The Unified Registry for Social Programs makes it possible to **identify the most vulnerable people in our society, their needs and where they live.** This registry enables a range of different programs to be designed and implemented for the benefit of low-income families. The registry also ensures that government actions actually reach the target groups.

Brazil´s Unified Registry (the Unified Registry for Social Programs) collects details about low-income families which can be used by various existing social programs.

The Unified Registry contains key information on families and their homes:

» Address and types of dwelling place (e.g. number of rooms, type of materials used for walls and floors, whether the streets are paved, etc.);

» Access to public services: water, sanitation, electric power and social programs;

» Family composition (number of family members, ages, relationship between family members);

» Monthly outgoings (expenditure on water, electricity, food, transport, rent, medicines);

» Whether the family belongs to traditional, specific groups (indigenous groups, *quilombos* (Maroon Communities), homeless, gypsies, riverine dwellers, recyclable waste scavengers, etc.)

The Unified Registry also contains data on each family member, including:

» Full name;

» Date of birth;

» Documentation;

» Educational level;

» Employment and occupation;

» Income;

» Existence of disabilities (details).

Only low-income families are enrolled in the Unified Registry. The Unified Registry describes these **as families living on a monthly household income of up to one half of a minimum wage per person.** A crucial point to be taken into account: it is essential to define in the clearest terms the target public for your registry. If this target group is the entire population, a social programs registry is not appropriate (a survey of the whole population would fall into the 'general registry' category). Furthermore, a poverty threshold must be established a priori in order to decide who will be the beneficiaries of each program. The Brazilian Government defines the target publics as follows:

» **Low-income families to be included in the Unified Registry:** families living on a monthly household income of up to *one half of a minimum wage per capita or a total of three monthly minimum wages for the entire household;*

» **Poor families eligible for inclusion in the Bolsa Família Program:** people surviving on around US$ 67 per capita per month (exchange rate: R$ 2,25 = US$ 1.00);

» **Extremely poor families eligible for inclusion in the Bolsa Família Program and the**

Brazil Without Extreme Poverty Plan: those living on around US$ 34 per capita per month (exchange rate: R$ 2,25 = US$ 1.00).

The Unified Registry works as follows: the municipalities identify the low-income families and where they live, interview each family in order to complete the registration forms and upload the data in the Unified Registry system.

This registration process gives central government a clear idea of the numbers and profiles of low-income families who are eligible for benefits from the Bolsa Família Program or from other programs that use the Unified Registry for selecting beneficiaries.

In order to operate a Unified Registry for Social Programs it is essential to determine which agencies are tasked with identifying and interviewing low-income families. Here in Brazil we have found that it is important for these agencies (preferably municipal or community entities or institutions), to be easily accessible to beneficiary families, thus ensuring that families are permanently registered and that the database is regularly updated with consistently reliable information.

A single standardized form containing all the questions that need to be answered by actual or potential social program beneficiaries is required for carrying out the registration interview. The design of this form is vitally important. It is, for example, essential for the questionnaire to be first discussed and then implemented by people and insititutions that are experienced in this particular area.

» **Certain rules and concepts need to be defined prior to completing the form in order to resolve practical questions that may arise during the interview,** e.g. how does the Unified Registry define 'family' (biological family, extended family or a group of people who share a living space?). Brazil´s Unified Registry is very clear about what constitutes a 'family': people who live in the same house and share income and expenses. Each person can only be registered as belonging to one family. In short, the registry must possess clear concepts so that queries can be suitably addressed during the registration process.

In addition to the data collection questionnaires, a registration system must be developed to contain the same information as that recorded on the forms. Data from these forms are uploaded to the system, for easy access by other central or local government users, thus facilitating the selection of beneficiaries by other social programs that use the Unified Registry.

Persons or institutions specializing in information technology are needed for developing the registration system. The system also needs to be capable of "talking" with other systems that manage social programs. A key point: **Brazil´s Unified Registry does not manage social programs but is restricted to identifying the target public.** There are other systems designed to actually manage the *Bolsa Família* Program and other programs that use the Unified Registry.

Qualified practitioners are required to complete the questionnaire and enter the resulting data in the Unified Registry system. These practitioners consist of:

» An interviewer: responsible for conducting the interview and completing the form;

» A system operator: responsible for entering the data in the system.

In many places the same practitioner can be trained to carry out both tasks.

Registration Process

In Brazil, registration is an ongoing process. Families need not wait to be identified by the government as being poor. They may apply for registration at any time in a Unified Registry reference center in the municipality in which they live.

Registration is free and families provide information on the basis of an interview. Family information is entered on the Unified Registry forms by the special interviewers.

The interview must be with a family member who is able to answer questions about all the family members. In the case of the Brazilian Unified Registry, this person, referred to as the 'person responsible for the family', must be able to show a Brazilian identification document and be over 16 years old. In Brazil, we suggest that this person should be preferably female because studies have shown that women tend to be better at managing the benefits on behalf of the entire family. To avoid multiple-counting, the identity documents of all the family members must be available to the interviewer.

