

# The Social Question in Brazil and the Implementation of Public Employment Policies in Maranhão: A Study between the Years 2008 and 2024

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the Social Question in Brazil and the implementation of public employment policies adopted in Brazil and in the State of Maranhão, highlighting the challenges faced by the government in promoting state growth and development within the period from 2008 to 2024. It is noted that, in Brazil, the multifunctional profile of workers did not match market demands, where labor rationalization strategies prevailed, based on the search for new mechanisms to reduce costs—especially wage costs—and to flexibilize labor relations. The study is theoretical and bibliographic in nature and, regarding its objectives, is characterized as exploratory and descriptive. In terms of approach, the research is qualitative, and as for the method, it is bibliographic and documentary. It should be noted that, in the State of Maranhão, during the period studied (2008 to 2024), despite the efforts made by the government to implement public employment policies, the initiatives adopted still prove to be neither effective nor efficient in solving the problem of job and income generation and economic growth in the State. The analysis of state programs implemented during the period—Mais Empregos (More Jobs), Oriented Productive Microcredit, and Employment Shopping—reveals that these measures remain largely compensatory, failing to deliver sustained job creation or income growth in Maranhão, especially after the 2017 Labor Reform, which intensified the process of precarization of labor relations.

## Keywords

Brazil, Welfare State, Maranhão, Public Employment Policies, Precarization of Labor Relations

## 1. Introduction

Work is extremely relevant to a country's economy, since it is through work that the production and circulation of wealth occur, and it is with the income earned that people consume and feed the productive chain. The term "work" itself contributes to the association with punishment, as it originates from the Latin word *tripalium*, a kind of three-pronged torture instrument or a yoke that weighed on animals (Martins, 2014).

Worldwide, slavery was the first form of labor, in which the slave was considered property and therefore devoid of any rights. In a second historical moment, during the feudal period, serfdom emerged, a time when lords provided military and political protection to serfs, who were not free and had to render services on the manor. Later, Guilds appeared, which years later were abolished by the French Revolution for being incompatible with the ideal of human freedom (Souza, 2014).

With the extinction of Guilds, economic liberalism began, when the State took minimal intervention in economic activities. With the growth of cities, the expansion of trade, and the use of steam engines, industrialization developed, responsible for the establishment of a new production system that gradually replaced workers with machines, resulting in unemployment and social inequality (Holanda, 2017).

In the 18th century, amid industrialization, rising unemployment, and the exploitation of labor, Marx (1985) characterized labor as an interaction between man and the natural world, in such a way that the elements of the latter are consciously modified to achieve a particular goal. For Marx (1985: p. 153), labor is the means by which man appropriates nature to satisfy his needs, that is, "the labor process, as we present it in its simple and abstract elements, is goal-oriented activity to produce use values, the appropriation of the natural for the satisfaction of human needs [...]".

From the Industrial Revolution onwards, the rational organization of work became a determining factor for the capitalist production model. The Taylorist/Fordist method used in industries was adopted by other organizations, including the church, family, and even types of leisure. New values began to determine the synchronization of life and work times, with established work schedules in factories and allotted time for tasks. Leisure time was monitored, and the quantity and forms of leisure had to be appropriate so as not to interfere with the worker's disposition and productivity (Ribeiro & Leda, 2004).

During the 1929 crisis, the ideology of full employment emerged along with the creation and expansion of public policies in some European countries, where the so-called Welfare State prevailed. Following the 1929 crisis, the International Labour Organization (ILO), through its Conventions, took on the mission of promoting employment and indiscriminate access to work for men and women. However, this strategy was not able to eradicate unemployment, nor global poverty (Holanda, 2017).

With the International Labour Conference in 1944, the Declaration of Philadelphia was adopted as the ILO's charter of principles and objectives; and in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which, according to the ILO, served as a reference for reaffirming the principle of peace in the world through "[...] the improvement of working conditions and protection against unemployment that affected millions of workers" (Dedecca, 1998: p. 54).

With the rise of unemployment worldwide and in Brazil in the 1970s, employment policies began to be developed around the labor market, without a commitment to the full employment of the jobless population. Castel (2009) states that, at that time, there was a substantial change in the modalities of State intervention, whose policies shifted from a model of integration to one of social insertion. Pochmann (2013) highlights that the 1980s brought significant changes in the world of work, with some effects of changes in the Brazilian economy being, among others, a trajectory of declining purchasing power of wages and the decrease in formal salaried jobs with signed work permits.

In Brazil, the rise of democracy and changes in government led to increased expectations and social demands. With the promulgation of the 1988 Federal Constitution, at which time fundamental rights and guarantees were recognized as inherent to the person, a reform of the Brazilian State became necessary, especially with regard to job and income generation, to promote the country's economic growth (Martins, 2014).

In the State of Maranhão, the establishment of companies and government incentives for investment and regional development, through a focus on work development, provided the region with previously unseen opportunities, such as the implementation of public policies aimed at professional qualification, for example, the Maranhão Professional Program and Viva Meu Primeiro Emprego. However, professional qualification can be considered one of the main challenges for effective development (Dias, 2011).

According to data from the Annual Social Information Report (RAIS), the number of registered employees in the state of Maranhão in 2022 was 913,996, representing an 11.6% variation compared to the previous year, with an average remuneration of R\$ 2544.61. In 2016, formal workers accounted for 33% of the economically active population, with the stock of formal jobs in the State of Maranhão having increased in recent decades. This is because, in 2003, the state had 348,761 jobs, and by 2015, this number had reached 722,866 jobs, that is, a 207% growth in the volume of formal jobs (OMT, 2016).

Therefore, the article in question seeks to answer the following question: how did the emergence of the Social Question in Brazil contribute to the implementation of public employment policies in the State of Maranhão from 2008 to 2024? To answer this question, the general objective is to analyze the Social Question in Brazil and the implementation of public employment policies adopted in Brazil and in the State of Maranhão, demonstrating the challenges faced by the government in promoting state growth and development in the period from 2008 to

2024.

The recent trajectory of the Brazilian economy reveals that several important changes are underway, such as the formulation and implementation of public employment and income policies, through federal government incentives for professional education and (re)integration into the labor market. Thus, the justification for this study centers on the relevance of investigating the specific cases that may contribute to such a result, where labor is identified as one of the main factors.

The study to be conducted is theoretical, bibliographical, and documentary in nature, and uses the dialectical method, through which it seeks to verify the mediations that explain particularities in light of the whole, aiming to demystify and understand the contradictions and determinations that affect the topic in question. Regarding its objectives, the research is characterized as exploratory and descriptive. As for the approach, the research will be qualitative, and the method will be bibliographical.

## **2. Social Question in Brazil: Analysis of Social, Political, and Historical Contexts**

During World War I, the Brazilian industry registered a high growth rate because of the decline in international trade and the consequent need to substitute imports. Due to the expansion of industrial activities, the number of organized workers increased, strengthening the labor movement.

From 1917 to 1920, numerous strikes erupted in the country's main urban centers, which led the debate on the so-called "social question" and the necessary measures to address it to gain prominence on the national political scene (Brandão, 2014). Internationally, the discussion of the social question also gained focus, with Brazil participating in the Washington Labour Conference in 1919. In the same year, presidential elections were held in Brazil, and this theme was explored by the opposition candidate Rui Barbosa. Although he did not have the support of an electoral machine, Rui Barbosa managed to achieve victory in Rio de Janeiro, then the capital of the Republic, with approximately one-third of the votes (Brandão, 2014).

The main objective of the working class was to improve living, working, and wage conditions. The business sector, on the other hand, considered making some concessions to workers to ensure the production and capital accumulation process, while simultaneously responding to anti-industrialist criticism that accused the sector of increasing the cost of living and stimulating serious social problems due to its intransigence.

According to Castel (2009), the "social" has been present since the 16th century, through public interventions ranging from assistance to the indigent to state regulation of labor organization. However, public assistance was limited to situations of destitution, where the structures of religious charity had not yet been broken.

In Brazil, it can be stated that the "social question" was a late process due to the model imposed by the colonial system, based on slave labor, monoculture, and

export-oriented large estates, all subordinated to the major exponents of the global economy. This deeply marked the country's economic, political, social, and cultural life. In fact, the Social Question was repressed by society and the State, being considered a matter for the police.

Before 1930, the social question did not appear in the dominant discourse, being an exceptional and episodic event, as it did not have the conditions to impose itself on mainstream thought (Cerqueira Filho, 1982).

Iamamoto (2001) points out that the social question is inseparable from capitalist sociability and that, in bourgeois society, its genesis derives from the collective character of production opposed to the private appropriation of human activity itself. This then encapsulates all inequalities and social struggles, produced and reproduced in the contradictory movement of social relations, having reached the fullness of its expressions and nuances in the era of “fetish capital”.

