2 %) left 14.0 million workers with no job (IBGE-PNADC, 2020). At the same time, in November, 2.1 million people were still away from work due to social distancing. For a significant part of Brazilians, discouragement has been the rule in recent years. As the pandemic advanced, the challenges it imposed shed light on precarization in the world of work. An attempt to understand the impacts of the new situation, still under development, is of utmost importance, with particular attention to its ambiguities.
- 8 This paper aims to critically analyze how the pandemic has highlighted social inequalities in the country and - the focus of the paper - especially as inequalities are

identified in the individuals-work relationship, paying particular attention to informal workers, unemployed persons, persons with no income, and the “microentrepreneur” (Cardoso, 2019), with low revenue level.

1.1 A methodological note

- 9 This paper has used secondary quantitative data from institutional sources, especially from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE - Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística). The primary source is the National Continuous Household Sample Survey (PNADC - Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios Contínua) conducted by IBGE quarterly in nearly 211,000 households, including over 3,500 of the country’s 5,570 municipalities.
- 10 The data choice to be analyzed has both advantages and limitations : we opted for a large-scope, strictly descriptive quantitative cutout. On the other hand, this allowed us to identify how the pandemic has affected several labor-related characteristics of Brazil’s more vulnerable populations, such as occupation and informal work relationships. These dimensions were associated with people’s fundamental features in their structural inequalities, such as age, income, education, and race/ethnicity, to investigate the pandemic’s impacts on these population groups. IBGE/PNADC’s data were complemented by the PNAD/COVID-19 survey.
- 11 The paper is composed of five sections, including an Introduction and a Conclusion. Section 2 presents some macro social and political indicators of Brazilian society. Brazilian democracy perversely coexists with solid tendencies to social inequalities resulting from, among other factors, the concentration of income at the “top” of social stratification. Some advances and dilemmas in developing democracy in the country and social integration challenges are also presented.
- 12 Section 3 focuses on theoretical and conceptual concepts. On the one hand, we will examine the historical, political, and legal trajectories that enabled the construction of a work order in the country, pointing to the regulation of the world of work. On the other hand, we will show how the institutionalized format of citizenship and social security in the country and the post-authoritarian period of deregulation and flexibilization of social legislation have hindered the maintenance/evolution of a sustainable and social protection regime that might be compatible with social and economic development. In Section 4, we analyze evidence from secondary sources of research (quantitative - extensive sample surveys of IBGE) on the deepening social inequalities and precarization of work during the pandemic period. Finally, the Conclusion presents reflections on the research’s primary results, focusing on data analysis involving the most vulnerable groups of the Brazilian population. Moreover, potential scenarios in the Brazilian world of work in the still uncertain future post-pandemic points in time are mentioned.

2. Social and political dimensions of Brazilian society

- 13 Brazil has a population of 211.8 million inhabitants. Its territory is divided into five regions (North, Northeast, Central-West, Southeast, and South) and includes 27 states and a Federal District (IBGE, 2020).

- 14 The 1988 Constitution – also known as the Citizen Charter – is the foundation on which the Brazilian return to the democratic rule of law was built after more than twenty years of the military regime (1964-1985). According to Samuel Huntington (1993), with its promulgation, Brazil could then be included among the cases of the third wave of democratization, started in 1974 (for example, the Carnation Revolution in Portugal) and extended across other continents (including Argentina, Chile, and Greece, for instance). The fact that Brazilian society is now a democratic political regime, divided into three branches, organized as a federation, with election routines for executive and legislative positions, freedom of political association, universal suffrage, and secret vote – all of which highlight the principles of the procedural minimum, according to Robert Dahl (1972) – shows no evidence of consolidation and experience of Brazilians with democracy.
- 15 The failure to consolidate the democratic regime in Brazil can be evaluated from survey data gathered by several research institutes. Latinobarometro provides an overview of the frail democratic legitimacy in the country. Brazil reached, in 2015, the HDI of 0.778, a reasonable level that contrasts with the data on the quality of its democracy and those presented by Transparency International: according to the CPI (Corruption Perception Index), the Brazilian score is 35/100. According to Latinobarometro (2018) considering macro indicators, as low as 6 % of the citizens were satisfied with the country's economic situation. Moreover, in the 2017-2018 period, Brazilians' support for democracy decreased : in 2017, 43 % of those interviewed preferred the democratic political regime, compared to 34 % in 2018. In 2018, 41 % of Brazilians declared they were *indifferent* to the country's political regime. As shown, Latinobarometro has identified that the Brazilian citizens' support for the democratic regime has been falling since 2013.
- 16 Such data reveal that, despite Brazil's return to democratic rule, many levels of contradictions persist. The growth of the HDI has been considered low. As such, the perception of Brazilians concerning democracy can be regarded as low, since the experience of habituation with the enjoyment of the democratic rule of law, its institutional arrangements, and the issue of citizenship is still a dilemma for the political and economic development of the country. As to income concentration, Brazil has a very high Gini Index, showing the persistence of patterns of inequality, poverty, and exclusion :

Table 1. Evolution of Gini Index (2000-2020)

YEAR	GINI INDEX
2001	0.596
2002	0.589
2003	0.583
2004	0.572
2005	0.570
2006	0.563
2007	0.556
2008	0.546
2009	0.543
2010	-
2011	0.531
2012	0.530
2013	0.527
2014*	0.518
2015**	0.525
2016	0.538
2017	0.539
2018	0.545
2019	0.543

Sources : * IPEA. <http://www.ipeadata.gov.br/ExibeSerie.aspx?serid=37818&module=M>
 ** Barbosa ; Souza ; Soares (2020).

