



ALONG THE PATHS OF ASSISTANCE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIAL PROTECTION NETWORK IN BRAZIL

Pelos Caminhos Da Assistência: Uma Análise Sobre A Rede De Proteção Social No Brasil

RESUMO

A pesquisa investiga como as políticas sociais com foco no enfrentamento e combate à pobreza influem na prática profissional no âmbito da rede de proteção social básica atualmente, sobretudo no campo de atuação do Centro de Referência da Assistência Social (CRAS). Conceber a Assistência Social como política pública contrapõe-se ao viés assistencialista, que marca sua trajetória. Observou-se a importância do conhecimento quanto às normatizações pertinentes à área da Assistência Social, tendo sido ressaltados aspectos relevantes da Política Nacional de Assistência Social (PNAS). Buscou-se referencial, a partir de autores como Sposati, Yazbek, Netto, Faleiros, Neves e Iamamoto, entre outros.

Adriano Rosa da Silva

Mestre em História Social pela Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF). Mestrando em Educação pela Universidade de Lisboa (ULisboa). Licenciado em História e em Pedagogia pela Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO) e bacharel em Serviço Social pela Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF)

PALAVRAS CHAVE: Assistência Social; Políticas Sociais; CRAS

**ABSTRACT**

Corresponding author:*Adriano Rosa da Silva**adriano.uff@hotmail.com

Received on: [21/02/2025]

Published on: [05/03/2025]

The research investigates how social policies focused on confronting and combating poverty influence the professional practice within the scope of the basic social protection network today, especially in the field of activity of the Social Assistance Reference Center (CRAS). The importance of knowledge regarding the regulations pertinent to the area of Social Assistance was observed, with relevant aspects of the National Social Assistance Policy (PNAS) being highlighted. To elucidate these issues, a theoretical framework was sought through specific legislation and bibliographic material related to this topic. from authors such as Sposati, Yazbek, Netto, Faleiros, Neves and Iamamoto, among others.

KEYWORDS: Social Assistance; Social Policies; CRAS.

INTRODUCTION

It is important to consider that Social Assistance, in its origins in Brazil, was marked by philanthropy and benevolence. In this context, philanthropy and social assistance were associated with charitable practices and depended on voluntary and isolated initiatives to help the poor and disadvantaged (SPOSATI, 2001). According to the author, these initiatives came from religious institutions, offering shelter, clothing and food, especially to abandoned children



and the sick in general, and were recognized through organizations such as the Santas Casas de Misericórdia (Holy Houses of Mercy). As Sposati (2001) states in this regard, "secular forms in the field of Social Assistance only came about after the Republic, given the official separation between the State and the Church" (p. 76). It was then, in the 1930s, that incipient initiatives by the Brazilian state emerged in the field of social assistance, with the centralization of public and private welfare work, and the creation of the National Council of Social Service (CNSS), which represents the first attempt to regulate social assistance in the country.

As a result of the industrial growth of the 1970s, the following decade was marked by popular movements, especially trade union movements. Thus, with the political and social transformations that took place in the 1970s and 1980s, there was an advance in the way Social Assistance was managed, characterizing it as a citizen's right and no longer as a state benefit. This change is marked by the 1988 Federal Constitution, which establishes Social Assistance as a public policy within the scope of social security, providing protection for the Brazilian population through a series of public measures aimed at guaranteeing rights. In this way, the 1988 Constitution opens up possibilities for the advancement of social policies in the Brazilian reality, contemplating significant demands from the working classes and conceiving Social Assistance as a public policy, the responsibility of the State. The implementation of the Organic Law on Social Assistance (LOAS, 1993) brought about significant changes in the conception and development of social assistance in the country, which required the organization of states and municipalities.

The National Social Assistance Policy (PNAS) and the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS): advances, limits and possibilities

It's worth noting that, as the object of this research is the regulations concerning the area of Social Assistance, I'll focus on the characteristics of the National Social Assistance Policy (PNAS) and the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS). The 4th National Social Assistance Conference (CNAS), held in December 2003, approved the new National Social Assistance Policy (PNAS), which consolidated the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS). The PNAS, whose main objective is the implementation of the SUAS and with it a system of social protection for Brazilians who need such a system, was born in 2004, under the government of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, through the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against



Hunger (MDS) and the National Secretariat of Social Assistance (SNAS) (MDS, 2008). In line with Sposati (2004), the implementation of the PNAS can be considered a historic opportunity to break with traditional patterns of subalternity, benevolence and charity which, for a long time, marked Social Assistance in Brazil.