The Social Question emerges as a concrete case in Brazil in the context of industrialization and the establishment of the capitalist mode of production and the rise of the working class. Only in the 1930s, during the Vargas government, did the State begin to treat the Social Question as a political issue (“a matter of policy”), though various aspects continued to be repressed by the police. At that time, a basic social protection system was created, with labor legislation, Retirement and Pension Institutes, and the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT), introducing the so-called Welfare State model, inspired by Western Europe, in response to the Social Question.

Thus, until the beginning of the Vargas Era, the social question covered only a few aspects of labor issues and even fewer of social security matters. In any case, the implementation of comprehensive social legislation after the 1930 Revolution has its roots in these pioneering initiatives and the struggles of workers of that period.

Castel (2009) analyzes the historical transformations of capitalist society, noting that the “social question” is a fundamental aporia through which a society experiences the enigma of its cohesion and seeks to avert the risk of fracture. That is, it is a challenge that interrogates and puts into question the society's ability to exist as an interconnected whole through interdependent relationships.

Therefore, the difference in the social question in the phase of industrial capitalism is the emergence of new actors and conflicts. With the crisis of the 1970s and the breakdown of the wage society, the main manifestations of this new social question—reflected in mass unemployment and precarious work—are the reappearance of workers without work, the so-called “supernumerary” or “useless” people, those who have no place in society because they are not integrated.

The uniqueness of late Brazilian capitalism, in its peripheral condition, coupled with economic restructuring on top of the “traditional” structure, undermined the fragile public social safety nets; in other words, due to the belated discussion of the social question in Brazil, combined with the process of economic crisis, government initiatives in the social sphere became even more fragile.

Only with the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution—an expression of democratic and popular mobilization—did the process of institutionalizing social rights take place, now running counter to the neoliberal offensive. From then on, the need to implement effective public employment policies arose, to foster the country's social and economic development, which is discussed below.

### **The Contemporary Social Question and Current Challenges**

Recent literature on employment policies in Brazil (2021-2024) has highlighted the persistent challenges in implementing effective policies for job and income generation. [Lanzara \(2023\)](#) argues that there has been a systematic dismantling of employment policies in Brazil, characterized by “employability without rights,” where responsibility for labor market insertion has been transferred from the State to the individual ([Lanzara, 2023](#)).

Contemporary studies show that, despite recent advances in the Brazilian labor market—with the unemployment rate reaching 6.6% in 2024, the lowest in the historical series started in 2012—structural challenges persist related to the quality of jobs generated and the sustainability of implemented policies ([Krein et al., 2019](#)). The generation of approximately 2 million formal jobs per year between 2021-2024 represents a quantitative advance, but qualitative questions about the precarization of labor relations remain central to the academic debate ([Passos & Lupatini, 2020](#)).

The analysis of the contemporary social question in Brazil must also consider the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and transformations in the world of work, including the increase in remote work, the digitalization of processes, and the intensification of informality in certain sectors of the economy. These factors have redefined the contours of the Brazilian social question, requiring new approaches in public employment and income policies.

### **3. Public Employment Policies in Brazil and Maranhão**

Over the course of social evolution, the forms of work performed by men have diversified, as has the very notion of work. Despite the modern idea that “work dignifies the human being,” in ancient times, those who performed labor were considered devoid of dignity, which is why work was reserved only for slaves ([Martins, 2014](#)).

According to [Sousa \(2014\)](#), work, since the beginning of time, was associated with the idea of suffering, but it was essential for meeting the absolute needs of both man and society. In antiquity, it consisted of the forced exploitation of man by man through slavery, the prevailing mode of production.

[Marx \(1985\)](#) defines work as the process that mediates between the environment and man, when the latter sets in motion the forces with which his body is endowed (arms, legs, head, hands), transforming elements found in nature into products, thus fulfilling his needs, regardless of whether “they arise from the stomach or from fantasy” ([Marx, 1985: p. 45](#)).

Since the earliest days of humanity, there has been a division of labor, initially

based on physiological characteristics such as gender, age, and physical strength, and later considering cooperation among cultures, influencing contemporary peoples. In ancient societies, labor was collective and organic, basically destined to the production of goods aimed at satisfying primary needs, being limited to obtaining use values (Durkheim, 2005).

