

Millions of informals in Brazil anxiously await a check for \$ 120

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Daiane Dos Santos had to close her hairdresser located in one of the largest favelas in Sao Paulo a month ago. With an unemployed husband and two children, she is one of the 38 million informal workers in Brazil awaiting a check for 600 reais (about \$ 120) promised by the country's government to alleviate the effects of the coronavirus crisis.

"The four of us are quarantining and starting to have some financial limitations," he explained to Efe Dos Santos from Paraisópolis, a neighborhood in the south of Sao Paulo that houses about 100,000 inhabitants.

In her house, for almost a month, no income has been entered. "My husband was fired from work a few weeks before this crisis began," she lamented.

Now, his hope is set in the Jair Bolsonaro government's commitment to provide a subsidy of 600 reais (about \$ 120) for three months to all informal workers, who represent just over 40% of the country's total employees, some 38 million people.

This initiative, also aimed at the self-employed, could benefit, according to the same Executive, more than 50 million Brazilians – a quarter of the population – whose income is being diminished by the social isolation measures decreed to prevent the spread of COVID -19.

ANALYSIS REQUESTS

The money was released last week to 2.5 million informal workers registered on the Caixa Econômica Federal website. But like Dos Santos, many thousands more have still not received it because their request, a week later, is still "under analysis."

This is also the case of Lorraine Alves Meneses, another Paraisópolis neighbor who stopped working as a domestic worker in late March, when the State of São Paulo began quarantining.

"Before the arrival of the coronavirus, we lived well. I did not have money every day, but at least two days a week I did have it," recalled Efe Alves, mother of three children of 6, 7 and 9 years.

According to the woman, "food is still not lacking at home, thank God" but she is concerned that she will not be able to pay the rent, "which is already behind schedule."

In this sense, the subsidy of 600 reais "does not help much but at least makes it a little more pleasant," said Alves, who hopes to receive this emergency aid shortly.

But the scenario is far from optimistic for Nilsa Maria Ferreira, another neighbor of the community, who did not even manage to register on the government's digital platform.

"It tells me that my CPF appears as irregular," claimed Ferreira, referring to the Brazilian fiscal identity, which needs to be regularized to obtain financial aid and is often blocked due to lack of information, among other reasons.

The 43-year-old woman does not have an account open at any bank, although this is not an essential requirement to receive the 600 reales.

Ferreira, a resident of Paraisópolis with one of her daughters and her grandson, was mainly dedicated to collecting recyclable materials, although she also worked on "a little bit of everything", she explained.

"I had an optimal life. I would get up at 6.30 in the morning and go to work until I returned at 6 in the afternoon" but, with the arrival of the coronavirus, "everything changed completely," he said.

"Now it is not worth going out and going to the streets because everything is closed, the shops, the works are stopped, and I depend on this to work and earn my money," Ferreira said.

THE SOCIAL GAP MAY INCREASE

In a country punished by high unemployment and poverty rates and considered one of the most unequal in the world, the coronavirus health crisis has brought a new horizon of uncertainty in fear of widening the already existing social gap.

According to the latest data from the Getulio Vargas Foundation, in 2018 the number of middle and upper class families in Brazil grew, the so-called A and B classes for sociologists, reaching 14.4% of the country's population.

The majority social class, known as class C, remained more or less stable with 55.3% of the population, while the poorest groups, made up of classes D and E, suffered a small increase reaching 30, 3% of Brazilians.

COVID-19 presents itself as a major threat to those living in extreme poverty, with just 145 reais per month (less than \$ 30), which in 2018 affected 13.5 million people, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE).