Homeless people: an analysis of public policies implemented by the Government of the Federal District (GDF)

Pessoas em situação de rua: uma análise das políticas públicas implementadas pelo Governo do Distrito Federal (GDF)

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ABSTRACT
This article seeks to analyze the public policies implemented by the Government of the Federal District (GDF), aimed at the homeless population. Despite the recognition of the fundamental nature of social rights by the 1988 Federal Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, such acts still need concrete measures to materialize their provisions. To carry it out, the descriptive research method and secondary data obtained by the Federal District Planning Company (CODEPLAN) in 2022 were used, which outlined the profile of the homeless population in the Federal District. The difficulty in implementing public policies in the Federal District is also reported. The research showed that the coronavirus pandemic contributed to the increase in the homeless population and that unemployment was identified as the main cause. These people are looking for an alternative to obtain income and have become victims of urban and police violence and social discrimination.
Keywords: street dwellers; human rights; public policy.

RESUMO

Palavras-chave: moradores de rua; direitos humanos; política pública.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Federal District is the federative unit with the highest per capita GDP in Brazil, according to the most recent data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). The Organic Law of the Federal District provides, among its priority objectives, the guarantee and promotion of the rights enshrined in the Federal Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The 1988 Federal Constitution (CF/88) guarantees the right to housing. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “every human being has the right to be recognized as a person before the law, everywhere.” However, our reality differs from what our Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaim.

In the Federal District, there are approximately 2,938 people experiencing homelessness, according to a survey conducted by CODEPLAN (2022). This number is expected to increase even further over time, as the coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated this issue. It is necessary to note that people experiencing homelessness are those who have slept on the street at least once in the last 7 days, according to CODEPLAN (2022). A humane approach is
necessary to reach these individuals; support includes providing food and a sense of security in the offered location.

The focus of this work is: what is the public policy of the Government of the Federal District aimed at the homeless population and its effects, where the general objective is to analyze the public policies implemented by the Government of the Federal District (GDF) for the population experiencing homelessness. To make this analysis possible, data from various sources have been compiled to provide a broader view of these individuals. To achieve this goal, the following specific objectives were outlined: to understand the public policies of the Government of the Federal District aimed at the homeless population and to identify the practical effects of these public policies.

In the Federal District, there are various places providing support for people in this situation, such as Standard Operating Procedure Centers for Social Services (POP), Specialized Reference Centers for Social Assistance (CREAS), Institutional Support Service, among others. The government continually works to provide support to these individuals, as reported by IPEA DF (2022). It is necessary to understand the needs of those living on the streets because the daily care for these individuals comes from support networks built by the people in these situations. These networks adapt to meet physical-biological, spiritual, and socio-affective needs.

While there are many policies addressing this issue, some bottlenecks prevent these policies from truly serving the homeless population. In the CODEPLAN survey (2022), homeless individuals reported one of the difficulties or negative aspects of living on the streets is the lack of food. There are centers that provide food; however, the number is insufficient to meet the quantity of people in need. Identifying these bottlenecks is crucial for competent authorities to guide areas that require more attention, also aiming for strategies to create opportunities for these individuals to leave the streets and restart their lives in a dignified manner.

This article is based on a critical analysis of existing public policies in the Federal District that urgently need improvement to better serve the population and the Brazilian legal system regarding the recognition and effective fulfillment
of the fundamental rights of the homeless population. For its realization, the method of bibliographic review was used, along with data obtained from the CODEPLAN (2022) survey that outlined the profile of the homeless population in the Federal District.

The structure of this article is divided into 5 parts in the following order: introduction, which succinctly introduces the topic to be developed; the theoretical framework, where we delve into the data and information found on the proposed topic; the methodology used, which is the bibliographic review; the discussions of the information raised; and, finally, the concluding remarks.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There was a significant increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness in the 1990s in the centers of major Brazilian metropolises. However, it was only in 2008 that the Federal Government introduced a set of guidelines for the National Policy for Social Inclusion of the Homeless Population (PNPR), with the aim of guiding the construction and implementation of public policies (Serafino and Luz, 2015; Aline et al.).

2.1 THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS AND THE POPULATION IN A SITUATION OF HOMELESSNESS

We will begin by understanding the concept of the term “homelessness”, which describes not only the lack of housing but is also directed towards a social group (IPEA DF, 2022). For this population, living on the streets has become a daily experience with violence, whether physical or psychological, resulting from social exclusion. There are also instances of violent and disorderly interventions by police officers and/or officials, compulsory removals and/or confiscation of belongings, neglect in medical and social care, and the absence or inefficiency of public policies (IPEA DF, 2022).

Individuals who are victims of neglect by the authorities, lack of empathy, prejudice, and discrimination often experience criminal acts, including not only verbal but also physical assaults, which, in many cases, lead to homicide or attempted homicide. These acts of violence do not solely originate from the
population; in many cases, they involve agents entrusted with the care and protection of this population.

According to Filho and Ximenes (2021), the heterogeneity, itinerancy, and mobility of the population experiencing homelessness pose challenges in conducting investigations with this public. Given the precariousness of their living conditions and the relevance of the topic, the quantity of studies is still small, especially when considering discussions about how people experience poverty on the streets. Generally, studies position the homeless population as being in a state of poverty but do not clearly define this category or seek to understand how poverty is concretely experienced on the streets.

Decree No. 7,053, dated December 23, 2009, which establishes the National Policy for the Homeless Population (PNPSR), is the result of dialogue between the Federal Government and representatives of civil society. In it, we find the following definition of the population experiencing homelessness:

[...] A heterogeneous population group that shares common characteristics of extreme poverty, disrupted or fragile family ties, and the absence of regular conventional housing. This population utilizes public places and degraded areas as living and sustenance spaces, either temporarily or permanently, as well as shelter units for temporary overnight stays or provisional housing (BRASIL, 2009).

2.2 MAIN CAUSES THAT MOTIVATED THE SHIFT TO THE STREETS

There are several reasons that lead people to live on the streets, according to the research conducted by IPEA DF (2022). Accidental reasons encompass unemployment, depression, and even the coronavirus pandemic. There are also reasons related to family dynamics, such as ruptures and family conflicts. The research further indicates the existence of both temporary and definitive ruptures in many cases of people experiencing homelessness. However, there is a continuity in family bonds, manifested through visits, encounters on the streets, contact through social networks, phone calls, among other forms (IPEA DF, 2022).

According to Pinho (2020), productive inclusion is foreseen as one of the strategies that can provide some autonomy to individuals in situations of social vulnerability. However, challenges and limits for this inclusion in and
through work, as well as for social emancipation, have been anticipated in the modern world of work.

Many people experiencing homelessness harbor some form of plan or desire to exit the streets. Therefore, it is necessary for specialized entities to have planning so that these plans are individually assisted by the State as a supportive body. There are various accounts of aspirations for a life with better work, food, and housing quality. Individuals facing homelessness dream of possibilities for improving their lives, but they are fully aware that material means are crucial for achieving this reality (IPEA DF, 2022).

According to Nonato and Raiol (2018), the population experiencing homelessness is socially perceived as a threatening group rather than a segment at risk. This perception reinforces the construction of an imaginary society of fear, one that must be feared and increasingly controlled by the police, especially when confronted with economic interests. These individuals are perceived as a problem when, in reality, the problem lies in the situation of homelessness.

In line with Ceolin et al. (2018), the way society views people experiencing homelessness is fundamentally ideological, replicating existing relations of domination. To better understand this relationship of domination, Marx (1998) points out that the new ruling class is compelled, if only to achieve its purpose, to present its interest as the common interest of the entire population. Taking the situation to the realm of ideas, their thoughts are portrayed as universal, implying them as the only coherent and valid ones.