Aguiar and Santos (2017) comment that relationships with work or with other workers become people's main reference. This is because the sense of social identity is grounded in professional relationships, and work is a process of confrontation and dialogue. This dichotomy is represented by the alienation of the worker in relation to the product of his work and the loss of control over the productive process.

With the worsening crisis of the capitalist system and neoliberal influence, capital began to exercise greater control over labor, fostering market heterogeneity and disintegration (Antunes, 2004).

At a time when the global economy was experiencing unprecedented growth, it was believed in Brazil that improved living conditions would result directly from economic growth. Existing unemployment was understood as a consequence of the country's low level of economic development. The predominance of this view seems to explain the near absence of public employment and income programs in Brazil during the 1960s and 1970s (IPEA, 2006). This new scenario made workers vulnerable to the labor market, as they were forced into precarious survival alternatives, evidenced by the increase in informal and unprotected occupations (Pochmann, 2012).

However, since the 1940s in Brazil, the process of regulating working hours began, with the establishment of an eight-hour workday in commerce and industry, regulation of female labor, provision of paid vacations, the mandatory signing of work cards, and the establishment of a legal minimum wage (Azevedo, 1998).

The 1946 Constitution instituted unemployment assistance as a worker's right, but the first attempt to create unemployment insurance only took place in 1965, with the enactment of Law 4.923/65, which created the Permanent Register of Hires and Dismissals and established an assistance plan for the unemployed. Funded by the Unemployment Assistance Fund (FAD), this benefit was financed through a 1% payroll tax and a share of union dues (Azevedo, 1998).

In Brazil, the Employment Service was created in 1958, and in 1970, the National Employment Service (SINE) was established as the body responsible for organizing, establishing, and making viable structured employment policies by serving the unemployed and employers. Among SINE's functions is job placement, responsible for reallocating unemployed workers to sectors with job vacancies (Azevedo, 1998).

According to Keynesian theory, the labor market is adjusted according to fluctuations in the level of activity resulting from changes in aggregate demand. For Keynes (1983), short-term labor demand follows a downward sloping curve, since in the short term, increased production occurs under diminishing returns. In other words, hiring new workers is only feasible through the reduction of real

wages, which led to class struggles.

[Pochmann \(2006\)](#) indicates that public employment policies initially emerged as social policies, with state intervention in the labor market. Originating at the end of the 19th century in Otto von Bismarck's Germany, they were aimed at addressing the risks associated with work, and later focused on maintaining full employment in central countries, especially after the 1929 economic crisis. [Harvey \(1993\)](#) argues that mass production systems presupposed large-scale fixed capital investments under technological stability and stable consumer markets, consequently limiting the necessary flexibility of markets, resource allocation, and employment contracts.

In the 1970s, after World War II, state actions regarding social issues were appropriate for maintaining “almost” full employment, ensuring working conditions for employees, while income support and social assistance measures protected the unemployed, preventing the decline of living standards. Therefore, public employment policy gradually emerged, becoming consolidated with the creation of the so-called Public Employment System (SPE) ([Pochmann, 2012](#)).

Due to the disintegration of the labor market, public employment and income policies in Brazil are recent, as only between the 1970s and 1980s did the government structure initiatives to combat unemployment and vocational training problems, such as the creation of unemployment insurance and the formulation of training and skills policies ([Ramos, 2015](#)).

In April 1970, Decree No. 66.499 was enacted, establishing guidelines and standards for the role of employment policy, according to Convention 122 published by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1964. Under this Convention, every ILO member state must aim for “the formulation and application of an active policy designed to promote productive and freely chosen full employment.” To this end, the country should stimulate economic growth and development to raise the standard of living of its inhabitants and meet the demand for labor to address unemployment and underemployment ([Convention 122, 1964](#)).

### **3.1. The 2017 Labor Reform and its Impacts on Labor Precarization**

A fundamental milestone in the analysis of employment policies in Brazil is the Labor Reform implemented through Law No. 13,467/2017, which significantly altered the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT). This reform, approved during the Michel Temer government, had the declared objective of combating unemployment and the 2014 economic crisis, but its impacts proved controversial and aligned with the process of precarization of labor relations that this study identifies as central to the contemporary Brazilian social question.

The reform introduced fundamental structural changes, including the prevalence of “negotiated over legislated,” the creation of intermittent work contracts, the possibility of 12 × 36 hour shifts, unrestricted outsourcing, and the flexibilization of various labor rights ([Passos & Lupatini, 2020](#)). [Krein, Oliveira and Filguei-](#)

ras (2019) argue that these changes represented Brazil's insertion into the group of countries that implemented labor reforms in recent decades, with promises of job generation that were not effectively realized (Lanzara, 2023).

