

Mortality from COVID-19 and the drop in employment rates in Brazil and around the world

Marcos Hecksher, Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea)

This One Pager seeks to situate the relative intensity of damages caused by COVID-19 in Brazil within the broader global context. Brazil recorded more deaths from COVID-19 in 2020, as a proportion of its total population, than 89.3 per cent of the other 178 countries with data compiled by the World Health Organization (WHO). When records are adjusted according to the population distribution by age group and sex in each country, the Brazilian result becomes worse than 94.9 per cent of those same countries. Furthermore, between the last three quarters of 2019 and 2020, Brazil had a more intense drop in employment rate than 84.1 per cent of the other 63 countries with data compiled by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Figure 1).

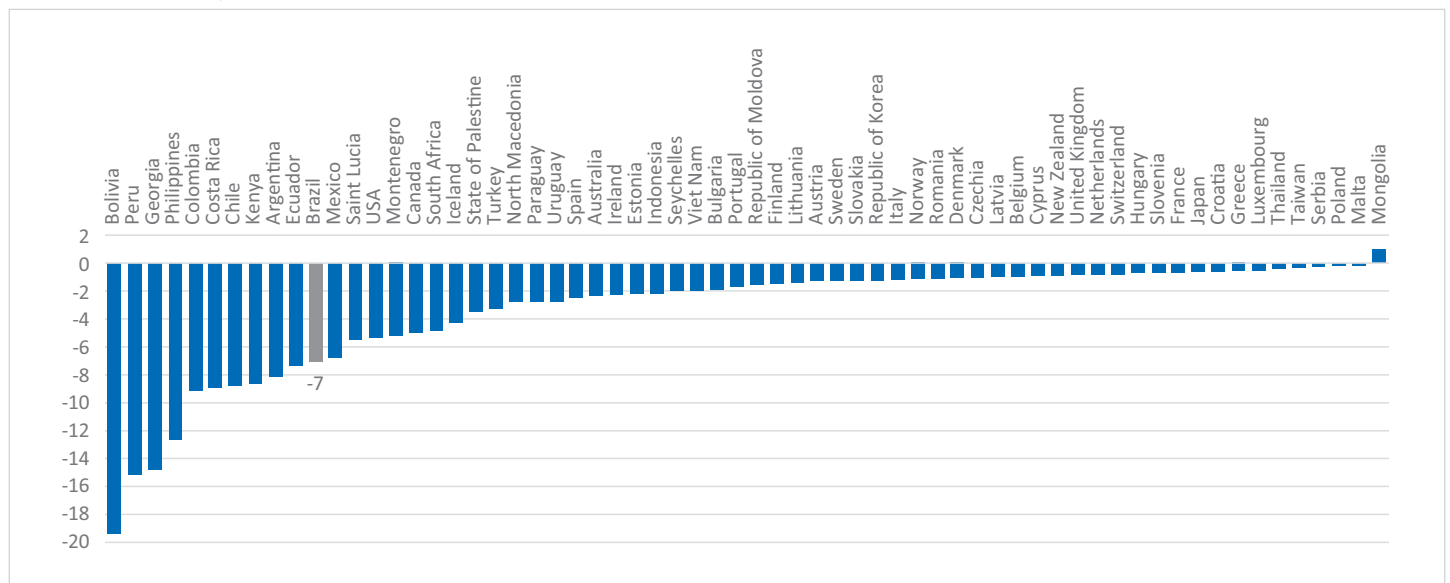
Within the same set of 179 countries where Brazil placed 20th in crude mortality rate per 100,000 inhabitants, it moves to the 10th worst position in the ranking adjusted by demographic composition. Seven of the nine countries with worse rates than Brazil are in Latin America, most notably Peru and Mexico. Reported deaths in 2020 for these two countries surpassed what would have occurred if both had replicated Brazilian rates across each age group and sex—by 42.8 per cent in Peru and 33.9 per cent in Mexico. At the opposite extreme, Vietnam

recorded only 0.05 per cent of the deaths it would have registered under the Brazilian mortality pattern. In other words, the risk of dying of COVID-19 in Brazil was 2,000 times higher than in Vietnam, according to both countries' records (Hecksher 2021).

In the rest of the world, the risk was 25.6 per cent of Brazil's, which means the risk of dying of COVID-19 in Brazil was 3.9 times the global average excluding Brazil. Latin America was the region with the worst adjusted mortality, although not as high as the Brazilian rate. The Brazilian adjusted mortality was worse than 80 per cent of the 35 remaining Latin American countries with available data.

The standardisation of national mortality rates is crucial for unbiased international comparisons. Six developed countries—US, UK, Belgium, Spain, France, and Italy—had worse crude COVID-19 mortality rates in 2020 than Brazil, but all had lower rates when controlled by age group and sex. This is explained by a higher share of elderly people in their populations (60 years old or older). The specific mortality rate among people aged 60 or older was higher in Brazil than in five of those developed countries (except for Belgium), and the Brazilian rate among people up to 59 years old was much worse than in all of them.

Figure 1
Variation in the employment rate between the last 3 quarters of 2019 and 2020 (percentage points)



Source: Author's elaboration.

Reference:

Hecksher, M. 2021. "Mortality from COVID-19 and the drop in employment rates in Brazil and around the world". IPC-IG Policy Research Brief, No. 76. Brasília: International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth.