

## DEVELOPMENT, POVERTY AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES IN BRAZIL



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### ABSTARCT

This study aims to provide an overview of inequalities and poverty in Brazil. The data analysis regarding poverty and social inequality was based on the "Report of the Brazilian Observatory of Inequalities of August 2023". The Document found that inequalities and poverty remain high in Brazil, especially racial, gender and social inequalities. Black people are at a disadvantage compared to other groups, especially in food insecurity; precariousness in education; low income; high homicide rates; shortage of basic sanitation. Therefore, Brazil must persist in the implementation of public policies, meeting the continuous need to promote citizenship, dignity, security and protection. It is essential to adopt a democratic and radical approach to redistribute income, wealth, power and ensure access to the state.

**Keywords:** Development. Social inequality. Poverty.

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## INTRODUCTION

Poverty has been problematized throughout the history of humanity, being present in all societies, developed or not, and in all political regimes. As defended by Amartya Sen, in his book "Development as Freedom", money – wealth – should be seen as a means and not an end for the development of a society in which there are fewer cases of poverty and scarcity. (SEN, 2010).

The paths to combat poverty are diverse, ranging from the delivery of a minimum income that provides conditions for the subsistence of families, to access to social policies that support the way out of the situation of extreme scarcity. The determinants of poverty are not reduced to the lack of resources/income, but are therefore related to the lack of capacities that allow people to choose their own destiny and their social well-being (SEN, 2010).

In Brazil, there is a large space that separates the rich and the poor, even considering that the official indexes do not describe all the data on the concentration of wealth of the richest. The richest 0.01% in Brazil have an accumulated wealth net of debts of R\$ 151 million on average. The richest 10% obtained, in 2022, an average monthly income *per capita* 14.4 times higher than the poorest 40%. Likewise, about 7.6 million Brazilians live with a monthly per capita household income of less than R\$ 150.00 (REPORT BY THE BRAZILIAN OBSERVATORY OF INEQUALITIES, 2023)<sup>6</sup>.

Based on the above table, this study aims to provide an overview of inequalities in Brazil, whose data analysis was based on the "Report of the Brazilian Observatory of Inequalities of August 2023".

Furtado insisted that the fronts for the undertaking of actions capable of totally transforming Brazil were diverse and not one or the other hegemonically. In his work "The Reconstruction of Brazil", Furtado (1999a) highlights some fronts that should be highlighted. One of the suggested fronts was to demonstrate that his concern had long been in accordance with the ideas of Amartya Sen. Furtado said that one of the fronts should have as its objective,

<sup>6</sup> This report is the first product of the Brazilian Observatory of Inequalities. It brings a selection of 42 indicators, organized into eight themes and compiled from public and recognized data sources. It is the result of a process of selection and calculation of indicators coordinated by a working group formed by organizations<sup>1</sup> that make up the Pact, with technical support from the Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning (Cebap). The dynamic involved the suggestion of indicators related to the priority agendas of these organizations, from which a list of priority indicators in the different themes was consolidated. [/https://cdn.brasilefato.com.br/documents/15cb78c372830623b8fc23e1f18e2412.pdf](https://cdn.brasilefato.com.br/documents/15cb78c372830623b8fc23e1f18e2412.pdf). Accessed 23 Aug. 2024.

[...] reverse the process of patrimonial and income concentration that is at the root of the social distortions that characterize Brazil. Our country is unique for having considerable potential for unused arable land, energy sources and underemployed labor. [...]. At the same time, it is home to tens of millions of undernourished and hungry people. This is a problem of a political nature, and not exactly an economic one, as Sen has well demonstrated. This author clearly demonstrates that the problem of epidemic famines and endemic poverty in large areas of the world today would not be solved by increasing the supply of essential goods in the countries concerned. It is what he [Sen] called the enablement approach. To participate in the distribution of social income, it is necessary to be qualified by property titles and/or qualified insertion in the productive system. What is blocked in certain societies is the qualification process (FURTADO, 1999a, p. 11).