The data collection interview is conducted in three ways in Brazil: by home visits (the interviewer goes to the family home); permanent service points (provided by the municipality, with uninterrupted service); and itinerant service points, including registration 'task forces' (for going to more distant or difficult-to-access places requiring more specific actions). Registration strategies are decided by municipalities to reflect local circumstances. A combination of these three approaches is often the best way to proceed.

Warning! There is no point in trying to register a lot of families at the same time or **avoiding establishing routines for keeping the records up to date.** The Brazilian Unified Registry operates according to the following rule: updating of the data must be done at intervals of no less than two years in order to ensure that the registered data are always accurate. In the event of a major change in family circumstances such as the birth or death of a family member, a change of address or employment, the data must be revised before the two-year deadline expires.

Registering in Brazil´s Unified Registry is no guarantee of automatic inclusion in any of the social programs that use the data generated by the system. Families are only eligible for benefits if they meet the criteria established by each program. In Brazil, the interviewers are obliged to inform families of this during the interview.

Data reliability and focusing

Given the large size of Brazil and the substantial number of low-income families (around 20 million), the bulk of the information is supplied by families on a 'self-declared' basis. However, a minimum of 20% of interviews must be conducted through home visits by interviewers so that part of the information volunteered can be checked *in loco*.

Brazil´s Unified Registry uses **self-declaration as a baseline procedure for data collection and for selecting the beneficiary families.** This means that families are not required to provide proof of the information that they give to the interviewer. For example, given that a significant part of the country´s poor population consists of informal workers who find it very difficult to provide proof of income, self-declaration plays a major role in the operation of the Unified Registry.
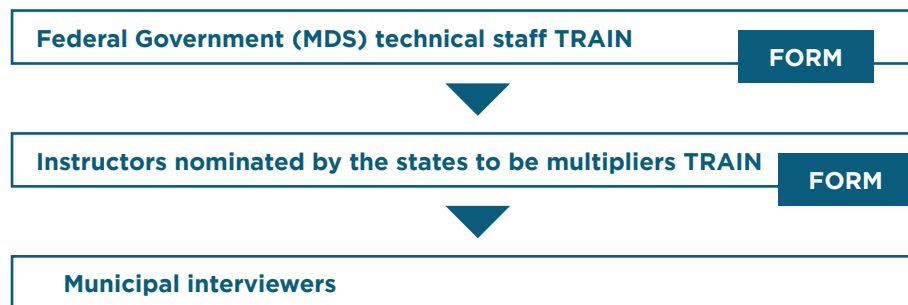
Brazil employs the following strategies to prevent self-declaration undermining the quality of the Unified Registry data and affecting the main purpose of the social programs:

» All Brazil´s municipalities possess local social control mechanisms for supervising and monitoring the *Bolsa Família* Program. Since this program uses the Unified Registry data these mechanisms also assist control of the Unified Registry itself;

» The Federal Government establishes for each munipality the estimated number of low- income families (to be registered) and poor families (eligible for the *Bolsa Família* Program), based on official demographic census data. These numbers are based on raw statistics but nevertheless serve as an appropriate guideline for the locally conducted registration process. Furthermore, the numbers of families are published on the site of the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger (responsible for the core management of the Unified Registry and the *Bolsa Família* Program) and are thus fully available for public inspection. The numbers are invaluable for controlling and verifying both programs;

» Any complaints made directly in the municipalities or to the Federal Government´s ombudsman are investigated;

» Unified Registry data are cross-checked with other administrative registries to detect income under-declarations or other irregularities. These registries include databases of deceased persons, the register of people receiving retirement pensions and the system for recording those working in the formal jobs market. It is important to point out that there is no problem in the data of formal workers or retirement pension beneficiairies being enrolled in the Unified Registry, provided that these people have declared income from these sources to the Registry and continue to fit the profile of low-income families. The rule that stipulates updates every two years contributes to the Registry being increasingly consistent with the real circumstances under which families live.

Training

In order to ensure the quality of the collected data it is also important that interviewers are fully familiar with the concepts and procedures of the Unified Registry. In this regard, the Brazilian Government runs a national training program that benefits from a full range of teaching aids (training manuals, video-lessons, workbooks, Powerpoint presentations) designed to teach interviewers how to fill out the registration forms, to undertake local management of the Unified Registry and to operate the system correctly.

The first two trainings are based on the multiplier model: technical staff from the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger (MDS) serve as instructors to 'students' nominated by the states, who are in turn responsible for training in the municipalities, as shown in this diagram:

Federal Government (MDS) technical staff TRAIN	FORM

▼

Instructors nominated by the states to be multipliers TRAIN	FORM

▼

Municipal interviewers

Training on the Unified Registry system is administered by the institution hired by the Federal Government to be responsible for the development and maintenance of the Unified Registry system through training courses provided in all the state capitals for municipal operators, in accordance with annually-mapped demand.

User programs

Over twenty Brazilian Federal Government programs currently use the Unified Registry to select beneficiaries. Examples are:

- » The *Bolsa Família* Program;
- » Housing programs;
- » Electric power and telephone social tariffs programs;
- » Rainwater Cisterns Program;
- » Other actions of the Brazil without Extreme Poverty Plan.