According to the MDS (2008), this new policy aims to reorganize actions, i.e. services, social protection benefits at both basic and special levels, for those who need them, programs and projects according to the need and complexity that arise. According to the CNAS (2004, p. 18), the PNAS has as its objectives the inclusion and equity of users and specific groups, with a priority focus on families, their members and individuals, guaranteeing family and community coexistence. It also has the territory as its basis for organization, expanding access to social assistance goods and services in urban and rural areas (MDS, 2004, p. 39).

"the social assistance services offered to the family universe must take into account, in addition to age and income, issues involving gender relations, social class, racial or ethnic and cultural aspects, and as such elements that guide the structuring of the social and economic relations that families and individuals establish or in which they are inserted" (MDS, 2004).

Based on the aforementioned objectives of the PNAS (2004), I would like to explain that its users are citizens and groups in situations of personal and social vulnerability and risk, as this policy comes as a response to the state's attempt to meet part of the demands of the subaltern classes. However, the adoption of a neoliberal policy by the country has had the effect of making work more precarious, increasing the misery of the population and minimizing the guarantees hitherto contained in law, to illustrate (CNAS, 2004).

(...) families and individuals with loss or fragility of bonds of affection, belonging and sociability; life cycles; stigmatized identities in ethnic, cultural and sexual terms; personal disadvantage resulting from disabilities; exclusion due to poverty and, or, access to other public policies; use of psychoactive substances; different forms of violence coming from the family nucleus, groups and individuals; precarious insertion or non-insertion in the formal or informal job market; differentiated survival strategies and alternatives that may represent personal and social risk. (CNAS, 2004, pp. 18-19).

The PNAS (2004) seeks to put social rights into effect through the management of the Social Assistance Policy, reinforcing the commitment of the federal entities to this management. This shared management, or in other words, decentralization, has allowed for the development of new ways of programming, administering and monitoring the National Social Assistance Policy. In addition to a new process in relation to the management and financing of actions organized within the scope of the social assistance policy.

Aiming to break away from the patrimonialist and clientelist use of social resources, in 1997 a Basic Operational Standard (NOB) was published, which sought to give concrete form



to the principles and guidelines of the LOAS (1993), conceptualized the decentralized and participatory system, establishing conditions to guarantee its effectiveness, explaining the concept of political-administrative decentralization present in the LOAS (1993), as well as the question of the decision-making and executing bodies of the Social Assistance Policy and defining the levels of management of this policy. In 1998, the Basic Operational Standard (NOB) established the issues related to financing, expanded the regulation of the PNAS of that year, conceptualizing and defining strategies, principles and guidelines to make it operational, also expanded the attributions of the Social Assistance Councils and proposed the creation of permanent agreement spaces to discuss the operational aspects of Social Assistance management.

These negotiating spaces were called the Tripartite Interagency Commission (CIT) and the Bipartite Interagency Commission (CIB), which became deliberative in operational terms in the management of the policy. The CIT was made up of the three federal entities: The Union, represented by the then Social Assistance Secretariat (SAS), the States, represented by the National Forum of State Social Assistance Secretaries - FONSEAS and the municipalities, represented by the National Collegiate of Municipal Social Assistance Managers - CONGEMAS. The CIB is made up of the system's two management bodies, bringing together representatives from the state and municipal levels. It is important to note that the Bi and Tripartite Commissions are spaces for shared management and democratize the state, following the deliberations of the Social Assistance Councils.

In 2004, the construction of the Basic Operational Standard for regulating the SUAS began, with the aim of advancing the constitution of the PNAS. "In March 2005, the preliminary version of the NOB/SUAS was presented to the CNAS by the SNAS with the aim of triggering debate. The final text was approved by CNAS Resolution No. 130 of July 15, 2005" (SPOSATI, 2004, p. 107). The 2005 Basic Operational Standard/ SUAS reaffirmed Social Assistance as a right, proposing greater articulation and unification of the services provided to users, establishing the parameters for the operationalization and standardization of this policy, pointing out a general regime for its management, constituting new guidelines in the implementation of SUAS. It is worth pointing out that "SUAS is not the product of the unexpected (...). It is the result of almost 20 years of struggle in social assistance and learning from health management" (SPOSATI, 2004).