It can be seen, from this perspective of the development of the human factor, that Furtado was close to the positions defended by Sen.

The link between social investment and the end of poverty is very strong. It works directly and indirectly. The direct way I want to emphasize is that, when you generate more education, more health, this in itself is an elimination of poverty, because poverty is not only low income, it is also illiteracy, it is also not having medical treatment when necessary. And by doing so, one contributes directly to the elimination of poverty. Secondly, with the expansion of education and the greater employability of people with more education, literate instead of illiterate, high school instead of primary, higher education instead of high school, all these levels, you can increase the quality of the human resources involved. You are contributing not only to economic growth, but also to a more shared system of economic growth. If economic opportunities are more shared, the fruits of economic growth will also be (SEN, 2001, p. 12).

In the understanding of Furtado (1992), only with the distribution of wealth and income can a society achieve that "political empowerment is disseminated in the social body, opening the way to the pluralistic forms of organization of power that are at the basis of democratic regimes [...]" (Furtado, 1992, p. 55). For Sen (2001), the problem of inequality has multiple approaches, including poverty. The author recommends that, instead of measuring poverty by the level of income, one should calculate what the individual can accomplish with this income in order to develop, taking into account that these achievements fluctuate from one individual to another and from one place to another.

## METHODOLOGY

To present a comprehensive overview of inequalities in Brazil, we used the **Report of the Brazilian Observatory of Inequalities of August 2023**. This report provided a detailed analysis of six different aspects, each addressed by a specialized research institute:

1. **Food insecurity:** Brazilian Research Network on Food Sovereignty and Security (PENSSAN).
2. **Illiteracy:** Educational Action; Paulo Montenegro Institute.
3. **Average income from all sources and unemployment rate:** Continuous National Household Sample Survey (PNAD).
4. **Urban inequalities and access to basic services:** João Pinheiro Foundation; Continuous National Household Sample Survey (PNADc).
5. **Water supply, sewage collection and garbage collection:** National Sanitation Information System (SNIS).
6. **Violent deaths among young people by race/color.** Brazilian Forum on Public Security.

## RESULTS

### FOOD INSECURITY

According to the Brazilian Research Network on Food Sovereignty and Security (Penssan), between November 2021 and April 2022, in Brazil, 30.7% of families lived in moderate and severe food insecurity. Among this group are approximately 9% of families, that is, 33 million people who were in a situation of hunger (PENSSAN, 2022).

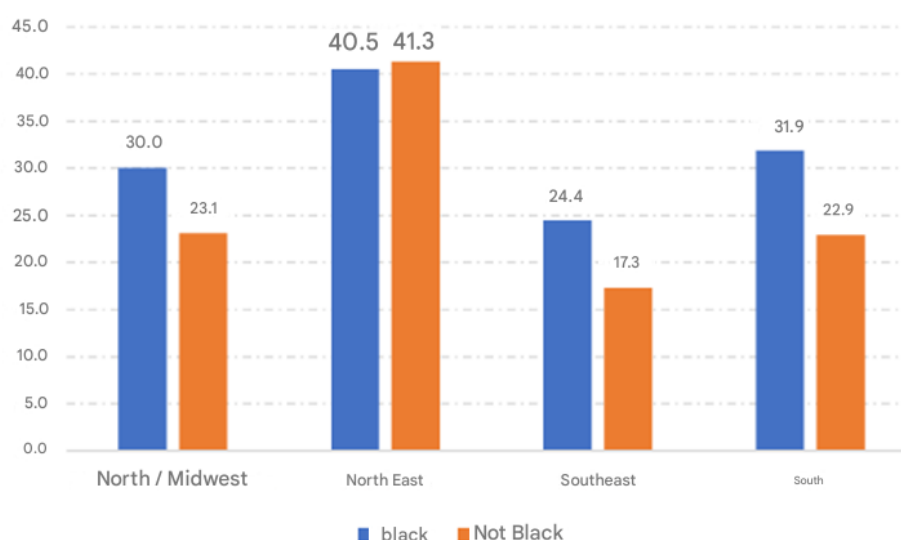
In terms of regional inequalities, the highest values are in the North Region (45.2% of families in a situation of moderate and severe food insecurity) and Northeast (38.4%). In 6 Federative Units (FU), more than half of the population was in this situation: Alagoas (54.9%), Piauí (54.3%), Ceará (52.6%), Pará (52.4%) and Maranhão (51.1%). (PENSSAN, 2022).

Racial inequalities are indisputable. In other words, hunger affects black people more: 41.7% of households headed by black women experienced moderate and severe food insecurity in the period (between November 2021 and April 2022), and among those households headed by white and yellow men, the proportion was 16.3%. In three states, the proportion of families in moderate and severe food insecurity whose heads were black women exceeds 60%: Alagoas (64.6%), Piauí (63.9%) and Pará (62.2%) (PENSSAN, 2022).

## LLITERACY

The Functional Literacy Indicator (Graph 1) seeks to characterize the cognitive abilities of the population between 15 and 64 years old through the application of a sample survey, based on a cognitive test that measures the "reading and interpretation of texts" (INSTITUTO PAULO MONTENEGRO, 2018, p. 4). Based on the results of the test, a proficiency scale is developed, in which functional illiterates group those who are totally illiterate or have a rudimentary level of proficiency (NATIONAL PACT TO COMBAT INEQUALITIES, 2023).

**Graph 1 - Functional illiteracy rate of the population between 15 and 64 years of age, by color or race, according to major regions**



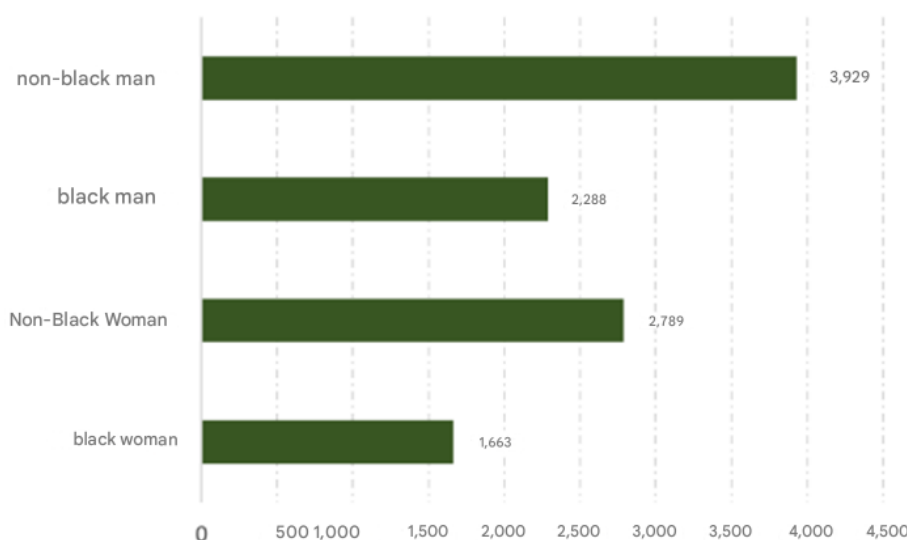
**Source: Ação Educativa; Paulo Montenegro Institute (2018).**

The results of the survey (Figure 1) indicate that approximately 3 out of 10 Brazilians are functionally illiterate, greatly compromising their ability to socially insert. In addition, according to the survey, those who earn up to one minimum wage per month, the value rises to almost 5 in 10 (48.3%). The analysis of the indicator also reveals strong contrasts when we combine regional inequalities and those of gender and race/color: while among non-black women (white and yellow) in the Southeast the value is only 13.9%, among black men in the Northeast, it rises to 47.7%. Although the Southeast has the lowest proportion of functional illiterates, 21.7%, among those who earn up to one minimum wage, the proportion rises to 51.4% (AÇÃO EDUCATIVA; PAULO MONTENEGRO INSTITUTE, 2018).

