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BRAZIL'S AUSTERITY CAP STUNTING RIGHTS TO FOOD, HEALTH AND EDUCATION
New study foresees women and the poor suffering most under 20-year spending freeze

Brasilia/New York (Dec. 14)—One year into Brazil's 20-year constitutional cap on public spending, the Center for Social and Economic Rights ([CESR](#)), the Instituto de Estudos Socioeconômicos ([INESC](#)) and [Oxfam Brazil](#) have presented [new empirical findings](#) to the [Brazilian Congress](#) that illustrate austerity's already severe impact on basic social and economic rights in the areas of food security, health and education, while exacerbating gender, racial and class inequalities.

The "Human Rights in Times of Austerity" [factsheet](#) reveals that federal funding for food security programs was reduced by 55% in 2017 and warns of an increase in hunger and malnutrition. The budget for Brazil's "Popular Pharmacy" program, which provides essential medicines to the needy through a network of public pharmacies, dropped 15%, leading to the closure of 314 dispensaries mostly located in the poorest regions. The share of education spending within the federal level has also taken a 19% drop.

Constitutional Amendment 95/2016 (EC 95), or the "Expenditure Ceiling," has also contributed to a 66% federal funding reduction in the budget initially allocated in 2017 to women's rights programs that promote gender equality and services for victims of gender-based violence, according to the study. Under the so-called "New Fiscal Regime," women's rights investments are highly likely to fall precipitously. Afro-Brazilian women, the most disadvantaged group in the nation, run the risk of suffering disproportionately as a result of the draconian adjustment measures, the NGOs show.

"The EC 95 claims to reduce the deficit and restore financial confidence, yet credible projections strongly suggest that the amendment will actually stall economic growth, compounding its social costs," according to Lara Pietricovsky, INESC co-director.

The factsheet finds that the austerity measures are unnecessary, regressive and discriminatory, and therefore in serious breach of the government's human rights obligations, including those enshrined in the country's Constitution.

"The constitutionalization of austerity is not a plan for fiscal stabilization, but an assault on the human rights of most Brazilians, particularly women, Afro-Brazilians and others at greatest risk of poverty," said Ignacio Saiz, Executive Director of CESR.

The study further illustrates how the spending cap jeopardizes decades of progress in reducing poverty and inequality in the country, and recommends the implementation of various viable tax and fiscal alternatives.

“Combatting tax evasion, for example, could raise R\$ 575.1 billion, almost four times the 2016 federal deficit. A progressive tax reform focused on tax top income earners would generate another R\$ 72 billion, while reducing Brazil’s obscene levels of economic inequality,” said Katia Maia, OXFAM Brazil’s Executive Director.

On the eve of the vote to constitutionalize austerity one year ago, the three organizations together with the Brazilian human rights organization Conectas prepared a [joint analysis](#) of the constitutional reform, warning the country’s public officials of the dangers the amendment posed to already disadvantaged Brazilians and pointing out the international human rights obligations that would be violated upon implementation. Following an appeal by the group of NGOs, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights Philip Alston also [intervened](#), saying “It is completely inappropriate to freeze only social expenditure and to tie the hands of all future governments for another two decades. “

EC 95 is part of a growing trend of regressive and discriminatory fiscal austerity policies throughout Latin America that [CESR, INESC, Oxfam and other partners](#) in the region have brought to the attention of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission. These organizations have consistently pointed out how such policies, often enacted with little deliberation or consultation, inhibit states’ capacities to generate resources to guarantee human rights.

Brazilian authorities should take immediate steps to repeal Constitutional Amendment 95 and to subject any fiscal consolidation measures to an independent and rigorous assessment of their human rights impacts, affirmed the organizations today at a special hearing in Congress on the human rights impacts of EC95.

The [public hearing](#), organized by the Human Rights Commission of the Chamber of Deputies together with human rights and development NGOs, also featured a complementary report on the human rights consequences of austerity in Brazil by the [Plataforma DHESCA](#)—a network of 40 civil society organizations, including CESR, INESC and Oxfam, who are all engaged in an ongoing effort to challenge EC 95.