- 17 Table 1 reveals that, despite the decrease until 2014, a sign of social policies designed to fight the persistence of poverty and social inequalities standards in the country, from 2015, the Gini has increased. As a result, we can state that per capita income inequality (as measured per household) has shown a very low decrease (as low as 9 % in the 2001-2019 period).
- 18 When it comes to the world of work, the data mentioned above allow us to understand that one of the country's top priorities is the relationship between integrating citizens in the world of work and strengthening social protection networks. But how can we solve those two major social issues (work and social protection) in a world of advanced restructuring and flexibilization of work ?

3. The process of formalization of work and the social protection system in check in Brazil

- 19 The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Brazilian world of work can be analyzed as part of an institutional legacy that dates back to the development of the country's social legislation, which started in the 1930s. This section addresses the institutional process of the development of laborism ("*trabalhismo*") in Brazil – which resulted in a robust centralized decision-making process about citizenship assets by the State – and the recent impacts of the precarization resulting from labor flexibilization measures, especially from the 1990s on, followed up by ever-increasing social inequalities (Pochmann, 1999 ; Antunes, 2006, 2020 ; Cardoso, 2016). The historical neo-institutionalism theoretical framework is based on two main points: (1) the institutional effects arising from the governmental decision-making process are shaped by the choices of the players, and (2) the choices of the players are shaped by history – that is, they depend on previous trajectories (social and political cleavages ; economic development pathways ; political regimes and political parties in power, etc.) (Hall and Taylor, 2003 ; Steinmo et al., 1992 ; Cardoso, 2010). Next, we will summarize and discuss the process of developing a relationship between institutions and the working class in the country up to the current stage, which is considered highly unfavorable to the workers in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.1. The historical-institutional legacies of labor in Brazil

20 Liberal conceptions and corporatist conceptions of the relationship between the State and society have prevailed alternatively in the process of labor regulation in Brazil. The establishment of a federative democratic republic culminated in the prevalence of a mix of a liberal approach of government and a corporatist labor approach (Werneck Vianna, 1979 ; Gomes, 2005). To understand this process, we must further analyze how the social issue was firmly institutionalized in Brazil and how labor regulation became a governmental priority, especially from the 1930s on, leading up to the formalization of millions of occupations (Cardoso, 2010).

21 The following table links milestones in the development of labor relations and social legislation to the social and political context :

22 **Table 2. Evolution of Social Legislation on Labor**

HISTORICAL PERIODS	ADVANCES AND TRANSFORMATIONS	DEVELOPMENT
A – Vargas Years (1930/1945; 1950/1954)	1- Laws of the Minimum Wage (1936) and the Employment Record Book ("Carteira de Trabalho"- 1932)	1.1- The criterion for calculating the minimum wage considered the basic needs of a worker. The Employment Record Book became a symbol of formalization of work; when carrying it, one would be free from the accusation of "vagrancy."
	2 - 1937 Coup d'état. The new Constitution enshrines or reaffirms collective employment, the institution of the Labor Justice, and considers strikes and lock-outs as "antisocial." *	2.1- The Vargas dictatorship, which began in 1937, will be overthrown by a military-civilian coup in 1945.
	3 - Trade union law - 1940: the creation of the mandatory "union tax" paid to the government annually by every employee, unionized or not. It maintains union unity.	3.1- The mandatory payment by the worker of a fee equivalent to one working day to the government; the resources are distributed to maintain the union structure. There is a single union by profession for each territorial basis.
	4 - Creation of the Ministry of Labor, Industry, and Trade (1930) and Regulation of Labor Justice (1939).	4.1- Coordinates the aspects of the capital-labor relationship. The Labor Justice sought the reconciliation of collective bargaining.
	5 - Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT) - 1943.	5.1- Systematization of labor-related norms and institutions, such as trade union law and Labor Justice, "in an organic and coherent whole," whose focus was shown to be the union and the "union tax." **
B - Post-Vargas period to this day	6 - 1985 Constituent Assembly	6.1- Promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, having at its core the CLT and several additional labor rights.
	7 - Beginning of flexibilization - 1990s	7.1 Laws of part-time work (1998) and the Bank of Hours (1998). 7.2 Legalization of the outsourcing of the company's support activities (1993). From 2015 on, all activities, including the company's main activities, were also included.
	8 - Labor Reform - 2017	8.1- Intermittent work, zero-hour contract, the prevalence of "negotiated" over the "legislated," restriction of the role of the Labor Justice, individual contracts.
	9 - Pension Reform - 2019	9.1- The reform increased the minimum retirement age and the minimum contribution time. It also increased requirements for receiving a pension and included the massive number of workers linked to the General Social Welfare Policy. 9.2- It did not affect civil servants' relationship with social security, including the military and civil servants of the three branches of the Brazilian State.