## AVERAGE INCOME FROM ALL SOURCES AND UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

According to the Continuous National Household Sample Survey (PNAD), in 2022, the average real income from all sources of the Brazilian population was, at average prices that year, R\$ 2,607 (Graph 2).

**Graph 2 - Average real monthly income from all sources, at average prices in 2022, by sex and color or race. In R\$, average prices for 2022**



**Source: IBGE - Continuous National Household Sample Survey, accumulated from fifth visits. 2022.**

The national average (Figure 2) revealed important and constant inequalities in the regional disaggregation, by gender and race/color, and especially in the combination of attributes. The data indicate a disadvantage in income according to gender: women earn, on average, only 72% of what men earn. This proportion is even lower in some regions, such as Aracaju (SE), where women earn only 64.2% of men's income; Vitória (ES), 65.1%; Teresina (PI), 65.6%; and Natal (RN), 66.1%. (IBGE - PNAD, 2022).

## URBAN INEQUALITIES AND ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES

The *housing deficit* in Brazil is calculated by the João Pinheiro Foundation based on information on the characteristics of households with data from the Demographic Census or the Continuous National Household Sample Survey (PNADc). The estimate is made based on a set of household characteristics that are calculated from three components, as listed in chart 1 below.

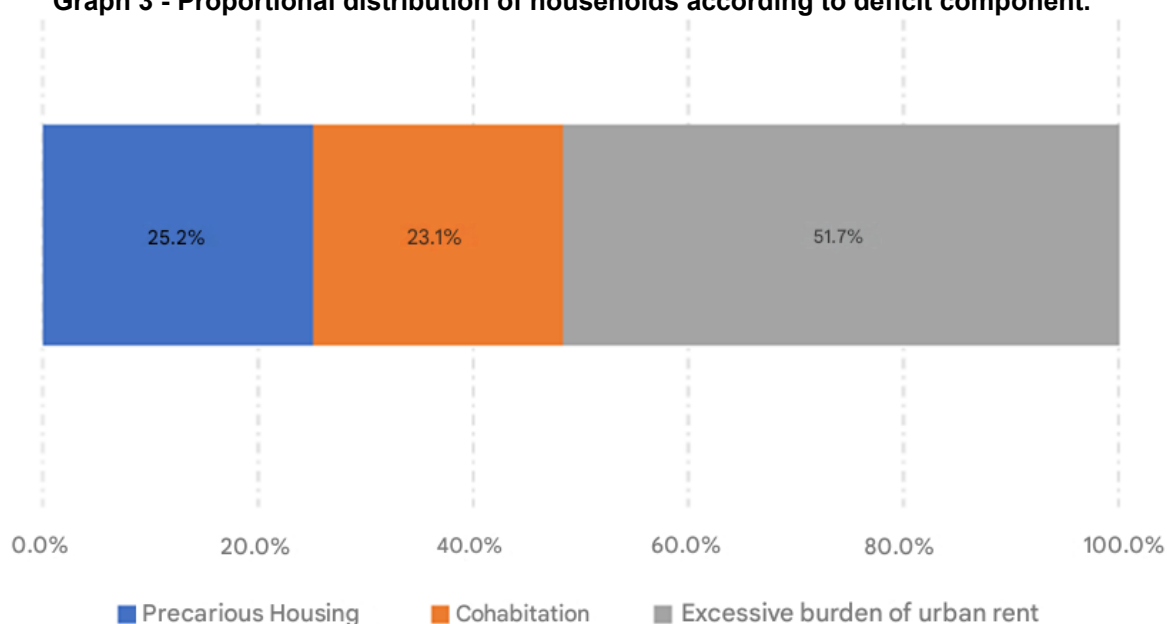
**Chart 1 - Housing deficit in Brazil**

I. Housing precariousness,	It consists of the sum between improvised dwellings and rustic dwellings. Improvised buildings are defined as places built without residential purposes that serve as housing. Rustic ones, on the other hand, are made of precarious material, without masonry or wood equipped, which, due to their unhealthy condition, result in discomfort or risk of contamination by diseases;
II. Cohabitation	Characterized as the presence of cohabiting families with a density of more than two people per room serving as a bedroom or even situations in which families live in a single room;
III. The excessive burden	With rent occurs in situations where the commitment of family income (with household income of up to 3 minimum wages) with rent corresponds to more than 30% of your income.