The PNAS (2004) has its guidelines embodied in the SUAS, which as a social protection system will incorporate the principles of the LOAS, with a view to coordinating services, programs, projects and actions, in line with its objectives. I would point out that the PNAS (2004) and its new SUAS management system introduced profound changes to the conceptual references, the organizational structure and the logic of management and control of social assistance actions. The innovation of SUAS in terms of social assistance is that it establishes a single management system in the country, with the aim of achieving universality (SPOSATI, 2004). According to this author, SUAS

deals with the conditions for the extension and universalization of social protection to Brazilians through the social assistance policy and for the organization, responsibility and operation of its services and benefits at the three levels of government management (SPOSATI, 2004).

Based on the above, the SUAS as a non-contributory, decentralized and participatory public system with the primary function of managing the specific content of Social Assistance will regulate and organize the social assistance network, in a system financed by the three spheres in which each will have determined its technical-political competence (CNAS, 2004). Bearing this in mind, the NOB/SUAS (2005) indicates the following prerogatives for the effective construction of the SUAS: shared management, co-financing and technical cooperation between the three federative entities.

The implementation of SUAS requires breaking with programmatic fragmentation. It requires separating the parallelism of responsibilities between the three spheres of government. It requires building references on the totality of vulnerabilities and social risks, overcoming the segregated analysis of social segments without a commitment to universal coverage and achieving quality results (SPOSATI, 2004, p.173).

In view of this, with a protective and innovative social concept, SUAS organizes and regulates the responsibilities of each level of government and civil society. It is based on the commitments of the PNAS (2004), the division of responsibilities between the federative entities to install, regulate, maintain and expand social assistance actions, regulate the links and responsibilities of the citizen system of services, benefits, among others. In view of this, the PNAS (2004) must be associated with sectoral policies with a view to differentiating socio-territorial inequalities, in order to guarantee social minimums and also respond to the universalization of social rights. With this in mind, the construction of SUAS (2005) must be based on human and social rights, specifically social assistance rights, with the aim of breaking with the idea that social assistance is a gift/favour rather than a right.



The SUAS (2005), which is the regulation and organization of social assistance actions throughout the national territory, defines and organizes the essential elements for implementing the social assistance policy, making it possible to regulate service standards, quality of care, evaluation and result indicators, the nomenclature of services and the social assistance network, as well as the structuring axes and subsystems (CNAS, 2004, p. 23). The structuring axes are as follows:

Socio-family Matriciality: I emphasize this as the main axis of management, as it is based on a centrality of care and monitoring that guarantees family and community coexistence, which is the main focus of SUAS, reaffirming article 226 of the Federal Constitution of 1988, which emphasizes that the family should have special protection from the state (PNAS, 2004), and its approach will be based on all family members. The policy's concept of the family is intended to break with the conservative view of the family, which is no longer understood in terms of the traditional family model, but rather as subjects who are united by ties of blood, affection or solidarity.

Based on the NOB/2005, the centrality of the family is established for SUAS as the focal point.

"This centrality present in SUAS is based on the idea that all the other needs and audiences of social assistance are somehow linked to the family, whether at the moment of using assistance programs, projects and services, or at the beginning of the cycle that generates the need for the individual to become the target of the policy's attention. The family is the basic social nucleus of welcome, autonomy, sustainability and social protagonism". (NOB/SUAS, 2005, p. 17)

Political-administrative decentralization and territorialization: considering the diversity between regions and municipalities in the country, the dynamics of each region must be known so that actions can be directed according to the structural differences of each location. The PNAS (2004) uses municipalities, the smallest administrative scale of government, as a reference for analysis, because as a public policy aimed at social protection, its interventions are essentially carried out in the territories, which means getting closer to people's daily lives, where vulnerabilities manifest themselves. This territory-based operationalization is an attempt to overcome the fragmentation in the practice of social assistance policy, breaking with segmentation and targeting. Municipalities now have management autonomy, boosting the division of responsibilities and co-financing between the spheres of government and civil society, in line with the precepts of decentralized and participatory management proposed by LOAS in 1993 (PNAS, 2004).

The definition of small, medium and large municipalities used by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) is used to differentiate the territories. Small municipalities I are those with a population of approximately 20,000 inhabitants, 5,000 families on average, while small municipalities II have a population of 20,001 to 50,000 inhabitants, or 5,000 to



10,000 families, both of which have a basic social protection network, but medium and high-complexity services only in nearby cities that are more populous; medium-sized municipalities are those with a population of between 50,001 and 100,000 inhabitants, 10,000 to 25.000 families, they have a broader network of services, but only offer more complex services when they add neighboring municipalities to meet the demand; large municipalities of 101,000 to 900,000 inhabitants and metropolises with a population of more than 900,000 inhabitants, are municipalities that, due to the large number of users with very diverse characteristics, have a basic social protection network and also special social protection of medium and high complexity (PNAS, 2004, p. 46).

New bases for the relationship between state and society: Article 104 of the Federal Constitution of 1988 is clear in highlighting the participation of civil society, both in the execution of programs and in the participation, formulation and control of actions at all levels (PNAS, 2004, p. 46). In addition, with the implementation of the LOAS, a new relationship between the state and civil society was established through the use of councils, made up of governmental and non-governmental members.

Financing: is represented by the Social Assistance Funds in the three spheres of government, in view of the decentralized and participatory system (CNAS, 2004). This financing model is an innovation, allowing greater autonomy for projects and programs, and is therefore considered an achievement for social assistance. With regard to these issues, I would like to point out that the Social Assistance Funds reinforce the role of the SUAS as a funding body for this public policy in the three spheres of government. It is worth considering that article 27 of the LOAS regulates the transformation of the National Community Action Fund (FUNAC) into the National Social Assistance Fund (FNAS), which is characterized as an instrument for rationalizing the application of resources. The Fund must manage the resources transferred and those that may be raised; it represents the concrete possibility of transparent financial management that contributes to strengthening the visibility of assistance, thus carrying out resource management in accordance with real local needs (CNAS, 2004).

According to the MDS (2004), there are two types of transfer, one between public bodies (public fund) and the other by bank operation, with direct withdrawal by the beneficiary at the Caixa Econômica Federal or Loterias. Benefits are funded directly to their recipients, and the social assistance network is funded through the transfer of resources fund by fund, as well as the transfer of resources to programs and projects that may be relevant to social assistance. The



Fund-to-Fund transfer, associated with the levels of responsibility assumed by the government, was an advance for this policy, since it provided less bureaucracy, as the resources go directly from the National Fund to the State Fund and thus to the Municipal Social Assistance Funds. This form of financing does not require a relationship with service providers (MDS, 2004).

Social Control: provided for by the LOAS (1993), as a form of control exercised by society over government actions, with regard to the processes of planning, follow-up, monitoring and evaluation of public management and the execution of public policies and programs, thus emphasizing the participation of the population, in a democratic manner, in the political-administrative-financial and technical-operational management process (PNAS, 2004).

"The concept of social control comes from the Federal Constitution of 1988, as an instrument for making popular participation effective (...), with a democratic and decentralized character. Within this logic, control of the state is exercised by society to guarantee fundamental rights and the democratic principles enshrined in the constitutional precepts" (PNAS, 2004, p. 56).

The challenge of user participation in the Social Assistance Councils: the PNAS, whose characteristic is the recognition of social and segmented demands and socio-territorial inequalities, opens up more space for popular participation in decisions, given that it is necessary for society's participation in the councils to take place in a democratic manner, starting with the entry of users into the debates (PNAS, 2004).

The Human Resources Policy: highlights the various occupations in the area of Social Assistance, which must be carried out by professionals qualified to intervene in this area of social work (PNAS, 2004). In this sense, the Basic Operational Standard for Human Resources - NOB/RH - was presented in 2005, bringing important elements regarding the way these professionals intervene in this work space.

Information, monitoring and evaluation: these systems should be developed jointly by the three spheres of government, with a view to developing the Social Assistance policy and, consequently, its actions and resources, in order to qualify this policy so that the PNAS and, with it, the SUAS can really be put into effect (CNAS, 2004). According to the MDS (2004), information is a social right and a condition for autonomy. Therefore, information enhances access to social rights, enabling the active participation of users and organized society in the decentralized, participatory structure. An articulated system for monitoring and evaluating the



structural and operational components of social assistance is a prerequisite for improving the quality of services.

In this direction, SUAS (2005) defines and organizes the execution of social assistance policy, regulating service standards according to the references of Social Surveillance, Social Protection and Social and Institutional Defense. Another aspect to be considered is that the SUAS (2005) provides for the organization of social assistance policy into two types of protection: Basic Social Protection (PSB) and Special Social Protection (PSE) of medium and high complexity, where the various services for the implementation of this policy are inserted, as I mentioned in the previous topic when dealing with LOAS. I would like to point out at this point that both types of protection aim to offer a set of services, programs and benefits with the aim of guaranteeing social security for the prevention, protection and coping with vulnerabilities, and the promotion and defense of rights (SUAS, 2005). These two levels of protection focus on the family, with the aim of guaranteeing them security of survival, income and autonomy, shelter and family life.

According to SUAS (2005), Basic Social Protection (PSB), through its services with local development, as well as programs, projects and benefits carried out directly at the Social Assistance Reference Center (CRAS), aims to help prevent situations of vulnerability and social risk resulting from poverty, lack of income, lack of access to public services, and weakened emotional ties. It works by developing potential and strengthening family and community ties, given that they have not been broken, but are fragile due to the exposed conditions.

As I will discuss the CRAS in the next topic, I will briefly explain at this point, by way of understanding, that this is a public and state unit located in areas of greater social vulnerability and "organizes and coordinates the network of local socio-assistance services of the social assistance policy" (CNAS, 2004, p. 19). An example of these social assistance services is the Comprehensive Family Care Programme (PAIF), which according to the MDS (2008) is characterized as

"a set of continuous actions necessarily developed in the Social Assistance Reference Centers, it is up to PAIF to provide reception services, monitoring, insertion in social assistance and coexistence services, development of collective and community activities and referrals of families to other social assistance services and other policies, the main action of the program is socio-family monitoring" (MDS, 2008).

Other examples of services developed at CRAS, by way of illustration, are: the Young Adolescent Program, services for children aged 0 to 6 and the elderly, the Elderly Card, occasional benefits, which are supplementary and temporary provisions provided to citizens



and families due to birth, death, temporary vulnerability and public calamity (MDS, 2008), as well as the Continuous Cash Benefit (BPC), among other services. To wit,

"The Continuous Cash Benefit is a social assistance policy benefit consisting of the payment of a minimum monthly wage to elderly people aged 65 or over and people with disabilities who are unable to work or live independently, whose family income per person does not exceed $\frac{1}{4}$ of the minimum wage per month" (LOAS, 1993).

According to the SUAS (2005), Special Social Protection (PSE) is a set of services coordinated by the Specialized Social Assistance Reference Centre (CREAS), which is a public service unit with municipal or regional coverage (MDS, 2008). It also includes programs and projects aimed at rebuilding family and community ties, defending rights, strengthening potential and protecting families and individuals from situations of social risk (SUAS, 2005).

With regard to the Special Reference Center for Social Assistance (CREAS), I would like to reinforce that the purpose of this space is to assist individuals in situations of personal and social risk, due to multiple occurrences, such as abandonment, mistreatment, sexual abuse, use of psychoactive substances, compliance with socio-educational measures, homelessness, child labor, among other conditions constituted in this way, not necessarily due to lack of income, but due to other variables of social exclusion (MDS, 2004, p. 36-37).

For the sake of understanding, although there is no social exclusion in capitalist society according to the Marxist perspective, I would like to highlight, as I also consider it important, another definition in which the term social exclusion cited above by the MDS text, although commonly confused, due to its similarities, with the concepts of inequality, misery, indigence and poverty, which are all situations, differs from them, because social exclusion is a process that can lead to the worsening of inequality and poverty and, as such, is heterogeneous in time and space (MDS, 2004, p. 36).

In fact, Special Social Protection (PSE) services are subdivided into medium and high complexity services, as has already been said. Thus, according to the PNAS (2004), medium-complexity services are those that offer assistance to families, their members and individuals whose rights have been violated, but whose family and community ties have not been dissolved, such as street outreach, social and family guidance and support, and the rehabilitation of disabled people, for example.