Source: * (Werneck Vianna, 1978)

23 The concept of regulated citizenship (*cidadania regulada*) helps to understand this process. According to Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos, the idea is rooted not "in a code of political values, but rather in a system of occupational stratification, and that, moreover, this system of occupational stratification is defined by legal norm" (Santos, 1979). That is, the author argues that the organic institutional structure of social

legislation – which linked the idea of citizenship to work – would have formed a broad corporatist spectrum that relates individuals to the world of labor (1) through the Employment Record Book (*Carteira de Trabalho*) to be signed by the employer, (2) through the mandatory trade unions contribution. According to Elisa Reis and Zairo Cheibub (1993), even considering the market interests in a social-regulating institution, in the Brazilian case, these “should be implemented basically by the initiative of the State.” The country’s state structure becomes “the main player in the promotion of development.” As to the concept of regulated citizenship, the authors argue that “the pattern of citizenship adopted was based on a labor market maintained under strict state control.”

- 24 The corporatist union system implemented after the 1930 Revolution, led by Getúlio Vargas, aimed primarily at controlling the trade union movement, partly explaining the effective development of labor protection laws. It was an overly ambitious move : Vargas not only sought to bring the social issue to the foreground of public debate (Gomes, 2005) but also to implement a state-led and controlled project having workers as players in the political scene in collaboration with public authorities (Vianna, 1978), despite the strong opposition of business owners, who would not accept workers at the negotiating table (Vianna, 1978, p. 207). The symbolic dimension of this project, of full promotion of the Brazilian man (Cardoso, 2010), “of glorification (...) of the Brazilian race (...) building the industrial greatness of Brazil (...)” (Gomes, 2005) is key to understanding how Vargas granted a large number of Brazilians social legislation.
- 25 The widening of social legislation favored the increasing formalization of labor relations, even though many social protection items took time to come into force. Such initiatives were implemented by the so-called “laborism” (Gomes, 2005), which represented what Philippe Schmitter named “state corporatism” (Schmitter, 1974). The basis of a long-term corporate system in the country was then created ; later, during the 1964 military coup, it would be repressed – but not destroyed.
- 26 Table 2 illustrates that Brazil has managed to achieve a social protection system materialized as (1) the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT) mentioned above ; (2) the 1988 Constitution (shortly after the military dictatorship period – 1964-85) ; (3) specific laws that granted Brazilians many social benefits so that they could be considered modern citizens. Despite issues such as access to and quality of services, which affect mainly the lower-income population, it is a broad set of benefits typical of a welfare state.
- 27 However, even though Brazil has developed robust social legislation, with the government organizing labor, the implementation of new policies and proposals for a new order of economic globalization has affected the form and structure of the integration of citizenship in the world of work. Aspects related to inequalities point to numerous biases in this integration. Even today, the very institutionalization by the State of citizenship linked to labor (with the creation of the Consolidation of Brazilian Labor Laws, Labor Justice, etc.) reinforces the country’s institutional legacies. Recent labor reforms (in the 1990s and 2017) brought Brazil closer to the capital-friendly economic order and weakened citizenship rights and social protection networks. One such example is the deterioration of the forms of labor contracts, with the legalization of temporary labor contracts, “intermittent” work, and unrestricted outsourcing of workers. The historical issue of the union tax, whose compulsoriness was extinguished by the 2017 reform, is another dimension that weakened workers’ representativeness

before their employers and the State and, as such, the possibility of channels for the mobilization of collective action.

4. The Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Labor - Inequality and precarization

4.1 A note on the persistence of inequalities in contemporary Brazil

- 28 Brazil is a structurally unequal society. One can analyze the persistent patterns of inequalities in the country in multiple ways and using different approaches. In this part of the paper, quantitative data related to the persistence of inequality in Brazilian society are examined, looking at changes in the world of labor.
- 29 Although successive governments have created public policies for inclusion and social integration, the persistence of work-related inequalities is coherent with what Charles Tilly (1998) calls durable inequality. That is, the persistence of patterns of inequality should be explained by the genesis of the institutional mechanisms of, for example, integration/exclusion: in the present case, inequalities related to work have as a reference not only the market but also the State as organizer and disorganizer of citizenship related to labor activities.
- 30 In another sense – as presented in Section 2 of this paper – some authors have emphasized the fact that income concentration at the “top” of social stratification shows a substantial impact on the perception of equality/inequality; ultimately, the absence of the first (equality) and the increase of the second (inequality) (Reis and Cheibub, 1993; Piketty, 2014; Medeiros et al., 2015).
- 31 In this section, we will show that the COVID-19 pandemic increased inequality in Brazil and made several population groups more vulnerable, especially those with structural characteristics, such as black or brown individuals, young individuals up to 24 years old, working mainly in the service industry and as informal workers (characterized as not having a formal contract of work - “a carteira de trabalho”), and coming from the Northeast of the country.