**Source: adapted from Fundação João Pinheiro 2022**

The estimate of the *housing deficit* is the sum of the three, which are mutually exclusive and total, in Brazil, 5.8 million households or 8.4% of the total number of households in the country. The main component of the *deficit* is the excessive burden of rent, which corresponded, in 2019, to 51.5% of its total, totaling 3.07 million households. (Graph 3). This condition has shown continuous growth between 2016 and 2019, driven by the growth of the phenomenon in the Southeast region (IBGE – PNADc, 2022). Next are the households in precarious housing, totaling 1.48 million or 24.9%, a number close to cohabitation with 1.412 million or 23.7% of the total deficit (IBGE – PNADc, 2022).

**Graph 3 - Proportional distribution of households according to deficit component.**



**Source: João Pinheiro Foundation. *Housing Deficit* in Brazil. 2019.**



In regional terms, the North and Northeast regions have the largest *deficits* in relative terms, with 13.4% and 9.6% of households, respectively. The highest proportions are in the states of Amapá (18.5%), Roraima (15.9%), Amazonas (15.4%) and Maranhão (15.8%). The indicators also point out that the *deficit* is concentrated in wage ranges of up to 3 minimum wages (89.7%) and in households headed by black people (68.7%) and women (59.1%). (IBGE – PNADc, 2022).

## WATER SUPPLY, SEWAGE COLLECTION AND GARBAGE COLLECTION

The precarious housing conditions are also manifested by the absence of basic infrastructure. The indicators produced by the National Sanitation Information System (SNIS) indicate that the country still has a significant unmet demand for sewage collection and, to a lesser extent, for water supply and regular garbage collection. The presence of the sanitary sewage service reaches, at the national level, only a little more than half of the Brazilian population, 55%, and the North and Northeast regions, with 13.2% and 29.4% of the population served, have the worst indicators. In terms of FUs, the worst results are in the states of Rondônia (6%), Amapá (6.8%), Pará (7.5%) and Maranhão (10.8%). (SNIS, 2022).

Regarding water supply, coverage in the country is 84.2%, meaning that there are still 36.3 million people in the country without regular access to this service. Regional disparities are significant. If, in the Southeast and South regions, the proportion of the population served is 91.4% and in the Central-West, 89.9%, in the Northeast, it is 74.7%, and in the North, it does not exceed 60%. In terms of FUs, the negative highlights are Amapá, with only 32.9% of the population served; Roraima, with 46%; Pará, 48.5%; and Acre, 50.2% (SNIS, 2022). In relation to regular garbage collection, coverage is 89.9%, but states such as Maranhão, Rondônia and Piauí have significantly lower averages, with 71.8%, 73.4% and 74.5%, respectively. (SNIS, 2022).

## VIOLENT DEATHS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE BY RACE/COLOR

"Intentional violent deaths include intentional homicides, robberies, deaths by bodily injury followed by death, and deaths resulting from police interventions, both on duty and off duty. The category indicates the total number of victims of intentional violent deaths in a specific territory" (BUENO; LIMA, 2023, p. 24).



According to the Brazilian Forum on Public Security (2022), 47,508 intentional violent deaths were recorded in Brazil in 2022, which represents a rate of 23.4 per 100 thousand inhabitants. Although the value has shown a small reduction compared to previous years, it characterizes a violent country. And, with regard to intentional violent deaths, Brazil has great racial, gender and regional inequalities.

The analysis of the indicator of the proportion of young people aged 15 to 29 victims of Intentional Violent Deaths by race/color makes it quite evident that most of the victims were black people (82.2%). The states with the highest proportion were Rio Grande do Norte (95.2%), Amapá (94.6%), Pernambuco (94.6%), Bahia (94.4%), Pará (93.3%) and Piauí (92.6%). It is important to highlight that, in some states, there is no record of the victim's race/color: in Maranhão and Paraíba, race/color was not reported in any of the registered cases and, in Ceará and the Federal District, in more than 70% of them (FÓRUM BRASILEIRO DE SEGURANÇA PÚBLICA, 2022).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **FOOD INSECURITY**

Between November 2021 and April 2022, 30.7% of Brazilian households were in a situation of moderate and severe food insecurity, with 33 million people going hungry.

#### *Regional Inequalities:*

The North (45.2%) and Northeast (38.4%) regions had the highest rates of food insecurity. In 6 states, more than half of the population was in this condition, with Alagoas (54.9%) leading.

#### *Racial Inequalities:*

Food insecurity affects black people more. 41.7% of households headed by black women lived in moderate and severe food insecurity, compared to 16.3% of households headed by white and yellow men. In Alagoas, Piauí and Pará, more than 60% of families headed by black women faced this situation.

These data highlight the severity of food insecurity in Brazil, especially in the North and Northeast regions, and the deep racial inequality that influences who is most affected by hunger. Addressing these issues requires targeted public policies and ongoing social action to mitigate these impacts.

## ILLITERACY

### *Functional illiteracy:*

Approximately 30% of Brazilians are functionally illiterate, affecting their ability to socially insert.

### *Income and Illiteracy:*

Among those who earn up to one minimum wage, the functional illiteracy rate rises to 48.3%.

### *Regional and Racial Inequalities:*

Non-black women (white and yellow) in the Southeast have a functional illiteracy rate of 13.9%.

Black men from the Northeast have a rate of 47.7%.

In the Southeast, the general rate is 21.7%, but among those who earn up to one minimum wage, the rate rises to 51.4%.

These data reflect deep regional, racial, and economic inequalities in Brazil, highlighting the need for public policies that address these disparities and promote social and educational inclusion.

## AVERAGE INCOME FROM ALL SOURCES AND UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

### *Gender Pay Inequality:*

Nationally, women earn on average only 72% of what men earn.

### *Regional Inequalities:*

In Aracaju (SE), women earn only 64.2% of the income of men.

In Vitória (ES), 65.1%.

In Teresina (PI), 65.6%.

In Natal (RN), 66.1%.

### *Disaggregation by Gender and Race/Color:*

These inequalities are accentuated when we combine gender and race/color, reflecting the multiple layers of discrimination that affect women's incomes, especially in the most affected regions.

The data show persistent wage and regional inequalities that affect women in Brazil, especially in some cities. Addressing these disparities requires effective public policies to ensure equal opportunities and incomes.

## URBAN INEQUALITIES AND ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES

### *Housing Deficit:*

The total housing deficit in Brazil is 5.8 million households, representing 8.4% of the total households in the country.

### *Excessive Burden with Rent:*

This is the main component of the deficit, corresponding to 51.5% of the total in 2019, which represents 3.07 million households. This phenomenon has grown continuously between 2016 and 2019, driven by the Southeast region.

### *Precarious Housing and Cohabitation*

Precarious housing: 1.48 million households (24.9% of the deficit).

Cohabitation: 1.412 million households (23.7% of the deficit).

### *Regional Inequalities:*

North Region: 13.4% of the households in deficit.

Northeast Region: 9.6% of the households in deficit.

States with the highest proportions of housing deficit: Amapá (18.5%), Roraima (15.9%), Amazonas (15.4%) and Maranhão (15.8%).

### *Social Inequalities*

89.7% of the housing deficit is concentrated in families with incomes of up to 3 minimum wages.

68.7% of the households in deficit are headed by black people.

59.1% of the households in deficit are headed by women.

These data highlight the deep housing inequalities in Brazil, which disproportionately affect low-income, black, and female-headed households. To address this crisis, inclusive public policies and actions aimed at reducing these disparities are needed.