Thus, in a class-based society, the prevailing ideas have their material origin, with their source lying in the particular interests of the bourgeoisie. However, they are always presented as collective interests to be adopted by all, maintaining the status quo of the bourgeoisie’s domination over other classes. This reality leads to the unification of that class through the minimal use of violence and the extensive use of persuasion, masking the truth and facilitating domination.
2.3 LEGISLATION IN THE FEDERAL DISTRICT FOR THE HOMELESS POPULATION

Public policies for the homeless population were legitimized with the Policy for the Homeless Population, instituted by Federal Decree No. 7,053 (BRASIL, 2009). The decree marked a legal guarantee of the rights of people experiencing homelessness. It conceptualized the homeless population and guided the provision of services for this group. In doing so, this policy brought to light a population segment that was previously invisible, emphasizing the significant challenges faced by this population on a daily basis. In the same vein, the Policy for Social Inclusion of the Homeless Population in the Federal District was created in 2012, through District Decree No. 33,779, dated July 6, 2012. The decree outlined the main responsibilities of the State in implementing actions and had some of its objectives:

i) Ensure access to social assistance, health, education, housing, security, culture, work, food security, and other services and programs for the homeless population; ii) Encourage the organization and participation of the homeless population in public policies; iii) Guarantee the continuous training of professionals for action in cross-sectoral, transversal, and intergovernmental public policies directed at people experiencing homelessness; and iv) Promote a change in cultural paradigms regarding the human, economic, social, and cultural rights of the homeless population.

The decree also established a series of actions distributed across nine axes and instituted an Intersectoral Committee for Monitoring and Monitoring the Policy, composed of government and civil society representatives. In 2020, the District Policy for the Homeless Population was created through District Law No. 6,691, dated October 1, 2020.

According to Silva (2018), the Federal District was the first federal unit to adhere to the National Policy for the Homeless Population (PNPSR), with the creation of the Reference Center for the Homeless Population (CENTRO POP). This center, of a public and state nature, constitutes a reference unit for medium-complexity social assistance, providing services such as food, hygiene, socio-educational workshops, psychosocial care, and working in coordination with other
social assistance units, referring users to other services such as health, legal, security, among others.

Laws like these establish a context in which services and actions are disseminated and directly offered to the homeless population. The current network for serving the homeless population in the Federal District, maintained by the State Secretariat for Social Development, includes 28 teams of the Specialized Social Approach Service (Seas), two Specialized Reference Centers for the Homeless Population, the Centro POP Brasília and Taguatinga, nine Centers for Social Assistance Reference (CREAS), and 15 institutional shelter services for people experiencing homelessness.

According to Resende and Mendonça (2018), the lack of knowledge, especially regarding the specificities and needs of this population, is one of the problems that hinder the effective implementation of specific public policies. If the homeless population is invisible to demographic and support policies, it is, on the other hand, excessively visible to law enforcement, with repressive and hygienist policies often observed.

As stated by Costa (2020), the main rights violated are the right to food, clothing, and housing, which form a material tripod to achieve a minimum level of dignity. Emphasizing the importance of these rights, international treaties are referenced:

Declaração Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948): Article 25: 1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of oneself and one’s family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond one’s control. (emphasis added)

International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (UN, 1966): Article 11: 1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing, and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing the essential importance of international cooperation based on free consent. 2. The States Parties to the present Covenant, recognizing the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, will take, individually and through international cooperation, the measures, including concrete programs, that are necessary to: a) Improve methods of production, conservation, and distribution of food by the full utilization of technical and scientific knowledge, by the dissemination of principles of
nutritional education, and by the improvement or reform of agrarian systems, so that effective exploitation and use of natural resources are ensured; b) Ensure an equitable distribution of the world food resources in relation to needs, taking into account the problems of both importing and exporting countries of foodstuffs. (emphasis added)

Protocol of San Salvador (OAS, 1988): Article 12: 1. Every person has the right to adequate nutrition that ensures the possibility of enjoying the highest level of physical, emotional, and intellectual development. 2. In order to make this right effective and to eliminate malnutrition, the States Parties undertake to improve methods of production, supply, and distribution of food, committing to promote greater international cooperation to support national policies on the subject. (emphasis added)

According to Filgueiras (2019), in Brazil, the approach to the issue shifted from repression as the sole form of treatment to assistance and a demand for actions to protect the lives of people experiencing homelessness. Until the Federal Constitution of 1988, in the absence of public policy, assistance to people living on the streets was generally practiced in the form of private charity or through sporadic actions by public authorities.

The human right to adequate food for the homeless population is violated due to their poverty, which has been further hindered by the pandemic. Other violated rights include the right to health, education, work, and social assistance. These areas urgently need intervention, as living in a dignified manner is the minimum that everyone needs. It is crucial to emphasize that the homelessness in which these people find themselves is a clear violation of human rights, occurring due to the absence of public policies and not because of their fault, as they have been overlooked by society against their will (Oliveira; Alcântara, 2021).

3 METODOLOGY

This is a descriptive, documentary research using secondary data. According to Gil (1999), descriptive research aims primarily to describe the characteristics of a particular population or phenomenon or establish relationships between variables. There are various studies that can be classified under this title, and one of its most important characteristics lies in the use of standardized data collection techniques.

This type of research, according to Selltiz et al. (1965), seeks to describe a phenomenon or situation in detail, especially what is happening, allowing for an
accurate understanding of the characteristics of an individual, a situation, or a group, as well as unveiling the relationship between events.

This form of research's main function is to put the researcher in direct contact with everything that has been written, said, or filmed about a particular subject (Marconi; Lakatos, 2007). According to the authors mentioned above, descriptive research is not merely a repetition of what has already been said or written about a specific subject but rather offers an examination of a theme from a new perspective or approach.

Demo (2000) adds that the research's function is to stimulate the personal contact of the student with theories through reading, leading to their interpretation.

In the preparation of this work, a descriptive research was conducted on the proposed theme: People experiencing homelessness – an analysis of the public policies implemented by the Government of the Federal District (GDF), as it allows synthesizing completed research and drawing conclusions from an area of interest.

The research from CODEPLAN DF (Planning Company of the Federal District), IPEA DF (Institute of Applied Research), and IPE DF (Institute of Research and Statistics of the Federal District) served as instruments for data collection, focusing on descriptors such as Homeless, Homelessness, Human Rights, and Marginalization. The study population consisted of various literature related to the research theme, including research papers, books, monographs, and articles selected based on the variable of interest.

The collected data are secondary as they represent information that has already been collected by another person or institution during a different research process. The selection was made through reading articles, pages on websites, and reports found on the internet, choosing only literature that met the inclusion criteria defined in this study. After data collection, a thorough reading of all materials was performed, and the main information is presented in the article. Subsequently, a descriptive analysis of the data was carried out, seeking to establish an understanding and expand knowledge on the researched topic and develop the theoretical framework.
4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

The precarious living conditions of the homeless population contribute to increased vulnerabilities. Despite the Federal Constitution ensuring various rights for all and making it the duty of the State, there is a clear limitation in extending these rights to this population. To achieve the goal of describing and analyzing access to legally guaranteed rights by the homeless population in the Federal District, a survey was conducted by COODEPLAN (2022).

According to a survey conducted by CODEPLAN (2022), there are currently approximately 2,938 homeless people in the Federal District. The majority are men, representing 80.7% (2,375 individuals), while 563 (19.3%) are females. In terms of gender identity, 96.1% (1,603 individuals) identify with their assigned gender at birth, and 3.5% identify as transgender. Regarding sexual orientation, 92.7% identified as heterosexual, 1.9% as gay, 1.9% as bisexual, and 0.7% as lesbian (CODEPLAN, 2022).

Graph 1: Gender Representation in this Population

Graph 1 illustrates the gender representation percentage, with the majority of homeless individuals (92.7%) identifying as heterosexual.
Graph 2 shows that, according to the survey, 80.7% of these homeless individuals are males.

Graph 3 displays the percentage of age groups in relation to the total homeless population. Almost half of the respondents (47.2%) are between 31 and 49 years old, and 22% are between 18 and 30 years old. 6.4% of the population is 60 years or older, while those below 18 years represent 8.3% of the total. The average age is 39.3 years for those on the streets and 41.7 years for those in shelter services. Proportionally, children are more present than teenagers (6.1% and 2.2%, respectively) (CODEPLAN 2022).
Graph 4: Percentage by Race/Ethnicity in this Population

Graph 4 illustrates the percentage division related to the race/ethnicity of the homeless population in the Federal District. 71.1% of individuals identified as brown or black, 11.6% as indigenous, and 14.7% as white (CODEPLAN 2022).

Graph 5: Education Level

Graph 5 shows the percentage in comparison to the total homeless population in the Federal District regarding race/ethnicity. The majority (99.2%) declared being literate. The most common educational level is elementary school (63.5%), followed by high school (28.8%). About 5.1% claimed to have completed higher education. Regarding professional training, 11.9% have taken or are taking construction courses, and 9.3% studied information technology or computing. Approximately 5% each attended courses in baking, confectionery, culinary, waiter or cook (5.7%), and administration and accounting (5%).
Understanding the needs was a key point for interviews aiming to characterize institutions, comprehend the street population's service scenario, understand how this population accesses health, education, security, food services, among others. Analyzing the various presented data, it is clear that government actions to address the homeless are crucial because, in many cases, they are the only ones received. However, the ongoing actions still prove insufficient for their mitigation. Other measures need to be considered, discussed, implemented, and evaluated in the future.

The fragility of family and community ties and work precariousness intensify the vulnerability leading people to live on the streets. Although they are on the streets, there is a desire to restructure and restart their lives. It is necessary for the State, in a humane way, to recognize this hope and turn it into fuel to transform lives. The graph below shows the various reasons that led these individuals to the streets.

![Graph 6: Motivations for Homelessness](source: CODEPLAN, 2022)

Graph 6 shows the various reasons that led people to live on the streets of the Federal District, where unemployment appears as the main cause, followed by alcoholism and the death of parents. The rights that are violated are guaranteed by various legal provisions, and it is necessary for them not only to be on paper but also to be put into practice. For this to happen, a response is required not only from the
State; society is also responsible for ignoring the needs of others. Treating human beings with respect is the minimum that a population can do.

Another important point highlighted by the CODEPLAN survey (2022) is the level of satisfaction of people living on the streets. It is very clear that they have the desire to exit this situation, but a source of income or employment is necessary for this transition to be possible. The numbers are quite clear regarding the dissatisfaction with the lack of security, be it in terms of food or physical safety.

Graph 7: Satisfaction Level

![Graph 7: Satisfaction Level](image)

Source: CODEPLAN, 2022.

Graph 7 illustrates the distribution of the homeless population by the level of satisfaction with living conditions. According to the CODEPLAN survey (2022), 53.4% declared being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. 41.3% of respondents claimed to have gone at least 24 hours without eating in the last week. These data can support the expansion of social assistance benefits, such as DF Social or Calamity Aid, or services in community restaurants, for example.

In practice, some difficulties are observed in shelter services, such as routines and operating hours that often do not represent or align with the reality of those living on the streets. Users may lose their spots or be disconnected from the service because they do not adhere to the rules of these shelter locations.

Although the absence of income and employment was the main reason cited by people to leave the streets, the lack of housing is one of the most significant obstacles to a sustainable exit from this condition. Another issue is that many users do not accept shelter because the institution does not accommodate
their pets, with whom they maintain emotional bonds. Regarding these needs and the duty of the State to present other shelter possibilities.

In the Federal District, there are 3 Pop Centers distributed in two cities, 3 street clinics, and 15 institutional shelter services. This quantity is insufficient since there are 35 administrative regions, and several areas end up without assistance.

To overcome the situation of injustice, inequality, and discrimination faced by people living on the streets, there needs to be greater awareness among the entire population about who these people are, how they see the world, their aspirations, the difficulties they face daily, and how this population historically formed. They are entitled to the same essential rights as any other citizen. This article sought to improve the understanding of citizens living on the streets, better comprehend their specificities through objective data from various publications, and always strive to demystify common prejudices. The table below lists the basic information of the selected articles for analysis.

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<td>As pessoas em situação de rua em Porto Alegre e seus dramas, tramas e manhas: A cooperação e a solidariedade como forma de humanização</td>
<td>Graziolla</td>
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<td>Receita pra lavar praça suja: Políticas públicas de saúde mental para a população em situação no Centro de Referência Especializado da Assistência Social da cidade de Leme/SP</td>
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<td>Pobreza e pessoas em situação de rua: uma revisão sistemática.</td>
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4.1 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first step in creating an efficient public policy is understanding the needs of people living on the streets. The research conducted by the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA DF, 2022) identified various reasons leading individuals to homelessness, ranging from accidental factors like unemployment, depression, to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, and familial ruptures or conflicts. The study revealed that unemployment is the primary reason for homelessness, emphasizing the importance of addressing income-related insecurity in shaping effective policies. For instance, expanding unemployment benefits for the most vulnerable could, to some extent, alleviate this insecurity.

While there are many policies targeting the homeless population, there are hurdles hindering their effective implementation. The research by CODEPLAN (2022) reports that approximately 40.7% of residents consider insecurity as one of the difficulties or downsides of living on the streets, expressing fear for their lives. This insecurity surpasses concerns about food scarcity, sounding an alarm as life is the most precious asset. About 41.3% of the surveyed individuals experienced at least 24 hours without food in the last week, as per CODEPLAN (2022). This reality is lamentable, indicating a severe form of insecurity related to nutrition. People rely on local businesses for sustenance, as the assistance points...
provided are insufficient. There is a pressing need to expand these facilities, such as community restaurants distributing free food, establishing points in more remote areas of administrative regions for better coverage, as current initiatives do not reach these vulnerable populations effectively.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This work aimed to analyze public policy practices directed towards the homeless population in the Federal District, who share common characteristics such as extreme poverty, the interruption or fragility of family ties, the absence or precariousness of regular conventional housing, and the lack of formal employment. These individuals inhabit public spaces, degraded areas, and occasionally make use of shelters, hostels, and the Center for Social Assistance to spend the night.

The research revealed a considerable increase in the homeless population in recent years, with the coronavirus pandemic contributing to this growth, among various factors leading individuals to make the streets their home. While there are some public policies targeted at this segment of society, they are not as effective as they should be, often neglecting the daily needs of these residents.

The article further demonstrated that the majority of the homeless claimed unemployment as the primary cause, and many of these individuals are on the streets seeking alternatives for income generation. As a result, they become easy prey, victims of urban and police violence, products of social discrimination.

In the Federal District, people living in homelessness exhibit a profile indicating lower probabilities of reintegration into social and professional life. This necessitates greater attention to this population—human beings—through more comprehensive public policies. These policies should include the restructuring and expansion of shelter institutions, training courses, professional development and updates, citizenship and health initiatives, as well as security and social protection measures. Additionally, creating and promoting opportunities for income-generating activities is crucial.

A limitation of this research is the lack of data sources that support such public policies, hindering the ability to monitor over time and assess the evolution
or regression in social aspects for this population. This study underscores the need for public authorities to establish a continuous data repository, as these numbers are highly volatile and change rapidly. There is a pressing need for public policies to address the needs of this population, including shelters for individuals and their pets, expanded food distribution, and opportunities for training or learning a profession for those seeking a fresh start.

It is suggested that for a more in-depth exploration of this topic in future research related to the homeless population, the analyses and perceptions of individuals experiencing homelessness should also be considered. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding and serve as a basis for the creation of more effective public policies.
REFERENCES


