

Professional Qualification in the Urban Productive Inclusion Strategy of *Plano Brasil Sem Miséria*

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The majority of poor working-age Brazilians are economically active. However, as their ties to the labour market tend to be weak, they have low and unstable earnings. This is largely due to their low level of formal education and lack of access to vocational training. The *Brasil sem Miséria* plan, whose priority is the fight against extreme poverty, has put forward a productive inclusion strategy that has brought new perspectives to these individuals.

In urban areas the flagship initiative is the *Programa Nacional de Ensino Técnico e Emprego* (Pronatec — National Programme for Access to Technical Education and Employment), which offers free high-quality training courses, recognised by the Ministry of Education and by the market, taught at employer-supported or public vocational schools. The courses have a minimum duration of 160 hours, and there are 441 modalities available, such as computer operator, receptionist, electrician and mason.

Previous attempts to expand the scale of the vocational education aimed at the poor population failed due to some characteristics of this group which require tailor-made policies. A lack of access to information, low educational levels, long working hours and long commutes to school, and very low incomes hindered their participation. Therefore, in addition to the courses' tuition fees, the federal government started to finance educational materials, transportation and snacks.

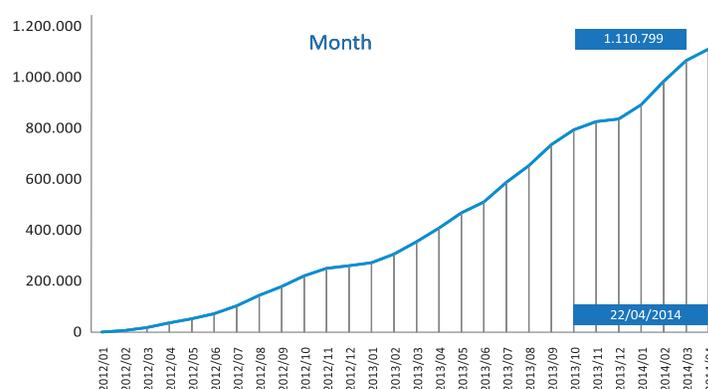
However, there were still two major challenges to overcome. The first comprised the difficulties in disseminating information about the courses and raising public awareness about the importance of improving skills. Many poor people did not feel entitled to that particular policy. Once the social assistance network was brought to the strategy, the situation changed. Its experience in providing services to vulnerable families, coupled with its nationwide network and national coverage, made it the ideal partner to assist the Ministry of Education in the program. The social assistance network reaches low-income individuals and refers them to vocational courses and labour intermediation services.

Another challenge was adapting the courses to the target population. The educational materials were revised, and the start of each new class came to be preceded by a welcoming period for the poorer individuals. Unlike previous initiatives, most students (43 per cent) now take evening courses, so they may combine work and study. Educational prerequisites were reassessed—today, 62 per cent of students enrol in courses that only require them to have partially completed fundamental education (which comprises a total of nine years of schooling—ISCED 2).

The number of vacancies and the courses offered in each city are negotiated with local government, schools, workers and entrepreneurs. This decision takes into account the economic vocation and labour deficits in the region, thus increasing the participants' chances of finding work. In just over two years, 1.1 million people have enrolled in Pronatec *Brasil sem Miséria* almost 70 per cent of whom are women.

Moreover, the programme was not restricted to capitals and major cities: courses are offered in 3479 of the 5570 municipalities.

Evolution in the Number of Enrolments in Pronatec Brasil sem Miséria



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Job intermediation services, coordinated by the Ministry of Labour with support from the social assistance network, are crucial. Of no less importance are partnerships with companies responsible for major infrastructure projects to qualify and hire local workers—thus reducing worker migration rates and mitigating the social problems that arise from migration.

Pronatec vocational courses also improve the productive inclusion of micro-entrepreneurs. Nearly 400,000 *Bolsa Família* beneficiaries have become formal individual micro-entrepreneurs. To support them in structuring and expanding their business, they have access to productive microcredit at lower interest rates as part of *Programa Crescer*, which, to date, has completed 2.8 million transactions with *Bolsa Família* beneficiaries. *Brasil sem Miséria* also supports 7800 enterprises engaged in solidarity economy across the country, directly benefiting over 150,000 people.

Through widespread access to high-quality training and by encouraging entrepreneurship and facilitating credit, Brazil has set itself on the right track to continue reducing inequalities in the labour market.

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