

At the time when income transfer programs were beginning to be implemented as a strategy to combat poverty in Brazil, the Unified Registry for Social Programs Form was introduced by Presidential Decree in 2001.

In 2001 and 2002 the Federal Government undertook a series of actions to benefit low-income families. These cash transfer programs, such as the *Bolsa Escola* (a decentralized conditional cash transfer program for child education), *Auxílio-Gás* (a cooking fuel supplement scheme), *Bolsa Alimentação* (Food Grant Program) and the Program for the Eradication of Child Labor, employed different registration methods for identifying and selecting potential beneficiaries among the target public. This approach made it difficult to coordinate the various fragmented actions and undermined the effectiveness of the programs. This lack of coordination between the programs led to some families accumulating benefits, while there was no guarantee of universal access to those families who were in genuine need of them. A single family, for example, might benefit from two or three programs simultaneously, while others living in similar circumstances and places received no support at all.

The goal of the Unified Registry, created in 2001, was to boost the integration of these programs so that efforts could be concentrated on target groups sharing similar characteristics and needs. It was not however possible to introduce a coordinated system immediately because management guidelines needed to be formulated, including definitions of the target public and rules and procedures to be used for the collection, updating and maintenance of data. **The consolidation of the Unified Registry as social inclusion tool began to take concrete shape with the creation of the Bolsa Família Program in 2003 which drew together the conditional cash transfer programs that were in force at the time. The legislation covering the Bolsa Família Program referred to the Unified Registry as a tool for identifying and selecting Bolsa Família beneficiaries. As a result, the Unified Registry was strengthened, the number of registered families expanded and the quality of the data improved.** From 2001 to 2003 the management of the Unified Registry was the responsibility of the Secretariat for Social Assistance of the Ministry of Social Welfare. With the creation of the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger (MDS) in 2004, the management of the Unified Registry and that of the Bolsa Família Program became the responsibility of the National Secretariat for Citizenship Income (SENARC), one of the five secretariats of the MDS.

Over the years the Unified Registry legislation continued to be refined as the result of a government directive and a series of decrees. In 2007, for example, the Unified Registry decree¹ provided a clearer definition of its goals, processes, instruments and operational aspects and of the respective competencies of the federative entities involved. Later, in 2011, the Unified Registry government directive² established the procedures for managing the Unified Registry.

Technical improvements were made to the Unified Registry between 2003 (when the Unified Registry system still lacked the technical means to update the register) and 2010 (the year in which Version 7 of the Unified Registry was introduced). From 2003 to 2010, the versions of the application were offline and therefore depended on local applications (installed and updated on the computers where registrations had been entered) and on unreliable links to transfer data to the national database. This was not an ideal solution and discrepancies tended to arise between the local and national databases.

1 Decree No. 6.135, of 26 June 2007

2 MDS Directive No. 177, of 16 June 2011

In 2011, the new version (Version 7) of the Unified Registry system was introduced countrywide, with a number of improvements and new registration forms. This system is an internet online application that eliminates synchronization problems between local and national level databases, although it does require good quality internet connection to work satisfactorily.

The new registration forms, compatible with Version 7, possess several advantages: conceptual improvement, better merging of the household survey data collection tools used by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) and, above all, enhanced profiling of low income families. In this way the current Unified Registry form can be used for registering homeless families, children subjected to child labor, indigenous families, *quilombos* (Maroon Communities) and members of different specific groups and populations (gypsies, extractivists, riverine families, recyclable waste scavengers, etc.) and even people with no birth certificates.

The implementation of the new form meant that specific instructional material had to be developed so that Unified Registry interviewers could understand the new concepts and changes that had been introduced, with a view to them ensuring that good quality information was duly collected from the families interviewed. To help with this, a national training process was instituted which, between 2009 and 2013, certified around 30,000 Unified Registry interviewers in all the Brazilian municipalities.

The above improvements contributed to the Unified Registry becoming known not only as the registry of the *Bolsa Família* Program but also as a consolidated national source of information for selecting the beneficiaries of a diverse group of social programs. At present, over twenty federal social programs make use of the Unified Registry. It is also used by many states and municipalities for developing social policies and programs at the local level. **Today, the Unified Registry contains the details of 23 million families, of which 13.8 million are beneficiaries of the Bolsa Família Program.**