

The Network closes a cycle. And wants to expand its agenda.

Covid-19: Public Policies and Society's Responses



page
14

Quality information for refining public policies and saving lives

Policy Briefing Note 22

Without clear guidelines for remote education and reopening schools, the Federal Government repeats the health tragedy in education. Millions of children stayed at home without school activities while the poorest have lost up to 50 school days.

Main Results

- Amidst the pandemic, the Ministry of Education has failed to provide effective guidelines or methodologies for distance learning. States have defined their own strategies and reaped very different results from home-based learning activities;
- Over 8 million children aged between 6 and 14 were left without any school activities at home;
- 30% of the poorest students had no school activities in July. Among the wealthiest, the rate was less than 4%;
- The poorest students in the Southeast and South had access to home-based learning activities in a similar proportion to the wealthiest students in the North and Northeast regions;
- As the State neglects and fails to provide support to vulnerable families, the disparity in home-based learning activities between poor and rich students may reach 224 hours, equivalent to 50 school days;
- Proficiency inequality in Portuguese among low- and high-income students could double in the period. For mathematics, the growth in inequality may reach 70%.

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic aggravated an array of structural inequalities in Brazilian society, as the Solidary Research Network addressed in practically all prior 21 policy briefs. The inefficiency and unpreparedness of authorities for addressing Education, particularly the Federal government's lethargy and omission, have become as blatant as in Health, with severe fallouts. Given the impossibility of in-person school classes due to social distancing measures, the federal, state, and city governments implemented discrepant policies and were unable to mitigate, as much as they could, the learning losses of more than 30 million students aged between 6-17 years old, of which circa 80% attend public schools. As the pandemic reaches the 6-month mark, the outcome is thousands of children without school activities, aggravated regional and socioeconomic inequalities and, above all, a complete lack of planning for the future of education in our country, whether in the short, medium, or long term.

With the suspension of in-person classes and changes in the school calendar, the capacity of schools and education networks to provide educational resources in digital format has become a pressing issue. According to Unesco (2020), school systems ought to provide teaching and learning materials in keeping with the national curriculum through online platforms, TV or radio programs, or printed home-based learning material.¹ Brazil only partially adhered to this basic recommendation, and with no sense of urgency or due importance for a country severely lacking in quality education.

Digital inequalities and structural limits at the outset

Data from the *TIC Educação* survey (NIC.br), collected in the second half of 2019, indicates that Brazilian school institutions were poorly prepared for the transition to remote learning: only 28% of schools in urban areas had a virtual learning environment or platform before the pandemic – an even lower a percentage when it comes to public schools (14%).²

Before the pandemic, communication between the school and the school community was improving with online social networks, albeit still restricted to tools provided by the schools themselves, such as websites and blogs. According to data from TIC Kids Online Brasil 2019, 4.8 million children and teenagers lived in households without Internet access, among which 2.9 million in urban areas and 1.8 million in rural areas.³

Lack of internet access, however, is not the sole undermining factor for distance learning. According to a recently published report by the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC, 2020: p. 3), poor Internet connections reinforce segregations insofar as they limit the use of digital solutions for telework and online education.

In summary, in pre-pandemic Brazil, 16.5 million children and teenagers aged 9 to 17 years lived in households with insufficient conditions for remote learning, either lacking internet connection or with download speeds below 4 Mbps.⁴ In rural areas, inadequate infrastructure affected 85% of young people in this age group (4.1 million). Furthermore, the majority of children and adolescents aged 9

¹ Unesco (2020). UNESCO COVID-19 Education Response Education. Sector issue notes. file:///C:/Users/fsenne/Downloads/373305eng.pdf

² See: <https://www.nic.br/noticia/releases/escolas-estao-mais-presentes-nas-redes-sociais-mas-plataformas-de-aprendizagem-a-distancia-sao-pouco-adotadas/>

³ See: <https://www.nic.br/noticia/releases/criancas-e-adolescentes-conectados-ajudam-os-pais-a-usar-a-internet-revela-tic-kids-online-brasil/>

⁴ In absolute numbers, insufficient Internet access for distance learning in the 9-17 age-bracket more strongly affects students in Elementary School (12.8 million). The data does not account for younger students (6-8 years old) and households that did not inform Internet speed.

to 17, i.e. circa 15.5 million, did not have computers at home⁵. Among youths enrolled in high school, about half did not have a computer in their homes. With educators the situation was no different. Before the pandemic, only 48% of teachers in the public (urban) education network offered content on the Internet to students, and only 31% said they received schoolwork or assignments from students through the Internet⁶.

The reaction of States and the Ministry of Education to remote education

In regions with limited Internet connection, governments around the world have adopted distance learning modalities combining the use of the internet with educational TV and radio programming, as well as the distribution of printed materials (UN, 2020).⁷ In Brazil, while all states have adopted some form of digital online platform, only 11 states made use of television.

Regarding the 11 states that adopted TV as a distance learning method, the average percentage of public-school students with Internet access is 77%, which is lower than the national average (83.4%). However, states such as Acre, Alagoas, Ceará, Bahia, and Rio Grande do Norte, where internet access is lower than 80%, have not adopted the measure. As for states in which over 90% of children have Internet access, only Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo, and Mato Grosso do Sul have adopted television as an alternative distance learning resource.

Table 1 – Distance learning resources and access to the Internet and TV by public-school students aged 6 to 17 years.

State	TV	Internet	Other Methods	% of children (6-17 years old) enrolled in public schools with Internet access at home	% of children (6-17 years old) enrolled in public schools with access to TV at home
RO	Yes	Yes	No	85.1	94.8
AC	No	Yes	No	66.6	91.5
AM	Yes	Yes	No	66.9	93
RR	N.I.	N.I.	N.I.	80.8	90.2
PA	Yes	Yes	No	66.4	90.8
AP	No	Yes	No	78.7	97.4
TO	Yes	Yes	Yes	80.9	94.1
MA	Yes	Yes	Yes	62.5	94.2
PI	Yes	Yes	No	63.8	94.8
CE	No	Yes	No	73.1	95.8
RN	No	Yes	No	78.7	97.3
PB	Yes	Yes	No	77.7	98
PE	Yes	Yes	No	74.2	96.6

⁵ TIC Kids Online Brasil 2019. A metodologia levou em conta computadores de mesa, computadores portáteis ou tablets (CGI.br, 2020). Dados processados com exclusividade para esta nota.