4.2 Aspects of the labor market in Brazil

- 32 The following table presents the structure of occupations in the Brazilian labor market as of the last quarters of 2019 and 2020 :

Table 3. Individuals 14+ years old, working, by position, industry, and category of occupation at the main job (per 1,000 individuals)

Jobs at main occupation	N (Oct-Nov-Dez 2019)	%	N (Oct-Nov-Dez 2020)	%
Total occupied population	94552	100.0%	86179	100.0%
Employee	63520	67.2%	56934	66.1%
Private sector (except domestic workers)	45523	100.0%	39870	100.0%
With a formal contract of work	33668	74.0%	29885	75.0%
Without a formal contract of work	11855	26.0%	9985	25.0%
Domestic worker	6356	100.0%	4902	100.0%
With a formal contract of work	1770	27.8%	1281	23.1%
Without a formal contract of work	4585	72.1%	3621	76.9%
Public Sector	11641	100.0%	12162	100.0%
With a formal contract of work	1191	10.2%	1194	9.8%
Military and statutory civil servant	7951	68.3%	8658	71.2%
Without a formal contract of work	2498	21.5%	2310	19.0%
Employer	4442	4.7%	3922	4.6%
With Employer Identification Number	3636	81.9%	3266	83.3%
Without Employer Identification Number	806	18.1%	656	16.7%
Self-employed	24557	26.0%	23272	27.0%
With Employer Identification Number	5101	20.8%	5556	23.9%
Without Employer Identification Number	19456	79.2%	17716	76.1%
Auxiliary family worker	2033	2.2%	2051	2.4%

Source: IBGE – PNADC - Feb/2021

- 33 The proportions of workers (considering the 4th quarter of 2020) of the four large groups among the occupied population, i.e., the employees (66.1 %); employers (4.6 %); self-employed (27.0 %), and auxiliary family workers (2.4 %) presented slight changes as compared to the fourth quarter of 2019. However, in absolute terms, the numbers declined. Over this period, the total number of employees presented a decrease of 8.9 % (8.373 million workers). Among the employees, self-employed and domestic workers, the total number decreased by 10.4 %, 5.2 %, and 22.9 %, respectively.
- 34 In all groups, except for the domestic worker group, the categories “Without a formal contract of work” (for workers) and “Without an Employer Identification Number” (for businesses) have recorded sharper decreases than the “With a formal contract of work” and “With Employer Identification Number”. For instance, the decline in the number of employees with a formal contract of work was 11.2 %, while among those without a formal contract of employment, the reduction was even sharper, 15.8 %. This reflects another vulnerability of the informal workers in the context of the pandemic. In the 4th quarter of 2019, the informality rate was 43.6 %; in the 4th quarter of 2020, it presented a slight decrease: 42.2 % - informal workers lost their work and did it massively (4.894 million fewer positions). Informality is distributed in all groups of occupations, including the public sector.

Table 4. Common monthly real income of all jobs for 14+ years old occupied persons by position, sector, and category at main occupation (In Reais)

Jobs at main occupation	N (Oct-Nov-Dez 2019)	N (Oct-Nov-Dez 2020)
Total occupied population	2.440	2.507
Employee	2.308	2.441
Private sector (except domestic workers)	2.086	2.157
With a formal contract of work	2.289	2.345
Without a formal contract of work	1.505	1.591
Domestic worker	942	896
With a formal contract of work	1.321	1.286
Without a formal contract of work	795	758
Public Sector	3.920	3.990
With a formal contract of work	4.126	4.137
Military and statutory civil servant	4.478	4.482
Without a formal contract of work	2.024	2.068
Employer	6.232	6.173
With Employer Identification Number	6.722	6.669
Without Employer Identification Number	4.019	3.706
Self-employed	1.784	1.802
With Employer Identification Number	3.245	3.070
Without Employer Identification Number	1.401	1.404

Source: IBGE - PNADC - Feb/2021

The average monthly income for all occupations - R\$ 2,507.00 (US\$ 481.84, at the average exchange rate in June 2020) - reflects a deficient level of workers' earnings in Brazil. This historical phenomenon has seen very few real gains indeed. The increase from one quarter to the other is due to the proportionally greater exclusion of low-wage workers in the period. Table 4 shows significant differences between occupation groups, such as private-sector employees (R\$ 2,157) and public sector employees (R\$ 3,990). The proximity between the averages of private-sector employees that do not have a formal contract of work (R\$ 1,591) and those who are self-employed (R\$ 1,404) reintroduces the issue of informality. The huge contingent of informal workers is usually associated with the worst conditions in the Brazilian labor market. Table 4 shows that the ratio of informal/formal workers' earnings varies from 40 % (self-employed with employer identification number) and 66 % (private sector employees), thus demonstrating the importance, in Brazil, of a formal labor relationship, an Employment Record Book with its note, a contract, and social security benefits.