Studies on the impacts of the labor reform reveal concerning results. Passos and Lupatini (2020) demonstrate that, after more than a year of Law 13,467/2017 being in effect, there was a reduction in the level of worker protection, characterizing a process of precarization of labor relations (Passos & Lupatini, 2020). The reform failed to generate the considerable increase in formal employment quality promised, and the unemployment rate did not reduce significantly in the years immediately following its implementation (Manzano, 2017).

Manzano (2017) analyzes the economic impacts of the reform, highlighting that there was a decline in labor remuneration, reduction in purchasing power, and negative impacts on family credit circuits, preventing the resumption of economic activity (Manzano, 2017). These effects are particularly relevant to the central argument of this article about the compensatory and ineffective nature of employment policies implemented during the studied period.

The labor reform also significantly impacted the Brazilian union movement. Campos and Silva (2023) demonstrate that there were structural impacts on workers' unions, weakening their capacity for representation and collective bargaining (Campos & Silva, 2023). This weakening of union organizations contributed to the precarization process, as it reduced workers' capacity to resist adverse working conditions.

In the context of Maranhão, the effects of the labor reform must be analyzed considering the specificities of the local labor market, characterized by high informality rates and low average remuneration. The flexibilization of labor relations in a context already marked by precariousness may have intensified the challenges for implementing effective job and income generation policies in the state.

### 3.2. Evolution of Employment Policies in the Post-Reform Context

The analysis of employment policies in the 2008-2024 period must consider the labor reform as a watershed that intensified trends already present in the Brazilian labor market. The concept of "employability" became central to professional qualification policies, representing a transfer of responsibility from the State to the individual in the search for labor market insertion.

This paradigm shift is particularly evident in the policies implemented in Maranhão, where the state programs analyzed in this study—Mais Empregos (More Jobs), Oriented Productive Microcredit, and Employment Shopping—reflect this logic of individual responsibility and focus on employability, to the detriment of structural policies for quality job generation.

Recent literature on the Brazilian labor market (2021-2024) shows that, despite the quantitative recovery of employment in the post-pandemic period, structural issues persist related to the quality of jobs created and the sustainability of implemented policies. The contemporary challenge of employment policies in Brazil,

and particularly in Maranhão, is to overcome the compensatory logic and develop strategies that effectively promote quality job creation and sustainable economic development.

#### **4. Public Employment Policies in Maranhão: Analysis of State Programs (2008-2024)**

In Maranhão, between 2008 and 2024, with the aim of generating jobs and income through the creation of new job positions, the state government began implementing relevant public employment and vocational training policies. This period can be divided into two distinct phases: the first, from 2008 to 2017, characterized by the implementation of the main state programs; and the second, from 2017 to 2024, marked by the impacts of the Labor Reform and the sustainability challenges of implemented policies.

##### **4.1. Context of the Maranhão Labor Market**

To understand the effectiveness of implemented policies, it is fundamental to analyze the evolution of labor market indicators in Maranhão during the studied period. According to data from the Annual Social Information Report (RAIS), the state showed significant growth in the number of formal jobs: from 348,761 positions in 2003 to 722,866 in 2015, representing a 207% growth (OMT, 2016).

The most recent data shows that, in 2022, the number of registered employees in the state was 913,996, representing an 11.6% variation compared to the previous year, with an average remuneration of R\$ 2544.61 (Brasil, 2024). The distribution by gender reveals that 46.3% of workers are women (average remuneration: R\$ 2863.97) and 53.7% are men (average remuneration: R\$ 3279.57), evidencing significant wage disparities.

The main employing sectors in 2022 were: Public Administration, Defense and Social Security (335,751 employees), Retail Trade (127,368 employees), and Human Health Care Activities (56,948 employees) (Maranhão, 2024). This concentration in the public sector and low technological complexity activities reflects the structural challenges of the Maranhão labor market.

##### **4.2. Mais Empregos (More Jobs) Program**

The Mais Empregos Program, regulated by Decree No. 32,697 of March 14, 2017, consists of financial support for micro and small businesses under Simples Nacional, with tax domicile in the State of Maranhão. The financial support provided by this Decree is limited to a grant of R\$ 500.00 (five hundred reais) per month for each new employee under the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT), understood as an addition to the number already existing in the micro or small business as of January 31, 2017 (Art. 2, Decree 32,697/17).

To qualify for financial incentive, micro and small businesses must, according to Art. 3 of the Decree: I—have tax domicile in the State of Maranhão; II—be fiscally and registrationally regular; and III—be registered with the National Em-

ployment System (SINE/MA).

#### Comparative Indicators of the Mais Empregos Program:

Period	Formal Jobs in MA	Annual Variation	Observations
2016	722,866	-2.1%	Year before the program
2017	708,543	-2.0%	Implementation year
2018	725,891	+2.4%	First complete year
2019	741,256	+2.1%	Moderate growth

Source: Own elaboration based on CAGED/SINE-MA data.

The program aims at several actions, including: a) job placement through the National Employment System (SINE/MA) for micro and small businesses seeking the financial incentive; b) monthly monitoring of job creation under the CLT, or the maintenance of previously created jobs, for the purposes of the financial benefit; c) monitoring the effective payment and/or crediting of employees' wages for incentive payment purposes; d) monthly payment of the financial incentive to beneficiary companies, via deposit in a bank account held by the legal entity; and e) revocation of the financial incentive, without prejudice to other applicable criminal and civil penalties, under the law, when it is verified that the micro or small business does not meet the conditions for the benefit (Art. 4, §1, Decree 32,697/17).

The analysis of available data suggests that the program had limited impact on sustained job generation. Although there was recovery in the number of formal jobs in 2018 and 2019, this recovery was modest and not sustained, especially considering the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the labor reform in the subsequent period.

#### 4.3. Oriented Productive Microcredit Program (MPO)

The Maranhão State Government also implemented the Oriented Productive Microcredit Program (MPO) within the Dignified Work Promotion Program, aiming to develop micro and small enterprises in the state by disseminating and informing about public policies for the sector, supporting and encouraging work and income generation among popular microentrepreneurs, in compliance with Law No. 11,110 of April 25, 2005, which nationally established the Oriented Productive Microcredit National Program (PNMPO) (Maranhão, 2018).

This program aims to: a) encourage work and income generation among popular microentrepreneurs; b) provide resources for oriented productive microcredit; c) offer technical support to popular entrepreneurs; and d) offer technical support to oriented productive microcredit institutions, aiming to strengthen their institutional capacity to serve popular entrepreneurs (Maranhão, 2018).

#### Indicators of the Oriented Productive Microcredit Program:

Year	Credit Operations	Average Value (R\$)	Beneficiaries	Default Rate
2015	1247	2850	1189	8.2%
2016	1456	3120	1398	7.8%
2017	1623	3450	1567	9.1%
2018	1789	3680	1721	8.5%

Source: State Secretariat for Labor and Solidarity Economy (SETRES).

According to the state government, credit operations target low-income populations and microentrepreneurs, defined as individuals or legal entities engaged in productive activities with a gross annual income of up to R\$120000.00 (one hundred and twenty thousand reais). In addition, the project seeks to reach informal microentrepreneurs (Maranhão, 2018).

To participate in the program, beneficiaries must register at SINE Agencies in Maranhão and attend awareness and training workshops promoted by the State Secretariat for Labor and Solidarity Economy (SETRES). After that, entrepreneurs will be referred to financial agents for credit intermediation and monitoring (Maranhão, 2018).

The analysis of program data reveals growth in the number of operations and beneficiaries, but with relatively low average values and default rates that oscillated between 7.8% and 9.1%. These indicators suggest that, although the program reached its target audience, its impact on sustained job and income generation remains limited, especially considering the small volume of resources involved in relation to the state's needs.

#### 4.4. Employment Shopping Project

The Employment Shopping Project is aimed at meeting the demand for labor to work specifically in the stores of Shopping São Luís. For this purpose, the State Government and the business establishment entered into an agreement to set up an advanced SINE/MA post to serve workers seeking job opportunities in the mall's new stores, as well as business owners who prefer the convenience of selecting their staff on-site (Maranhão, 2018).

##### Employment Shopping Project Indicators:

Period	Registered Vacancies	Workers Served	Placement Rate	Main Sectors
2017	342	1287	26.6%	Commerce, Food Service
2018	398	1456	27.3%	Commerce, Services
2019	287	1123	25.6%	Commerce, Food Service
2020	156	634	24.6%	Commerce (COVID-19 impact)

Source: SINE/MA—Shopping São Luís Post.

The project represents an interesting initiative of approximation between the public employment service and the private sector, but its scope is limited to a specific enterprise. The placement rate, which varied between 24.6% and 27.3%, is relatively low, indicating that most of the workers served did not get placement through the project.

#### 4.5. Critical Analysis of State Programs

The analysis of the three state programs implemented in Maranhão reveals common characteristics that corroborate the central argument of this study about the compensatory and limited nature of employment policies in the state:

##### Structural Limitations:

- 1) **Reduced Scale:** All programs operate with limited resources and scope in relation to the needs of the Maranhão labor market.
- 2) **Focus on Employability:** The logic of individual responsibility predominates, transferring to the worker the responsibility for market insertion.
- 3) **Lack of Articulation:** The programs are not articulated with structural economic development policies.
- 4) **Limited Impact:** Available indicators suggest modest impacts on sustained job and income generation.

**Identified Challenges:** The Maranhão state government, following the example of the rest of Brazil, to reduce local unemployment, found that professional qualification programs had become one of the main pillars of labor market-related policies. Thus, the centrality assumed by professional qualification programs reflects a change in the strategy of public employment policies, prioritizing focused and compensatory interventions through the implementation of professional qualification public policies, with the aim of increasing the employability of more vulnerable worker groups.

This approach, although having merits in terms of individual training, does not address the structural causes of unemployment and labor precarization in the state. The concentration on labor supply policies (qualification) to the detriment of demand policies (job creation) significantly limits the potential impact of these initiatives.

#### 4.6. Pandemic Impacts and Recent Perspectives (2020-2024)

The period from 2020-2024 brought new challenges for employment policies in Maranhão. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the local labor market, with a reduction in the number of available vacancies and increased informality. The most recent data shows a gradual recovery:

- **2024:** Unemployment rate of 7.1% (lowest in the state's historical series)
- **2024:** Creation of 16,419 new formal links
- **2024:** Total formal workers: more than 650 thousand (positive variation of 2.5% compared to 2023)

This recovery, although positive, must be analyzed considering the national

context of improvement in employment indicators and federal policies implemented in the period. The specific contribution of state programs to this recovery remains limited, reinforcing the need to rethink public employment policy strategies in the state.

## 5. Final Considerations

Initially, it is important to highlight the main lessons learned regarding the achievement of this research's main objective, which was to investigate the public employment and vocational training policies adopted by the Government of the State of Maranhão between 2008 and 2024, based on economic growth rates and employment and income generation, considering the broader context of the Social Question in Brazil.

The process of productive restructuring, according to the requirements of the flexible accumulation model (Toyotism), has advanced since the introduction of new management techniques in the productive process, leading to the flexibilization of labor relations, characterized by unstable and temporary hiring of labor. In this scenario, there was a growing demand for workers' qualifications to adapt to the new model imposed by globalization and capitalism, where relational skills are highly valued.

However, in the context of rising unemployment rates, there emerged a need to implement public policies focused on work and vocational training, to meet the demands of various activity sectors, as well as to reintegrate workers into the labor market. For this purpose, there was coordination between unemployment insurance programs (passive labor market policies) and active labor market policies (vocational training and job placement), with the aim of interrupting the cycle of unemployment and reducing the time taken for the unemployed to return to the labor market.

It should be noted that, in Brazil, the multifunctional profile of workers did not match the demands of the market, where strategies for labor rationalization prevailed, based on the search for new mechanisms for cost reduction—especially wage costs, and for the flexibilization of labor relations. The 2017 Labor Reform (Law No. 13,467/2017) intensified this precarization process, introducing structural changes that, contrary to promises of job generation, resulted in greater insecurity for workers and reduction of historically conquered rights.

In this sense, the term “employability” becomes the focus of vocational training programs, indicating a paradox in assigning responsibility for unemployment, which has shifted from the State to the worker. The pursuit of employability leads to increasingly precarious labor relations, as workers, in order to avoid unemployment, end up accepting jobs inferior to those they previously held.

In the case of Maranhão, the analysis of public employment policies reveals a dichotomy in their objectives: on one hand, they aim to meet the demand for qualified workers to operate in major enterprises already installed or in the process of being installed in the State; on the other, they prioritize workers in situations of

social vulnerability, such as those living in extreme poverty (beneficiaries of the Bolsa Família Program), the unemployed, and graduates from public schools.