## WATER SUPPLY, SEWAGE COLLECTION AND GARBAGE COLLECTION

### *Inadequate Basic Infrastructure:*

Precarious housing conditions are manifested by the lack of basic infrastructure, especially in sanitation, water supply and regular garbage collection.

### *Sewage Collection:*

Only 55% of the Brazilian population has access to sanitary sewage service. The North (13.2%) and Northeast (29.4%) regions have the worst indicators, with the states of Rondônia (6%), Amapá (6.8%), Pará (7.5%) and Maranhão (10.8%) being the most affected.

### *Water Supply:*

The national coverage is 84.2%, leaving 36.3 million people without regular access to this service. Regional disparities are significant, with the Southeast (91.4%) and South (91.4%) being better served, while the North (60%) and Northeast (74.7%) are less served. Amapá (32.9%), Roraima (46%), Pará (48.5%) and Acre (50.2%) stand out negatively.

### *Regular Garbage Collection:*

Coverage is 89.9%, but states such as Maranhão (71.8%), Rondônia (73.4%) and Piauí (74.5%) have significantly lower rates.

These data highlight the urgent need for improvements in basic infrastructure in several regions of Brazil, especially in the North and Northeast, to ensure better housing and health conditions for the population.

## VIOLENT DEATHS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE BY RACE/COLOR

### *Intentional violent deaths:*

In 2022, 47,508 intentional violent deaths were recorded in Brazil, representing a rate of 23.4 per 100 thousand inhabitants. Despite a slight reduction compared to previous years, the figure still indicates a significant level of violence.

### *Racial Inequalities:*

82.2% of the victims of intentional violent deaths, in the age group of 15 to 29 years, were black people. The states with the highest proportions of black victims were Rio

Grande do Norte (95.2%), Amapá (94.6%), Pernambuco (94.6%), Bahia (94.4%), Pará (93.3%) and Piauí (92.6%).

#### *Lack of Registration of Race/Color:*

In some states, there was no record of the race/color of the victims, such as in Maranhão and Paraíba. In Ceará and the Federal District, this information was omitted in more than 70% of the cases.

These data highlight the severity of intentional violent deaths in Brazil and highlight the deep racial inequalities that mainly affect the young black population. Effective public policies and targeted actions are needed to combat violence and reduce these disparities.

## **CONCLUSION**

Inequalities and poverty remain high in Brazil, especially when confronting racial, gender, and social issues. Black people are at a disadvantage compared to other groups, especially in food insecurity; precariousness in education; low income; high homicide rates; shortage of basic sanitation. Therefore, the country will have to continue to deal with the public policy agenda, as there is a continuous need to build citizenship, dignity, security and protection, with democratic radicalism, and redistribution of income, wealth, power and access to the State.

As pointed out by Sen (2010), the paths to combat poverty are diverse, ranging from the delivery of a minimum income that provides conditions for the subsistence of families, to access to social policies that support the way out of the situation of extreme scarcity. The determinants of poverty are not reduced to the lack of resources or income, but are therefore related to the lack of capacities that allow people to choose their own destiny and their social well-being.

Still referring to poverty, Sen (2001) highlights that the link between social investment and the end of poverty is very strong, working directly and indirectly. The direct form occurs when more education and health are generated. In this way, it contributes directly to the elimination of poverty. Secondly, the expansion of education and the greater employability of more educated people can increase the quality of the human resources involved. In this sense, the State would be contributing to a system of more shared economic growth. If economic opportunities are more shared, so will the fruits of economic growth.

In the analysis of Amartya Sen and Celso Furtado, Brazil is characterized by having considerable potential for unused arable land, energy sources and underemployed labor. At the same time, it is home to millions of undernourished and hungry people. This is a problem of a political nature, and not exactly an economic one. To participate in the distribution of social income, in this sense, it is necessary to be qualified by property titles and/or qualified insertion in the productive system.

Therefore, Brazil must persist in the implementation of public policies, meeting the continuous need to promote citizenship, dignity, security and protection, and it is essential to adopt a democratic and radical approach to redistribute income, wealth, power and ensure access to the State.

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