- 35 We can then evaluate the movement of workers through different demographic and labor situations along the covid-19 pandemic period.
- 36 In Brazil, the working-age population (+/- 14 years old), as estimated in November 2020, amounted to 170.7 million people. The workforce (occupied + non-occupied persons) amounted to 98.7 million workers, from which 56.1 million were males (56.8 %) and 42.6 million were females (43.2 %) (IBGE, SIS/PNAD - Covid19).
- 37 The transition into and out of the main work situations over four months in 2020 recorded by the IBGE survey during the pandemic was as follows :

Table 5. Resident working-age population, occupied and unoccupied, inside and outside the workforce in the reference week (a thousand individuals) – Brazil – May, August, September, and November 2020

Month/year	Population groups (per 1,000 individuals)	N°
May/20	Resident population	210 869
	14+ years old Individuals	169 893
	Total occupied population	94 533
	Occupied population	84 404
	Unoccupied population	10 129
	Persons outside the workforce	75 360
August/20	Resident population	211 262
	14+ years old Individuals	170 312
	People in the workforce	95 068
	Occupied population	82 141
	Unoccupied population	12 926
	Persons outside the workforce	75 245
September/20	Resident population	211 392
	14+ years old Individuals	170 531
	People in the workforce	96 421
	Occupied population	82 934
	Unoccupied population	13 486
	People outside the workforce	74 110
November/2020	Resident population	211 652
	14+ years old Individuals	170 742
	People in the workforce	98 699
	Occupied population	84 661
	Unoccupied population	14 038
	People outside the workforce	72 042

Source: IBGE, PNAD COVID19 /202011_trabalho

- 38 In the seven months between May and November (table 5), 3,909 million people lost their jobs, either formal or informal. The workforce increased, but thanks to the increase in the number of non-occupied persons. The absolute numbers are overwhelming : in November, more than 14 million workers made some effort to get a job, but they failed ; this failure was concentrated in the Northeast and North, structurally the country's poorest regions.

Table 6. Percentual variation in the number of non-occupied persons in Brazil from May to November 2020 (%)

Brasil	North	Northeast	Southeast	South	Center-West
38.6	51.0	70.2	35.5	5.6	10.5

Source - IBGE, PNAD COVID19 /202011_trabalho.

- 39 Such evidence substantiates the worsening interregional inequalities concerning work and the distribution of other integrative social policies – such as health, education, transportation, etc. It should be noted that the centers of political power have historically concentrated in the Southeast and South regions, where the regulation of work developed, as seen in Section 3. On the other hand, the cleavages in the condition of insertion at the world of work – and its counterpart, informality – are not expressed only in national and regional macrosocial indicators ; the precariousness and the advancement of informality are also associated with the age group of the worker.

4.3 Occupation among young people in Brazil : the reverse march of social citizenship

- 40 In the fourth quarter of 2020, there were 86.179 million occupied persons in the country, 8.373 million fewer than in the fourth quarter of 2019, an 8.9 % decrease in the year in which the pandemic developed. A comparison of the occupied persons in the quarters before the pandemic outbreak and the pandemic's full-blown period in 2020 (Table 7) shows that such a decrease is differentiated according to the age group.

Table 7. Distribution in the proportion of occupied workers, by age group, Brazil (%)

Year/ Quarter	2014/4	2019/4	2020/1	2020/2	2020/3	2020/4
Age Group						
14 to 24	16.2	13.9	13.4	12.0	12.0	12.5
25 to 39	38.7	37.4	37.2	36.7	36.5	35.3
40 to 59	38.3	40.5	41.1	42.7	43.0	43.6
60+	6.8	8.2	8.3	8.6	8.5	8.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: IBGE/PNADC (2020/4th quarter).

- 41 The table shows a decreasing trend in the proportion of workers up to 39 years old and an inverse trend in older groups in the total distribution. However, the total of occupied workers is also decreasing. There were then less 1,594 million occupied young people (from 12,330 million to 10,736 million) between the 1st and 4th quarters of 2020. The level of occupation of young workers has consistently decreased in the last decade : for instance, in the 18 to 24 age group, it decreased from 57.9 % in 2014/4 to 53.0 % in 2019/4 and 45.3 % in 2020/4. This does not apply to the older age groups.
- 42 Table 8 shows the difference in the unemployment rates among the age groups. For the 18 to 24 age group, the unemployment rate during the period mentioned is more than double the 25 to 39 age group rate over the same period. The unemployment rates among young people are very high. It is worth noting the substantial increase in all age groups' unemployment rates during the 2020 pandemic.

Table 8. Unemployment rate per age group – selected quarters – Brazil (%)

Year/quarter	Total	14 to 17	18 to 24	25 to 39	40 to 59	60+
2019/4	11.0	39.2	23.8	10.3	6.6	4.2
2020/1	12.2	44.0	27.1	11.2	7.5	4.4
2020/4	13.9	42.7	29.8	13.9	9.0	5.0

Source: IBGE/PNADC (2020/4th quarter).

43 The data presented reinforce the general view of this paper, that is, in addition to the structural changes resulting from the successive reforms in the world of labor, which had a perverse impact on the consolidation of labor in the country, the rates of occupation among young Brazilians have not shown any growth – as could be expected given the optimistic arguments in defense of neoliberal reforms about the positive effects of labor flexibilization on the level of occupied persons.

44 **4.4 Regional inequalities and unemployment**

45 In the second quarter of 2014, the unemployment rate in Brazil was 6.8 %. As a result of the economic recession that has affected the country since then, and with the outbreak of the pandemic, this rate has doubled (Table 9) :

Table 9. Unemployment rate (%) in selected quarters – Regions Northeast and South, Brazil

Year / Quarter	Northeast	South	Brazil
2014/2	8,8	4,1	6,8
2019/2	14,6	8,0	12,0
2020/1	15,6	7,5	12,2
2020/2	16,1	8,9	13,3
2020/3	17,9	9,4	14,6
2020/4	13,9

Source - IBGE - PNADC/2020, 4th quarter

46 The unemployment rate is growing, followed by the number of discouraged workers, persons of legal employment age who are not actively seeking employment or have not found work after a long period. In 2020 (4th quarter), the number of discouraged workers in Brazil was 5.788 million, 25.3 % higher than the 4.62 million discouraged workers in 2019 (4th quarter).

47 Moreover, regional differences confirm inequalities in the Brazilian social structure. The most impoverished region and one of the wealthiest (the Northeast and the South, respectively) have the same relative position regarding unemployment rates in the quarters under analysis. Unemployment rates in the Northeast are nearly double the rates in the South.

4.5 Impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on work – inequality and “the vulnerable”

- 48 For this analysis of the country’s social data, some aspects were selected to help understand the impacts of the pandemic affecting Brazil as we write this paper. Some variables, such as educational level, type of labor relation (position in occupation), race/color, were highlighted to understand how inequality has intensified our so-called “contrasts,” especially during the spread of the disease in the Brazilian population. These structural variables will be correlated to some categories, such as unemployment and informality, as well as other pandemic-related categories to help understand work-related factors’ dynamic evolution.

Table 10. Percentage distribution of the population by educational level in – 2020/4th quarter (%)

Uneducated and less than one year of education	Incomplete elementary school or equivalent	Complete elementary school or equivalent	Incomplete high school or equivalent	Complete high school or equivalent	Incomplete college education or equivalent	Complete college education or equivalent	Brazil
4.9	28.3	8.9	7.4	28.5	5.5	16.5	100.0

Source: IBGE – PNADct/2020, 4th quarter

- 49 The distribution of the 14+ age group in Brazil denotes a low level of insertion : 4.9 % of the total had no education, while only 16.5 % had a complete college education. Cumulatively, only 42.2 % of Brazilians over 14 reached the maximum elementary level of education. As a result of the Brazilian structural situation of profound inequality in education, some potential impacts of the pandemic regarding this condition should be further investigated.
- 50 Unemployment is structurally differentiated according to the level of education. Its increase in the most basic levels of education is faster. At the end of the three last quarters, fully corresponding to the pandemic, and based on 2020 (1st quarter), the unemployment rate of the population at the lowest level of education (no education or less than one year of schooling) increased 9,4 % ; at the complete elementary school or equivalent level, it increased 15,9 %, while at the college education level, it grew 9,5 %.
- 51 Below is a summary of some aspects of occupation considering subpopulations according to race/color. The data (from 2019) show significant structural differences among racial groups.

Table 11. Some aspects of the occupation of workers per color/race – Brazil – 2019 (%)

Color / race	Level of occupation	Formalization rate	Unemployment rate
White	57.5	65.5	9.2
Black and brown	53.6	52.6	13.6

Source: IBGE/SIS/2020

- 52 All three indicators are favorable to the group of white workers. The difference between unemployment rates should be highlighted.
- 53 As summarized below, pandemic-specific issues show the effects of the phenomenon that aggravates the very “stable” situation of social inequality in Brazil⁴.

Table 12. Informality and unemployment – impacts of the pandemic - May/Nov 2020 – Brazil (%)

Aspect	Informality rate		Distribution of unoccupied persons	
	May/20	Nov/20	May/20	Nov/20
White	30.2	29.5	39.4	36.2
Black and brown	38.6	38.9	59.3	62.6

Source: IBGE/PNAD-Covid

- 54 Among the whites, informality, which is structurally lower than among the blacks/browns, decreased 0.7 percentage points. In comparison, among the black/brown, it increased 0.3 percentage points, widening the gap between the two ethnic/racial groups. The same phenomenon occurs in the distribution of unoccupied persons. The differences in the number of jobless persons due to the pandemic are impressive : the 1.1 million whites who lost their jobs represented 27.6 % of the initial number of unoccupied persons (May), compared to the 2.773 million blacks/browns (representing 46,2 % in the same situation).
- 55 The PNAD/Covid19 allows us to examine better the nature of impacts with questions specific to the several work situations in which the Brazilian workers found themselves in 2020 (and in 2021, for many of them). The percentage of unoccupied persons that are not looking for a job, either because of the pandemic or because there are no job offers in the area they live, but that would like to work in the previous week, as compared to the total number of persons outside the workforce, is 18,9 %. The breakdown of such data by race/color shows 14.3 % of whites and 22.6 % of blacks/browns. This sort of “discouragement,” like so many other dimensions, highlights the intensity of inequality related to ethnicity/race. Another item registered by PNAD Covid was occupation in remote work : in May/2020, working from home was possible for 17.6 % of white workers and only for 9.0 % of blacks/browns.
- 56 The outbreak of the pandemic forced state governments and municipalities to institute measures of physical or social distancing. According to the region and the political-party position of the local executive branch, they were partially and locally fulfilled. The federal government did not encourage the fulfillment of such measures ; instead, it prompted a boycott of their implementation, with the permanent public affirmation of a false dichotomy between the economy’s growth and the confrontation of the pandemic with measures of distancing.
- 57 The measures have affected workers differently. The type of labor relation helps explain the distribution of people away from the jobs they had due to social distancing (Table 13).

Table 13. Distribution of occupied people who are away from the work they had, due to social distancing - Brazil (%)

	MAY/2020	NOVEMBER/2020
TOTAL	100.0	100.0
Private sector employee with a formal contract of work	26.6	32.9
Private sector employee without a formal contract of work	11.8	7.1
Domestic worker with a formal contract of work	1.3	2.0
Domestic worker without a formal contract of work	6.9	3,5
Public sector employee with a formal contract of work	2.6	6.0
Public sector employee without a formal contract of work	4.1	6.6
Military and statutory civil servant	9.5	26.7
Employer	1.9	1.4
Self-employed	35.0	13.6
Auxiliary Family worker	0.3	0.2

Source: IBGE/PNAD-Covid

- 58 The private sector employees with a formal contract of work represent 26.6% of occupied persons, away from the job they had due to social distancing at the beginning of the 8-month pandemic period started in May 2020, as registered by PNAD-Covid. This percentage increased to 32.9% in November, approaching the proportion that the private sector employee with a signed formal contract of work has in the total occupied population (37.9%). Inversely, the numerous group of self-employed workers represented 35% of the same group in May/2020, which decreased to 13.6% of the total in November. It is much lower than the 28.2%, the proportion of occupied self-employed. The participation of nearly all formal workers increased, but the opposite is true for informal workers. As time goes by, there is an increasing need among the informal workers to break the rules of social distancing and maintain their activities, which usually requires them to contact other persons, consumers on the streets, and the restriction to their movement suspended over time. There was never a genuine lockdown in Brazil, but rather partial restrictions in working times and activities. Informal workers need to use public transportation – always crowded and acting as disease spreaders – and are submitted to precarious work conditions in the new situation and were gradually becoming aware of the pandemic's severity. The main aid provided by the Federal Government, destined to informal workers, started to be paid nearly two months later, and its eligibility imposed many conditions. In September, it was cut by half; in December, it was suspended. As of the three first months of 2021, a new aid had not been yet established. A substantial part of the aid to small businesses consisted of loans or postponing tax payments; therefore, informal entrepreneurs shall have to pay them in 2021.
- 59 A note on the economic situation can help to understand the federal government's omission and its refusal to assume the central coordination that would be its responsibility in combating the pandemic.

- 60 GDP per capita between 2010 and 2014 (part of the center-left governments periods) increased by 12.9 %, while families' consumption per capita grew by 16.6 %. The international crisis and domestic issues resulted in a decrease in those indicators during the 2015-19 period, of -7,1 % and -5,4 %, respectively. As a result, the 6.9 % 2014 unemployment rate raised to 12.5 % in 2017 and, in 2019, presented a slight decrease, reaching 11.7 % (IBGE -PNADC 2020-19). In 2020, GDP fell by 4.1 %, and the forecast for 2021 is for modest growth of around 3 %. The service sector's added value collapsed in 2020 in a historical proportion (- 4.5 %, the most significant drop in 72 years)⁵.
- 61 The service sector represents nearly 63 % of the GDP and is responsible for 68 % of jobs. The "other services" subsector (services provided to families, businesses, food, and housing, among others) represented 32 % of the total jobs and had a 12.2 % decrease : "This strong retraction, disseminated among the activities of other services, is explained by being areas directly related to the care of people, thus requiring interaction between large population contingents for their full functioning"⁶. Such interaction is a target of the local government's restrictive measures. The difficult economic situation is further compounded by erratic and confusing domestic policies – roughly a promised and unfulfilled liberalism.
- 62 The fear of further economic deterioration, due to the need to care for the population of vulnerable workers (in 2020, Emergency Aid covered 68 million workers), leads the central government to enforce a campaign to end restrictions on work in risky situations, known in other parts of the world, to open commercial activities unconditionally, and against the "stay home" recommendations. Despite the tragedy of hundreds of thousands of deaths by Covid-19 in Brazil, the central government continues a campaign favoring "economic recovery". Here we can see that politics play a decisive role as the 2022 presidential elections approach.

5. Conclusion

- 63 The article's main objective was to analyze the impacts of the pandemic-COVID-19 on Brazilians' work throughout 2020. Evidence was sought for two related factors : (1) during the pandemic, social inequalities have increased in the country ; (2) the decrease in occupation levels in the country was associated with the increased precariousness of structurally vulnerable population subgroups. This paper emphasizes a combination of these two factors. The Covid-19 pandemic caused not only a significant setback in the Brazilian economy but, more importantly, it led to the consolidation of inequalities and reinforced the precarization of vulnerable workers. During the pandemic period starting in March 2020, the context was dominated by choices, both from the market and from the government, that allowed the resurgence of neoliberal political-economic and labor reforms.
- 64 The Covid-19 pandemic has made intensified *inequality in the country*, reinforcing the country's image as a 'land of contrasts,' according to Roger Bastide. Such contrasts can be seen in the profound inequalities that link, for instance, level of education, income, and age group to issues most closely related to work, particularly the occupation levels. Regional differences, where the Northeast and the North are the country's regions where extreme poverty is the norm, further aggravate the situation. It should also be pointed out that, in 2020, there was an increase in the Gini Index, indicating that : for a few months, the most miserable workers obtained a small financial gain destined to

their survival ; jobless persons were thrown into a new situation, having to look for new jobs, and received partial and provisional earnings ; and finally, a few segments at the top of the income pyramid saw, in general, their wealth maintained or increased. The post-pandemic context may confirm this assertion.

- 65 Brazil has undergone profound structural changes regarding the integration of individuals in the enjoyment of social citizenship. However, the same route designed in the development of political and economic modernization has perversely impacted the Brazilian workforce's composition. The relationship between work and social protection networks not only has been dismantled ; it has also been depoliticized since the origins of the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT) and the "labor reforms" (the 1990s and 2017). If before the workers found some kind of political representation of their interests and demands (with the unions, for example), now the role of labor relations in the country had its political and conflict aspects diminished.
- 66 The historical construction of labor relations in Brazil was characterized by the labor force and unions' link to the State's regulations and its intermediation with the country's economic order. The conceptual and historical review of the genesis of laborism and its evolution, in which Vargas – the "father of the poor" – is the protagonist and object of attention of prominent Brazilian sociologists, shows that, in Brazil, citizenship linked to work has not granted the free worker with rights and guarantees. On the contrary, Brazil's labor regulation has always been linked to the State and the market players' political and economic proposals.
- 67 The country experiences the perverse effects of a confluence of factors in which the worker (the "self-employed," for example) is more unprotected than ever. At the end of the 8-month pandemic period in 2020, many Brazilians found themselves out of the workforce (5.8 million "discouraged" workers in the last quarter of 2020), became unoccupied workers (14 million as of November 2020), or, more dramatically, were thrown into poverty or misery (because of the rising food prices and the end of emergency aid, for example). In 2020, the Brazilian government adopted a reverse march concerning the constitutional guarantees of social protection networks. Such solutions (for instance, the emergency aid and aid to the private sector) were at the same time the targets of conservative theses such as the one that advocates the idea that the costs of emergency aid will endanger previous future benefits (which will come from a "fiscal austerity" that will always determine emergency aid-related decisions). Thus, what could be set out as a change in socioeconomic stratification (the emergency aid agenda being treated as a political agenda by the universal basic income), becomes another topic of the agonizing Brazilian labor society.
- 68 It was shown that the Covid-19 pandemic has increased social inequality due to the impact of its intrinsic characteristics on work and did so based on population groups of old structural elements known in Brazilian society for its vulnerability and precariousness, such as differences in access to education and race/ethnicity issues. The data we have analyzed in this paper support the thesis that works in Brazilian society expresses deep socioeconomic inequalities.
- 69 As effects of a post-pandemic moment, it is suggested that working conditions in the country tend to worsen, primarily through informality. Brazil has structural inequalities that will hardly be solved by criteria related to obtaining income from work, which would be contingent (the minimum wage may be an exception). There will be an intensive need for discussions on redistributive policies (access to education and

housing, tax progression, gender equality, ethnic/racial issues, etc.) so that democracy and the political and socio-economic development of Brazilian society can consolidate.

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NOTES

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4. Between 2012 and 2019, the poorest 10 % held between 0.8 % and 1.1 % of total household income per capita in Brazil ; the share of the 5 % richest also presented a minimal variation, between 29.1 % and 30.7 %, an unfavorable regularity to the poorest.
5. <http://bibliotecadigital.fgv.br/dspace/bitstream/handle/10438/30313/2021-03-boletim-macro.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (Last visited on April 04, 2021).
6. See note 5.

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to consider and analyze the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on work in Brazil. The difficult times Brazil has been facing have deepened the precarization experienced by a significant number of citizens in the work world and exposed the structural inequalities of the Brazilian society. We begin by presenting a contextualization of the country in terms of general indicators (political and social) and highlighting the development of Brazil's work relations. We then analyze secondary data (from official sources), showing even more profound social inequalities in the work world in pandemic times, including those referring to recent reformist policies, with strong neoliberal inspiration in Brazil. Finally, we discuss the above-mentioned profound inequalities, especially those related to the increasingly weaker social protection networks and labor rights in Brazilian society.

RÉSUMÉ

L'objectif de l'article est d'analyser les effets de la pandémie de COVID-19 sur le monde du travail au Brésil. L'idée motrice est que les temps difficiles vécus par le pays ont non seulement approfondi la situation de précarisation vécue par un nombre significatif de citoyens dans le monde du travail, mais ont aussi rendu plus visibles les inégalités structurelles de la société brésilienne. L'article présente une contextualisation du pays en ce qui concerne les indicateurs généraux (politiques et sociaux) et retrace l'itinéraire de la formation des relations de travail au Brésil. Ensuite, il analyse des données secondaires (de sources officielles) qui mettent en évidence l'approfondissement des inégalités sociales dans la sphère du monde du travail en temps de pandémie, incluant celles qui se rapportent aux politiques récentes de forte inspiration néolibérale. Enfin, l'article revient de manière critique sur l'augmentation évoquée des inégalités, spécialement celles concernant l'affaiblissement des réseaux de protection sociale et des droits du travail dans la société brésilienne.

INDEX

Mots-clés: travail, pandémie, inégalité, précarisation, informalité

Keywords: work, pandemic, inequalities, precarization, informal work

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