⁶ TIC Educação 2019. Data processed exclusively for this note.

⁷ United Nations (2020). Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond. August 2020.

State	TV	Internet	Other Methods	% of children (6-17 years old) enrolled in public schools with Internet access at home	% of children (6-17 years old) enrolled in public schools with access to TV at home
AL	No	Yes	No	71.4	97.1
SE	No	Yes	No	81.2	95.4
BA	No	Yes	No	75.6	95.2
MG	Yes	Yes	No	90.2	97.9
ES	Yes	Yes	No	90.7	96.6
RJ	No	Yes	No	90.4	98.9
SP	No	Yes	No	93.2	98.3
PR	No	Yes	No	89.8	97.4
SC	No	Yes	No	93.1	98.4
RS	No	Yes	No	91.1	98.8
MS	Yes	Yes	No	91.2	96.1
MT	No	Yes	No	91.1	95.6
GO	No	Yes	No	90.8	96.9
DF	No	Yes	Yes	96.4	94.8
Brazil	11	27	3	83.4	96.6

Source: State Education Secretariats and 2019 Annual Continuous Pnad.

The inaction of the Federal Ministry of Education (MEC) further aggravated the diverging response strategies of the states. Experts mention that the Ministry ought to be responsible for⁸: i) implementing distance learning methodologies mindful of regional and socioeconomic differences; ii) coordinating the dissemination of successful distance learning methodologies adopted by states and municipalities; iii) establishing partnerships with the private sector to expand and ensure Internet connection for students, especially low-income students in poor regions.

Too little, too late has been done, however. The main measures adopted by the Ministry of Education, according to the last report published by the institution itself in mid-June, are summarized in Table 2⁹.

A first striking fact is that several listed actions have no direct relationship with the pandemic – such as, for example, expanding the Unified Selection System (SISU). The vast majority of actions refer to continuing the Ministry's customary activities, such as financial assistance and maintenance of scholarships. For pandemic-related actions (Column Pandemic = yes), there is not a single measure addressing distance learning and teaching.

The MEC does not disclose any information regarding the performance and results of the Emergency Operative Committee (COE), created in March for mitigating the impacts of routine changes in teaching.

⁸ See "Coronavírus: saiba quais medidas o Ministério da Educação já realizou ou estão em andamento": <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/educacao/2020/06/ministerio-da-educacao-so-propos-aco-es-minusculas-na-cri-se-da-covid-19.shtml>

⁹ <https://www.gov.br/mec/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/coronavirus-saiba-quais-medidas-o-mec-ja-realizou-ou-estao-em-andamento>

Table 2 – Measures undertaken by the Ministry of Education during the pandemic

Action	Level of education	Objective	Pandemic	Date (dd/mm/yyyy)
Temporary hiring of new professionals in university hospitals	Higher Education	Financial assistance (S)	Yes	Mar/20
Centralizing purchases of PPE, drugs, and other materials for University Hospitals	Higher Education	Financial assistance (E/S)	Yes	13/03/2020
Paying resident doctors	Higher Education	Financial assistance (S)	Yes	26/03/2020
Transfer of funds to Mais Médicos and other government programs	-	Financial assistance (S)	Yes	27/03/2020
Reduction of school days	General	Operational	Yes	01/04/2020
Transfer of funds to federal universities and institutes	Secondary and Higher Education	Financial assistance (E)	Yes	02/04/2020
Creation of the Emergency Operative Committee (COE)	General	Organizational	Yes	02/04/2020
Public notice for financing pandemic-related research	Higher Education	Financial assistance (E)	Yes	06/04/2020
Increased transfers to university hospitals	Higher Education	Health	Yes	06/04/2020
Suspension of in-person classes in professional education	Ensino Técnico	Operational	Yes	06/04/2020
Appointment of university students for internships in basic health units	Higher Education	Operational	Yes	20/05/2020
Replacing in-person school activities for virtual activities	General	Operational	Yes	16/06/2020
Transfer of resources for cleaning school environments	Elementary and Secondary Education	Financial assistance (S)	Yes	1 week of 2020
Postponement of ENEM, inquiring students	Secondary Education	Evaluation	Yes	1 week of 2020
Publication of the National Education Council (CNE) Guidelines	General	Information	Yes	1 week of 2020
Monitoring Covid-19 infection in educational institutions	General	Operational	Yes	1 week of 2020
Providing scholarships through the FIES	Higher Education	Financial assistance (E)	No	12/03/2020
Online courses for literacy teachers	Ensino Fundamental	Training	No	20/04/2020
Deadline extension for the School Census data collection	General	Routine maintenance	No	28/04/2020
Early graduation for medical students	Higher Education	Operational	No	20/05/2020
Maintenance of scholarships for exchange students	Higher Education	Financial assistance (E)	No	05/06/2020
Opening enrollment registrations for SISU	Higher Education	Routine maintenance	No	30/06/2020

Action	Level of education	Objective	Pandemic	Date (dd/mm/yyyy)
Distribution of textbooks	Elementary and Secondary Education	Routine maintenance	No	1 week of 2020
Maintenance of financial transfers for school meals	Elementary and Secondary Education	Financial assistance (E)	No	1 week of 2020
Maintenance of financial transfers for school transport	Elementary and Secondary Education	Financial assistance (E)	No	1 week of 2020
Provision of professional qualification courses	Technical Education	Qualification	No	1 week of 2020

Source: Ministry of Education

The only references we found allude to the National Education Council (CNE in the Portuguese acronym)¹⁰, a collegiate institution part of the (still poorly institutionalized) National Education System. The collegiate advises the MEC and has normative and deliberative attributions, in addition to formulating and evaluating public policies – albeit dependent on the executive for approval.

Between April and July, 2020, the CNE approved 5 technical reports, some of which took more than 30 days to be ratified, while others are still awaiting ratification¹¹.

The Council only adopted a technical report acknowledging the differences between students with or without internet access and/or students unable to access synchronous or asynchronous activities on July 7, 2020, and stated that “the huge inequality in internet access by students” reveals a learning challenge. However, while supporting Bill 2.182/2020, which proposed using the Fund for the Universalization of Telecommunication Services (FUST) to expand Internet access in public schools, the technical report did not forwards initiatives addressing the issue, nor did the MEC adopt measures to tackle this situation.

Increasing socioeconomic and regional inequalities

Data from the Pnad-Covid survey of July 2020 reveals a combination of pre-existing inequalities and the lack of a coordinated education policy throughout the pandemic.

The survey asked whether the school offered school activities during the pandemic¹². Almost a quarter of the students had no activity, totaling 8.3 million children. Among the poorest families, the percentage was as high as 30%. We find a similar trend across age brackets, however the difference between the poorest and wealthiest students exceeds 20 percentage points for the two older groups (11 -14 and 15-17 years old).

¹⁰ Half of the nominations for counselors must occur through a list of names drafted by representative entities within the field of the education. However, the MEC is tasked with defining which organizations will be included and the president appoints the counselors. On July 10 of this year, 11 new councilors were appointed by presidential decree (among a total of 24), in a heavily criticized process, which denounced the absence and/or reduced number of representatives from states, municipalities, and public education agencies.

¹¹ <http://portal.mec.gov.br/component/content/article?id=85201&Itemid=866>

¹² Unfortunately, there is no information on the administrative category of the school (public or private) and how the activity was offered (internet, television or other). Students who were on vacation were excluded.

Table 1 - % of students with school activities, according to income and age

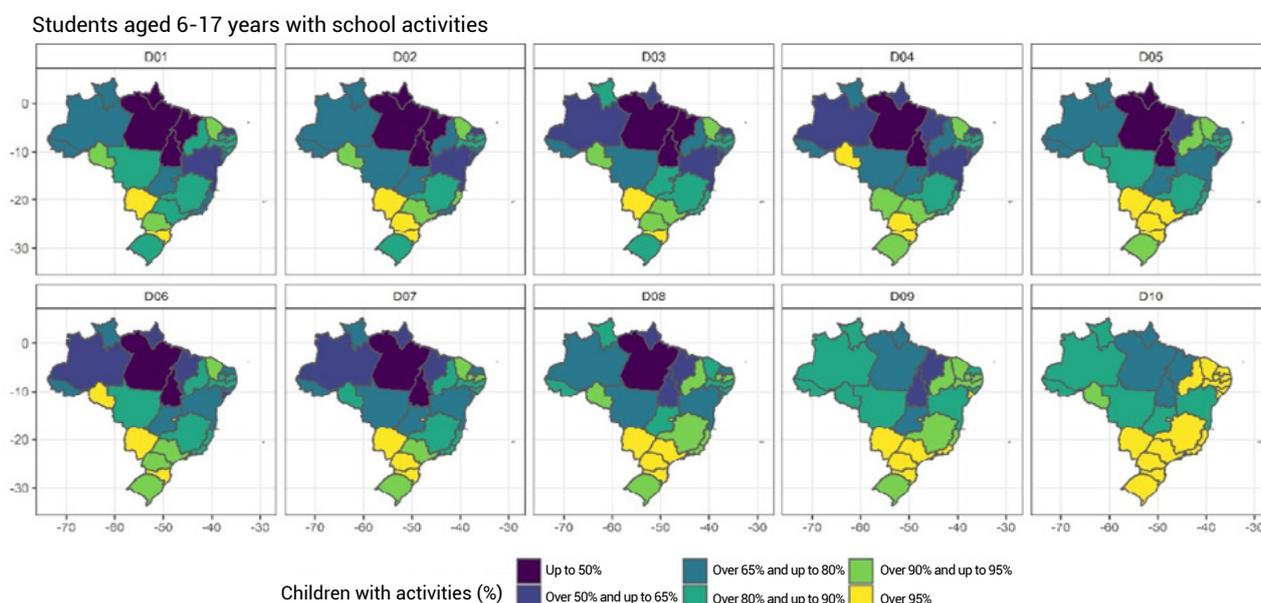
Tenths of household income per capita	6 to 10 years	11 to 14 years	15 to 17 years	Total
Poorest	70.40%	68.40%	67.60%	69.10%
2	73.60%	71.20%	68.00%	71.50%
3	76.40%	75.90%	71.20%	74.90%
4	79.70%	78.00%	72.50%	77.30%
5	76.90%	78.90%	71.30%	76.10%
6	82.80%	81.00%	74.50%	80.20%
7	84.60%	82.20%	82.10%	83.10%
8	86.30%	84.80%	79.70%	84.10%
9	85.50%	88.00%	82.60%	85.60%
Wealthiest	82.60%	83.90%	80.00%	82.50%
Total	77.90%	76.70%	72.80%	76.20%

Source: Pnad Covid, July 2020.

The map panel below reveals a striking regional dimension in inequality. The situation of the richest 10% (D10) in Northern and some Northeastern states is equal to or worse than the situation of the poorest 10% (D01) in most Southern and Southeastern states. The map expresses, above all, the disparity in access to school infrastructure for students with similar socioeconomic levels, albeit in different regions.

The most critical situations are in the states of Pará, Amapá, Piauí, Tocantins, Bahia, and Sergipe. In these states, less than 50% of the poorest students had school activities. On the other hand, the scenario is more favorable in Santa Catarina and Mato Grosso do Sul, followed by Paraná, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro.

Map Panel 1 – Students aged 6-17 with school activities in July, according to income (D01 poorest, D10 wealthiest)



Source: Pnad Covid, July 2020

The relocation of school activities to inside the home ascribed further importance to the family. In view of the reduced mediating role of teachers, the inequalities in the characteristics of parents (level of education, possession of resources to facilitate learning, time available for the children, etc.) reflect more directly in inequality in the children's engagement and learning.

Therefore, even among students who received school activities, we find a significant discrepancy in the time spent. Students from the highest-income strata accomplish, on average, 5 more hours per week of activities than students from the lowest-income strata. If we consider the entire 5-month period of the pandemic thus far (April to August), this difference rises to 124 hours, circa 28 school days. The difference between families in which mothers have a higher education degree against mothers with complete secondary education follows the same trend: 80 hours, or 18 school days. In comparison with students whose mothers are less schooled (up to Elementary School, approximately 35.0% of the total), the difference amounts to 21 school days.

If schools remain closed, and insufficient access to educational activities to students from the lower strata endures, we will likely see a further aggravation of these differences. A conservative estimate shows that the discrepancy in hours for school activities, translated into number of school days, may reach 50 between the poorest and wealthiest students.

This does not mean we advocate re-opening schools. Rather, we emphasize that the responsibility for addressing learning difficulties amidst the pandemic cannot be left to families alone. Governments need to act to prevent these inequalities from escalating, starting with a systematic monitoring of learning conditions, focusing on the most vulnerable families, adopting more efficient forms of communication, and mobilizing intersectoral policies at the local level.

**Tabela 2 - Estimated number of hours spent on school activities at home
(if the school offered home activities)**

Household income per capita	March - August		September - December		March - December	
	Hours	School days	Hours	School days	Hours	School days
Poorest	228	51	185	41	413	92
2	231	51	187	42	417	93
3	242	54	196	44	438	97
4	244	54	198	44	442	98
5	257	57	208	46	465	103
6	255	57	207	46	462	103
7	266	59	215	48	481	107
8	283	63	229	51	513	114
9	309	69	250	56	559	124
Wealthiest	352	78	285	63	637	142

Household income per capita	March - August		September - December		March - December	
	Hours	School days	Hours	School days	Hours	School days
Mother's Schooling	Hours	School days	Hours	School days	Hours	School days
Incomplete Elementary Education or Less	219	49	177	39	395	88
Elementary Education	236	52	191	42	426	95
Secondary Education	245	54	198	44	443	99
Higher Education	315	70	255	57	570	127

Source: Pnad-Covid, July, 2019. The data refers only to July 2019. Estimates for prior and subsequent periods presume that the pattern remains the same throughout the entire period.

Impact on learning

The socioeconomic status of families and the strategies adopted by educational institutions and authorities are the two main undermining factors of the students' learning process amidst the pandemic.

To evaluate this combination, we used the simulator developed by Petrus, Vasconcelos et al (2020)¹³, which allows us to estimate proficiency scores in the Basic Education and Assessment System (SAEB in the Portuguese acronym) for different student profiles across different scenarios¹⁴. The profiles stem from a combination of contextual variables (presence of a computer at home, parental encouragement to perform school activities, history of student abandonment), distributed by socioeconomic level¹⁵.

We developed the scenarios based on two learning context variables: i) expected learning level of students; ii) differences in learning between student profiles. Thus, we have four scenarios (low-low, low-high, high-low, high-high). If we add the variable "using computer or television" to the analysis, 8 scenarios emerge. The underlying logic in the analysis is that students with lower socioeconomic profiles have less access to computers and high-speed Internet, as argued at the beginning of this policy brief. Thus, the use of television as an emergency tool to address this deficit enables direct contact with school content and increases likelihood of learning¹⁶.

Based on the available tool, we performed simulations for proficiency in Portuguese and Mathematics for students enrolled in the 9th grade of elementary school.

13 We express our gratitude to Juliana Vasconcelos for her thoughtful clarifications and suggestions. The simulator may be found at the link: <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieYmMwNWE3YWQtNjkwOS00ZGJmLWE4MGItOWZlYmZmN2lwZDdmliwidCI6IjczNjFkMjI1LWE3OWUtNDhmZS04ZmI0LTMzZjQ4NDMzZjU1ZiJ9>.

14 The SAEB scores range from 0 to 500. According to INEP, "The results are presented on a performance scale capable of describing, at each level, the competences and skills shown by students. The scale is unique and cumulative for each school subject, across all evaluated years and grades: the logic is that the more the student progresses along the scale, the more skills they will have accumulated. Therefore, students in the 5th year of elementary school are expected to achieve numerical averages lower than those in the 9th grade, while these will achieve lower averages than by students in the 3rd or 4th grade of high school".

15 Petrus, Vasconcelos et al (2020). "Cenários relativos à evolução do impacto da pandemia em indicadores educacionais – Nota Metodológica". Trabalho apresentado no IX Seminário RBMA – "A Pandemia e o alcance das ODS no Brasil: Onde Estamos?". August 13, 2020.

16 For further details on the adopted methodology see (Petrus, Vasconcelos et al, 2020).

The table below shows the general results of our simulation. The column “Without the pandemic” shows the estimated score if there was no pandemic – these values are constant for each of the income fifths as it refers the estimated scenario in a normal situation. In turn, the column “With the pandemic” shows the results for each scenario, depending on the medium (television or computer).

Table 3 – Estimated grades for proficiency in Portuguese and Mathematics, with and without the pandemic, in 4 different scenarios, with the use of computer or TV – low (Q1) and high (Q5) classification

Expected student learning level	Learning differences between classes	Without the Pandemic		With the Pandemic			
				TV		PC	
Portuguese							
		Q1	Q5	Q1	Q5	Q1	Q5
Low	Low	251.8	263.9	237.9	251.1	230.0	250.8
Low	High	251.8	263.9	244.9	258.5	231.9	258.1
High	Low	251.8	263.9	245.7	258.6	239.3	258.5
High	High	251.8	263.9	248.6	262.1	237.5	261.8
Mathematics							
		Q1	Q5	Q1	Q5	Q1	Q5
Low	Low	253.08	271.80	241.82	261.46	234.67	261.27
Low	High	253.08	271.80	246.16	266.38	233.20	266.04
High	Low	253.08	271.80	247.02	266.54	240.62	266.37
High	High	253.08	271.80	249.88	270.04	238.75	269.74

Source: School performance simulator in the pandemic. Herkenhoff & Prates

If we only consider grade scores – that is, absolute learning – the most detrimental situations for the lower-income classes are scenarios that use computers, indicating losses of approximately 20 points in the SAEB for both Portuguese and Mathematics. For the higher-income classes, the maximum loss would be 13 points for Portuguese and 10 for Mathematics.

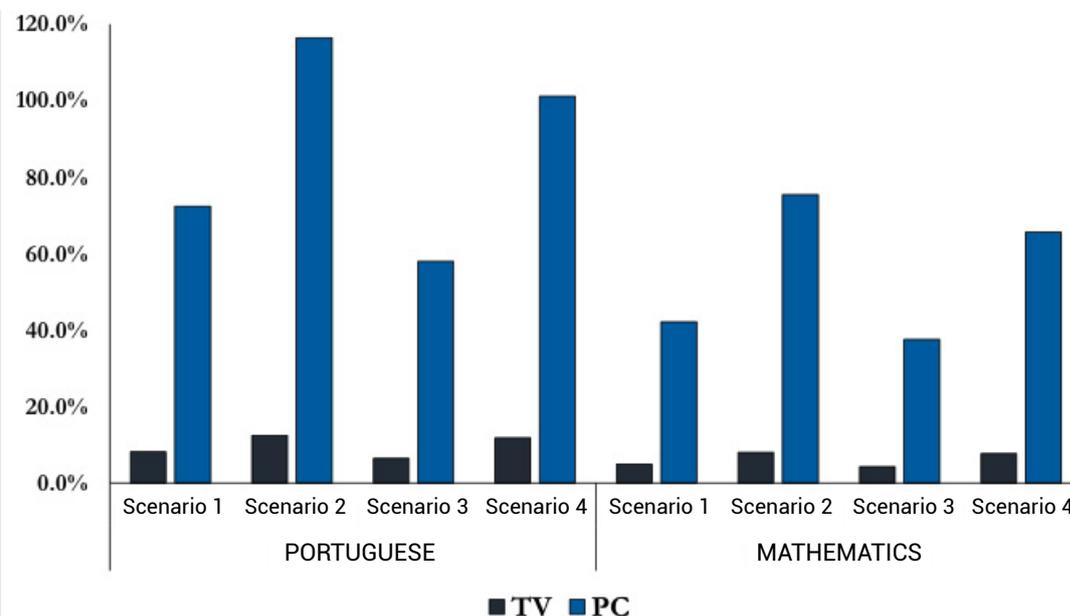
If we consider that 25 points in the SAEB equals to the average learning of one year (ibid), we may estimate the loss in each of the scenarios. Table 4 presents this percentage loss against what the student could have gained in a normal academic year. For all scenarios with the use of computers, the percentage loss of the poorest is very high, both for proficiency in Mathematics and in Portuguese, varying between 50% (scenario 4) to almost an entire academic year (87.3%). For the wealthier, scenario 1 entails a loss of approximately 50.0% (regardless of using computer or television), while all other scenarios entail a lesser impact.

Table 4 – Percentage of the estimated loss of a regular school year in four scenarios

Scenarios	TV		PC	
	Portuguese			
	Q1	Q5	Q1	Q5
1	55.4%	51.4%	87.3%	52.2%
2	27.7%	21.7%	79.5%	23.1%
3	24.2%	21.1%	49.8%	21.8%
4	12.8%	7.1%	57.3%	8.2%
Scenarios	Mathematics			
	Q1	Q5	Q1	Q5
1	45.0%	41.4%	73.6%	42.1%
2	27.7%	21.7%	79.5%	23.0%
3	24.2%	21.0%	49.8%	21.7%
4	12.8%	7.0%	57.3%	8.2%

Source: School performance simulator in the pandemic. Herkenhoff & Prates

The greater inequality increase between low-income and high-income students happens in Portuguese in scenarios 2 and 4, with more than 100% growth in the difference in proficiency scores if the use of computers is the adopted method. For Mathematics, the difference in these scenarios would grow by around 70%. If television is the adopted method, the growth in proficiency inequalities is less pronounced across every scenario, for both disciplines.

Graph 2 – Estimated increase (in%) of proficiency inequality between high-income and low-income students, in four scenarios, according to the use of computers or television

Source: School performance simulator in the pandemic. Herkenhoff & Prates

Dilemmas for the future

When the pandemic arrived in Brazil and schools were closed, the technological limitations of the poorest regions, together with access inequalities to digital media, were already longstanding issues. The Federal government and, more specifically, the Ministry of Education bore responsibility to provide and coordinate a national policy, articulated with states and municipalities, and address the challenges imposed by social distancing with clear guidelines and protocols.

Nothing of the sort happened. The paralysis of the Ministry of Education left the school system without adequate support and aggravated regional inequalities. Millions of students were left without access to learning activities, mostly black students and/or living in the North and Northeast regions. Even among those able to continue school activities, the poorest were the most affected, either because they had sparse resources at home from their families, or because the institutional support of schools was considerably inferior and insufficient to perform school-related tasks at home.

These prior-existing disparities had a negative learning impact on millions of students. The data and simulations indicate that the poorest students may experience a loss equivalent to almost a year of learning (especially if computers are the sole method adopted).

Given the growing inequalities in education, the federal, state, and municipal authorities need to react quickly, implementing new emergency policies, attentive to local and regional realities, and based on a combination of distance learning methods to expand the support network to a larger share of students.

The poorest families must be the focus of these policies, which may require tailored monitoring of students and organizing education, social assistance, and even health professionals relegated to the background during the pandemic. Concentrated efforts are needed to expand internet access in the short and medium term, as the use of more efficient means of communication favors and facilitates learning processes.

At the moment, the public debate mostly revolves around reopening schools. Social interactions resulting from a return to in-person school activities will likely increase the risk of infection. On the other hand, a prolonged suspension of classes imposes additional costs on the country's fragile educational situation.

Without a clear and effective coordination between the federal government and the states, reopening schools could entail additional tragic consequences. Four groups advocate different strategies: (i) governors and mayors, who hold the prerogative to plan and decree the return to school and determine the necessary hygiene and biosafety protocols; (ii) teachers and their unions, who act, in general, against the return of in-person classes; (iii) private schools and their unions, which press for the reopening of activities; and (iv) the Judiciary, which has been called upon when school or teacher unions attempt to reverse the decisions of governors or mayors

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, which could define decisional parameters, are all but absent. The only education-related measure was the enactment, in July, of biosafety guidelines for resuming classes and providing free internet to students enrolled in federal universities and institutes. The debate develops, therefore, through pure intuition or, worse, electoral intents.

The reopening of in-person activities is particularly susceptible to the country's existing inequalities, which tend to aggravate throughout and after the pandemic period. These effects will particularly affect the competition for opportunities in schools, universities, and in the labor market.

The Health tragedy and the dire situation in Education must not progress any further, risking a legacy of thousands of deaths and scars typical of countries that fail to educate their children and youth.

With the next Bulletin, the Solidarity Research Network ends a cycle before opening another, with short break for evaluation and expansion of our research agenda. See you soon in October.

The **Solidarity Research Network** emerged alongside the first signs of COVID-19 in Brazil. The nascent extraordinary challenges encouraged us to create an interdisciplinary research group comprising professors, technicians, and researchers aspiring to provide quality information, data, indicators, and analyses for improving public policies developed by the Federal government, states, and municipalities in the fight against the pandemic. Our prime concern was to help save lives. We knew that we would have to engage in the debate and establish a dialogue with authorities, congressional representatives, public managers, colleagues in the press, the academic community, businesspeople, non-governmental institutions, and anyone else interested in taking concrete actions with a direct impact on the lives of the population.

As a voluntary grouping, the Network focused all its energies into a systematic review and production of information, in addition to devising mathematical and statistical models to monitor, identify gridlocks, and recommend paths for evidence-based public policies. Our constant strive towards precision and accuracy governed our activities under the principles of research transparency, integrity, and ethics. Likewise, it also steered us away from magical solutions, unfounded opinions, and the politicization of decisions for combating the pandemic.

The Network successfully brought together a diverse array of researchers, inspired by their multidisciplinary spirit and open-minded approach to the public debate – the underlying foundations of any scientific activity.

Under these guiding principles the Network secured early support from institutions such as the University of São Paulo (USP), the Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning (CEBRAP), INCOR, the Institute for Advanced Studies (USP), the Brazilian Network Information Center (NIC.br), and the Center for Metropolitan Studies (CEM). The participation of renowned international centers of excellence was essential for the Network's rigorous work process, including researchers from the Blavatnik School at Oxford University, Tulane University, Columbia University, and Texas A&M University. Today, five months after the first Bulletin, a total of 22 prominent institutions comprise our Network, such as the Ethos Institute, Albert Einstein Hospital, Ebape/FGV, EAESP/FGV and EESP/FGV, The Covid-19 Social Observatory, Open Knowledge Brasil, COVID-Radar, ONAS-COVID-19, among others.

We are deeply grateful to the Betty and Jacob Lafer Institute, CEBRAP, the Tide Setubal Institute, the Ford Foundation, CEM, and BDMG for their trust and financial support, which enabled our activities. Because of their support, we were able to gather circa 100 researchers in the fields of political science, medicine, sociology, psychology, public health, economics, and law. They are students and professors, mostly young researchers, who offered the best of their abilities to produce weekly Bulletins, without interruption,

in two languages, Portuguese and English. We have published 22 editions thus far, sent to a mailing list of circa 10,000 addresses. Furthermore, newspapers such as Folha de São Paulo covered our policy briefs on a weekly basis. In addition to Folha, our researchers have been mentioned on the pages of Jornal da USP, The Washington Post, O Valor, Globo, Nexo, Pesquisa Fapesp, Piauí, Estado de São Paulo, Correio Braziliense, The Brazilian Report, El País, New York Times, Deutsche Welle, The Lancet. They have also been interviewed by leading radio and TV stations in the country, such as Globo, GloboNews, Record, and Bandeirantes.

To broaden the public discussion, we have organized more than 20 virtual seminars, including the presence of the editor-in-chief of the New England Journal of Medicine, Dr. Eric Rubin.

We participated in debates in the National Congress and Senate, and collaborated with legislators across the political spectrum. Under the auspice of the City Council President of São Paulo, Eduardo Tuma, Dr. Lorena Barberia, member of the Solidarity Research Network, participated in a dialogue between the Secretary of the City of Buenos Aires (Dr. Fernando Straface), the Secretary of Finance of Bogotá (Dr. Juan Mauricio Ramírez), the Assistant Secretary of Health of the city of São Paulo (Dr. Edjane T. Brito), and the President of the Finance Committee (city councilor Antonio Donato).

To expand and improve the quality of the data about the responses of federal, state, and city authorities to the pandemic, we have produced unprecedented indicators to monitor social distancing policies, Covid-19 testing, and ICU bed capacity, in addition to monitoring which resources were allocated over time since the outset of the pandemic. We performed a real-time assessment of social policies and the labor market, identifying the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic and the emergency measures adopted. Our data is public and has assisted researchers, journalists, and authorities with indicators inspired by the University of Oxford's COVID-19 Government Response Tracker initiative.

Over the course of these months of the pandemic, we established dialogues with governors and state crisis committees, as well as with the Federal and some state-level Prosecutor's Offices. Our constant and daily presence on social networks, especially on Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter expanded our audience reach: our digital media has thousands of followers, our website registered more than 10,000 users, received visitors from 39 countries, and our Newsletters have been downloaded almost 6 thousand times.

The Network's activity has never ceased to be arduous in the last period. A tough, somber, and thorny path, not least because of the countless infected individuals in need of hospitals and ICU beds, as well as the almost 120 thousand people who left their families mourning in grief.

The dismay of knowing that many of these deaths could have been prevented only further increased our uneasiness. Nonetheless, it has also pushed us forward as we strive to improve the debate on issues and policies which, not always efficiently designed, have further aggravated the hardships of the population, especially across its most vulnerable sectors.

We are sure that our journey thus far has been not only touching, but exceptionally rewarding. We are honored to play our role in the profusion of initiatives against

COVID-19 emerging around the world and in our country. In the short time span of only a few weeks, new projects and research groups multiplied across Brazilian universities to address the pandemic. A similar movement happened in the private sector, with the active participation of many companies not only through philanthropy, but also through the support of researches across different areas. A positive rupture from Brazil's longstanding tradition of distancing or transferring responsibilities to the State.

We are still far from fully describing the scope of the solidarity networks formed across the country. Our research integrated a national and international network of initiatives, which ignored borders and bureaucratic constraints. Our Network extracted energy from solidarity to relentlessly pursue further efficiency in public policies.

We take this moment to announce a brief pause to redesign our activities. Bulletin number 22, addressing unequal access to education, and our next edition, number 23, dedicated to evaluating the critical situation of vulnerable communities, will close the first cycle of the Solidary Research Network. We will resume our activities in October with a renewed agenda. In addition to the pandemic, vaccines, and public policies, we will tackle issues such as education, diversity, race, youth, science and technology, environment, climate, elections, digitalization, and economic performance in the mid- and long-term, particularly how they relate to the COVID-19 crisis.

As always, we want what is best for our country. With that goal in mind, we plan on correcting mistakes and further improve our analysis, methodologies, and tools. We expect to include new research groups in our Network and evolve towards the consolidation of a dynamic center for elaborating quality public policies. Constant debates, adjustments, and criticisms are our oxygen, as tolerance to the adversary is what guides us as researchers and scientists.

To everyone who followed our work, honored us with their attentive reading, and helped the Solidary Research Network contribute to raising the standard of public policies, we express our utmost gratitude.

The cooperative work, learning, and results have more than made up for the headaches and sleepless nights over the past six months. The Postgraduate discipline offered to the entire university community at USP this semester (The Pandemic Crises and Opportunities for Building a Safer, Less Unequal, and Sustainable World), as well as a book in preparation with the results of our research will be the preamble for the construction of a robust center concerned with the quality of public policies in Brazil.

To all our readers, supporters, managers, authorities, our most sincere gratitude.

To the institutions that supported us, our eternal gratitude.

To the researchers, mentioned below, our most affectionate regards.

See you soon.

Solidarity Research Network Coordination

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Coordinating Committee

- Glauco Arbix (USP-Sociology, IEA)
- Lorena Barberia (USP-Political Science)
- Graziela Castello (CEBRAP)
- João Paulo Veiga (USP)
- Fabio Senne (NIC.br)
- José Eduardo Krieger (InCor-Faculty of Medicine-USP)
- Tatiane Moraes (Fiocruz)
- Rogério Barbosa (CEM-USP, Princeton BrazilLab)
- Ian Prates (CEBRAP, Social Accountability International)
- Hellen Guicheney (CEM, CEBRAP)
- Priscila Vieira (CEBRAP)

Coordenação Científica

- Scientific Coordination

Consultants

- Alvaro Comin (USP) - Diogo Ferrari (California University, Riverside) - Flavio Cireno Fernandes (Joaquim Nabuco Foundation) - Márcia Lima (USP and AFRO-CEBRAP) - Marta Arretche (USP, CEM) - Renata Bichir (USP, CEM) - Guy D. Whitten (Texas A&M University) - Arachu Castro (Tulane University) - Úrsula Peres (USP-EACH, CEM)

Researchers

- Anna Paula Ferrari Matos (USP)
- Bruna Pizzol (Polytechnic School-USP, CEM)
- Carolina Langbeck Osse (USP)
- Carolina Requena (USP, CEM)
- Claudia Barros (UNISANTOS)
- Claudia Ranzini (Design)
- Cristiane Cabral (USP)
- Cristiane G. da Silva (UNIFESP)
- Cristiane Geraldi Queiroz (Observatório da Inovação, IEA)
- Dara Aparecida Vilela Pinto (USP)
- Dafny Almeida (USP, CEBRAP)
- Daniela Costanzo (USP, CEBRAP)
- Diego Tomasiello (Polytechnic School-USP, CEM)
- Eduardo Lazzari (USP, CEM)
- Elton Freitas (CEDEPLAR-UFGM)
- Fabiana da Silva Pereira (USP)
- Fabio Senne (NIC.br)
- Leonardo Lins (NIC.br)
- Fernanda De Negri (IPEA)
- Priscila Koeller (IPEA)
- Gabriela Calazans (FM-USP)
- Gabriela Palhares (Innovation Observatory-IEA)
- German Freiberg (Polytechnic School-USP)
- Glauco Arbix (USP-Sociology, IEA)
- Graziela Castello (CEBRAP)
- Graziela Zucoloto (IPEA)
- Hellen Guicheney (CEM, CEBRAP)
- Heloísa Fimiani (USP)
- Iana Lima (CEPESP/FGV)
- Ian Prates (CEBRAP, Social Accountability International)
- Ingrid Castro Loureiro Silva (USP)
- Isabel Seelaender (USP)
- Ivan França Jr. (Public Health-USP)
- Jaciane Milanezi (PhD student IPP/CEBRAP, Afro/CEBRAP)
- João Lucas Sacchi de Oliveira (USP)