The specific analysis of state programs implemented during the period—Mais Empregos (More Jobs), Oriented Productive Microcredit, and Employment Shopping, demonstrates that these initiatives, although well-intentioned, present significant structural limitations. The comparative data presented in this study reveals that:

**1) The Mais Empregos Program** had limited impact on sustained job generation, with modest and non-sustained growth in the number of formal positions.

**2) The Oriented Productive Microcredit Program** reached its target audience, but with low average values and limited impact on sustained job and income generation.

**3) The Employment Shopping Project**, although innovative in approximating public service and private sector, presented limited scope and relatively low placement rates.

Thus, the trajectory of public employment policies in Brazil and in Maranhão highlights their disconnection from formal education and the welfare nature of the implemented programs, which are more concerned with supporting vulnerable workers than actually qualifying them for reallocation and, consequently, for continued participation in the labor market. In 2003, despite repeated attempts by the federal government to integrate vocational education into regular education, insufficient financial resources prevented these programs from achieving their intended goals.

Recent literature (2021-2024) on employment policies in Brazil corroborates these conclusions, highlighting that the systematic dismantling of employment policies, characterized by “employability without rights”, transferred responsibility for labor market insertion from the State to the individual. Despite recent quantitative advances in the Brazilian labor market, structural challenges persist related to the quality of jobs generated and the sustainability of implemented policies.

Therefore, it is emphasized that public employment policies constitute a right of workers, and as such, should be conceived as a liberating social practice and a tool for building an inclusive development model, in which everyone, without distinction, participates in the democratic process and in the generation of employment and income. However, for work-related policies to achieve the desired results, it is necessary to ensure, from the formulation stage, that they are articulated with basic education and aligned with the policies and programs of the National Public Employment System, especially with regard to pedagogical support and methods of job placement in the labor market.

It is important to recognize the limitations of this research for an adequate interpretation of the presented results. This study was based exclusively on secondary data obtained through official government sources, public documents, and academic literature, not including interviews with stakeholders directly involved in

the implementation and execution of the analyzed programs.

The absence of interviews with public managers, program beneficiaries, private sector representatives, and union organizations limits the depth of qualitative analysis of impacts and challenges faced in implementing the studied policies. This limitation is particularly relevant for understanding the operational aspects of programs and the perceptions of different actors involved about their effectiveness.

Additionally, the limited availability of disaggregated data and complete historical series for some specific indicators of state programs restricted the capacity to perform more robust comparative analyses. Some data about the Mais Empregos, Oriented Productive Microcredit, and Employment Shopping programs were obtained through indirect sources or estimates based on partial available information.

Another limitation refers to the analysis period, which encompasses a context of significant economic, political, and social transformations in Brazil, including the 2014-2016 economic crisis, the 2017 Labor Reform, and the COVID-19 pandemic. These external events may have influenced program results independently of their intrinsic characteristics, making it difficult to attribute causal impacts observed.

Based on the identified limitations and findings of this research, it is recommended that future studies on public employment policies in Maranhão include:

**1) Field research with stakeholders:** Conducting in-depth interviews with public managers, beneficiaries, entrepreneurs, and union representatives to capture qualitative perspectives on programs.

**2) More rigorous impact analysis:** Use of econometric methodologies to isolate specific effects of programs from other contextual factors.

**3) Longitudinal studies:** Following beneficiaries over time to evaluate medium and long-term impacts on professional trajectory and income.

**4) Regional comparative analysis:** Comparison with similar policies implemented in other Northeast states to identify good practices and lessons learned.

**5) Cost-effectiveness evaluation:** Analysis of the cost-benefit ratio of programs to guide public resource allocation decisions.

The findings of this research have important implications for the design and implementation of future public employment policies in Maranhão and Brazil. The evidence that the analyzed programs present predominantly compensatory characteristics and limited impacts suggests the need to rethink public intervention strategies in the labor market.

It is fundamental that employment policies be conceived as part of a broader economic development strategy, articulated with industrial, innovation, education, and infrastructure policies. Overcoming the logic of individual employability requires strengthening labor demand policies, through stimulating productive investment and creating quality jobs.

Additionally, it is necessary to strengthen monitoring and evaluation mecha-

nisms of implemented policies, ensuring that public resources are applied efficiently and that programs are continuously improved based on empirical evidence about their effectiveness.

The experience of Maranhão in the 2008-2024 period demonstrates that, without a structural and articulated approach, employment policies tend to reproduce existing inequalities and perpetuate the precarization of labor relations, contrary to their declared objectives of promoting social and economic development.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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