- João P. Romero (CEDEPLAR-UFMG)
- João Paulo Veiga (USP)
- Jonatas Mendonça dos Santos (USP-Sociology)
- José Eduardo Krieger (InCor-Faculty of Medicine-USP)
- José Ricardo C. M. Ayres (FM USP)
- Júlio Simões (USP)
- Kelly Senters Piazza (DFPS- United States Air Force Academy)
- Lara Mesquita (CEPESP/FGV)
- Laura Simões Camargo (USP-Social Sciences)
- Leonardo Fontes (CEBRAP)
- Lorena Barberia (USP-Political Science)
- Lorrane Vanícia Correia Castilho (Digital Media)
- Luciana Lima (UFRN)
- Luciana Garbayo (University of Central Florida)
- Luis Guilherme Galeão-Silva (USP)
- Luiz Guilherme Roth Cantarelli (USP)
- Luiz Lopes (Site)
- Maria Carla Corrochano (UFSCAR)
- Macarena U. Devicenzi (UNIFESP)
- Marcela Zamudio (USP, CEPESP/FGV)
- Marcia Lima (USP, Afro/ CEBRAP)
- Marcos R. V. Garcia (UFSCAR)
- Maria Leticia Claro de F. Oliveira (USP, CEPESP/FGV)
- Mariana Giannotti (Polytechnic School-USP, CEM)
- Mariane Caetano Vasconcellos (Fiocruz-PE)
- Matheus Barboza (Politécnica-USP, CEPESP/FGV)
- Michelle Fernández (UnB)
- Monise Picanço (CEBRAP, USP)
- Natália de Paula Moreira (USP)
- Patrícia L. de O. Borba (UNIFESP)
- Paulo Agabo (USP)
- Paulo Flores (USP)
- Paulo Scarpa (Translation)
- Pedro Logiodice (Polytechnic School-USP, CEM)
- Pedro Miranda (IPEA)
- Pedro Schmalz (USP, CEPESP/FGV)
- Priscila Vieira (CEBRAP)
- Raquel Requena Rachid (USP)
- Reinaldo José Gianini (FM-PUC)
- Renata Breves (Fiocruz)
- Rodrigo Brandão (USP-Sociology)
- Rogério Jerônimo Barbosa (CEM-USP, Princeton Brazil Lab)
- Sergio Simoni (UFRGS, CEM)
- Tainá Bittencourt (Polytechnic School-USP, CEM)
- Tatiane C Moraes de Sousa (Fiocruz)
- Thiago Meireles (USP-Political Science)
- Thiago Moraes (UNESP)
- Vanessa Triches Pezente (Fiocruz)
- Vera SF Paiva (USP-Psychology)
- Vitor Matheus Oliveira de Menezes (USP, CEBRAP)
- Vitória Lopes (CEPESP/FGV)
- Wedgide Bourdeau (United States Air Force Academy)
- Withson Sampaio (USP-Social Sciences)

ABOUT

We are over 100 researchers, actively engaged in the task of improving the quality of public policies within federal, state, and municipal governments as they seek to act amidst the Covid-19 crisis to save lives. We dedicate our energies towards rigorous data collection, devising substantial information, formulating indicators, and elaborating models and analyses to monitor and identify pathways for public policies and review the responses presented by the population.

The Solidary Research Network has researchers from all scientific fields (Humanities as well as Exact and Biological Sciences) in Brazil and overseas. For us, the combination of skills and techniques is vital as we face the current pandemic. The challenge ahead is enormous, but it is particularly invigorating. And it would never have come to fruition if it weren't for the generous contribution of private institutions and donors who swiftly answered our calls. We are profoundly grateful to all those who support us.

Visit our site: <https://rededesquisasolidaria.org/>

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WHO WE ARE

Coordination Committee

Glauco Arbix (USP), João Paulo Veiga (USP), Fabio Senne (Nic.br), José Eduardo Krieger (InCor-Faculdade de Medicina USP), Rogério Barbosa (CEM-USP, Princeton Brazil Lab), Ian Prates (CEBRAP, Social Accountability International), Graziela Castello (CEBRAP), Lorena Barberia (USP-Ciência Política), Tatiane Moraes (Fiocruz) e Hellen Guicheney (CEM, CEBRAP)

Scientific Coordination Lorena Barberia (USP)

Editors Glauco Arbix, João Paulo Veiga, and Lorena Barberia

Donations and contact rededesquisasolidaria@gmail.com

Consultants Alvaro Comin (USP) • Diogo Ferrari (Universidade de Chicago) • Flavio Cireno Fernandes (Prof. da Escola Nacional de Adm. Pública e Fundação Joaquim Nabuco) • Márcia Lima (USP e AFRO-Núcleo de Pesquisa e Formação em Raça, Gênero e Justiça Racial) • Marta Arretche (USP e Centro de Estudos da Metrópole - CEM) • Renata Bichir (USP e CEM) • Guy D. Whitten (Texas A&M University) • Arachu Castro (Tulane University)

Design Claudia Ranzini **Translation** Paulo Scarpa

Work group responsible for Technical Note 22

Coordination Ian Prates & Hellen Guicheney

Researchers Thiago Meireles (USP) • Vitor Menezes (USO) • Eduardo Lazzari (USP/CEM) • Paulo Flores (USP/CEM) • Sergio Simoni (UFRGS) • Carolina Requena (CEM) • Heloisa Fimiani (USP) • João Lucas Sacchi de Oliveira (USP)

Special Collaboration Fabio Senne (NIC.br) • Daniela Costa (NIC.br) • Isabela Coelho (NIC.br)

Partners



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