High-complexity services, such as foster care, group homes, substitute families, among others, which should guarantee full protection such as housing and food, for example, are aimed at families, their members and individuals who are without a reference and/or threatened and who, under these conditions, need to be removed from their family and community nucleus, for



which they are guaranteed full protection such as housing, food and protected work. These services require specialized, targeted care, as well as individualized psychosocial monitoring (PNAS, 2004).

In this sense, the programs within the scope of Special Social Protection (PSE) of medium complexity, in order to exemplify, are: Guidance and socio-family support services; open-ended socio-educational measures (Community Service Provision and Assisted Liberty); Social Work; Street approach; Housing and Rehabilitation Services for people with disabilities, among others (CNAS, 2004, p. 24). The programs developed by the highly complex Special Social Protection (PSE) include: Hostels; sheltered work; restrictive and deprivation of liberty socio-educational measures (semi-liberty, provisional and sentenced internment); Casa de Passagem, among others (CNAS, 2004, p. 23).

In summary, in this topic I have highlighted some elements of the current Social Assistance policy and the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS), as I consider them relevant to understanding the problem I am studying, bearing in mind that the focus of my discussion in this work is the repercussions for social policies today, as they become more focused and sectorialized, thus characterizing Social Assistance in the current Brazilian context. I consider these points to be relevant, since in the next topic I will dedicate a study to the Social Assistance Reference Center (CRAS), within the scope of this policy mentioned above.

The Social Assistance Reference Center (CRAS)

Concept and target audience

In order to think of the Social Assistance Reference Center (CRAS) as an advance for Social Assistance, a right for citizens, I point out that it is a new space for intervention in this policy, concerning the management of the SUAS/2005 policy (MDS, 2009). Thus, I intend to conceptualize CRAS as expressed in the relevant regulations and the users who make up its target public, in such a way that LOAS (1993) and SUAS (2005), in their wording, propose that the State should become the executor of services and responsible for the social assistance network. The CRAS is a new structure within the management of the SUAS policy, and also a recent space for intervention by Social Assistance, the "gateway" for users to this network, more specifically, to the Basic Social Protection (PSB) network of this policy (MDS, 2009, p. 9). It



is worth noting that the implementation of CRAS as a public SUAS facility is a step forward for the Social Assistance policy and its recognition as a right.

Based on the above, the CRAS, as a Social Assistance institution that marks the presence of the SUAS in municipalities, is a decentralized state public unit with a territorial base (MDS, 2009, p. 9), as it must be installed near places with a higher rate of social vulnerability, according to the indicators defined in the NOB-SUAS (2005). The social vulnerability rate, as defined in the NOB-SUAS (2005), is an important indicator of the need to offer Basic Social Protection (PSB) services to the public demanding this policy. In this way, each municipality must identify areas of social vulnerability and implement a CRAS in them, with the aim of bringing social assistance services closer to the users who demand them.

This is because CRAS is a reference and counter-reference unit of the Basic Protection network, which provides services aimed at preventing situations of social risk and violation of rights, through the development of potentialities and acquisitions, and the strengthening of family and community ties. Promoting human and social development and contributing to the process of autonomy and emancipation of its target public, according to the identification of the situation of vulnerability presented by users in order to include them in the various actions offered, which involve different sectors (MDS, 2004, pp. 33-34).

From this perspective, the CRAS, whose main characteristics are gratuity, continuity, permanent public investment and the decentralization of actions, is therefore responsible for offering programs, local projects and ongoing reception, coexistence and socialization services to users who make up the CRAS' target audience, i.e. families in situations of social vulnerability, excluded from access to goods and services and living in areas of greater social fragility, promoting the social assistance monitoring of families in a given territory (MDS, 2004, pp. 33-34). It is important to point out that in the PSB, social work with families must consider new references for understanding different family arrangements, with the aim of recognizing other models besides the nuclear family.

Finally, I would like to point out that I believe these considerations about the concept of CRAS and the definition of its target public are relevant, given that they should be recognized in this way by the interdisciplinary team of CRAS workers, who represent its human resources, and who will carry out social work with the families that use the service through material resources. This is why I address these issues in the following section.



Human and material resources

Having understood the concept of the CRAS and the public for which it is intended, from the perspective of the Social Assistance policy, I will explain, with regard to human resources, based on the text of the MDS (2009, p. 61), that the CRAS has an interdisciplinary team of workers responsible for implementing the PAIF, PSB services and projects and for articulated management in the territory covered, always under the guidance of the municipal manager. This group of workers, the main technology of the Social Assistance policy, is called the 'CRAS reference team' and its composition, regulated by the Basic Operational Standard for Human Resources in the SUAS (NOB-RH/SUAS), depends on the number of families referred to the CRAS, given that this number "is defined according to the size and vulnerability rate of the municipality" (MDS, 2009).

In addition, the NOB-SUAS also stipulates the minimum number of CRAS according to the size of the municipality. In view of the above, the CRAS's service capacity varies according to the size of the municipality and the number of families in situations of social vulnerability, as established in the NOB-SUAS. Therefore, according to MDS (2009, pp. 35 and 66):

- Small I - serves 2,500 referenced families and has an annual service capacity of 500 families, with two or more medium-level technicians and three or more higher-level technicians, at least one of whom is a social worker and one is a statutory higher-level coordinator.

- Small II - serves 3,500 families with referrals and an annual service capacity of 750 families, with three or more medium-level technicians and four or more higher-level technicians, at least one of whom is a social worker and at least one is a statutory higher-level coordinator.

- Medium-sized/Large-sized/Metropolis - serves 5,000 families with referrals and an annual service capacity of 1,000 families, with four or more medium-level technicians and five or more higher-level technicians, including at least two social workers, a psychologist and a statutory higher-level coordinator.



According to the MDS (2009, pp. 63-64), for social work with families, it is necessary for professionals to have a technical profile, where they have sensitivity to the issues presented by users, the ability to communicate and listen to families, knowledge of the reality of the territory and also of the relevant legislation: the Federal Constitution of 1988; the LOAS (1993); the ECA (1990); the PNAS (2004); the National Elderly Policy PNI - (1994); the NOB-SUAS (2005); Codes, Laws, Decrees and Ordinances of the MDS; Ethical, legal, theoretical and methodological foundations of interdisciplinary work, among others. Each CRAS must have a coordinator, with training and practice in the social area, a university degree, with a job, ease of communication, experience in collective work, with a managerial and leadership profile, among other characteristics (MDS, 2009, p. 64). It is also necessary for the interdisciplinary team to be trained periodically, as well as to hold weekly meetings to discuss and evaluate the social work carried out and the possible results achieved.

In this way, according to the NOB-SUAS (2005), municipalities qualified for basic and full management can receive the incentive to participate in training programs for managers, professionals, councillors and the service provider network, promoted by the state and the federal government. Since the Federal Government is responsible for formulating policy for the systematic and continuous training of human resources in the field of Social Assistance and the states co-finance Basic Social Protection (PSB), by providing resources for the information system, monitoring, evaluation, training, technical support and other actions, they even receive federal funds when they fulfill certain responsibilities.

As for the duties of the CRAS reference team (MDS, 2009, p. 63), these professionals should, for example: articulate professional procedures for qualified individual or group listening, identifying needs and offering guidance to individuals and families and mediation of PAIF groups; carry out home visits to families; articulate services and resources for care, referral and follow-up of families and individuals; carry out active searches; work as a team; produce reports and documents necessary for the service; develop socio-educational activities of support, welcome, reflection and participation.

With this in mind, it is worth noting that trainees can be admitted to CRAS on an optional basis, accompanying and playing an active role in assisting the population. According to the NOB-SUAS (2005), trainees can take part, together with the technician, or on their own, as long as they are guided, accompanied and supervised by the technical team, from the same professional category, and with the users' consent, in activities such as: assistance to families



(reception, interviews, guidance, home visits), family group activities, activities to identify and articulate the social assistance network and other collective activities as long as they are accompanied by the technician responsible for the activity, drawing up reports and taking part in meetings to discuss and evaluate the work, by way of example (NOB-SUAS, 2005).

In terms of material resources, i.e. the physical structure of the CRAS, these spaces must be compatible with the services it offers. In this respect, "the physical space must be organized in such a way that families living in the territory covered by the CRAS recognize it as a public unit that enables access to rights" (MDS, 2009, p. 48). It should therefore have the following features: at least six rooms in its own building, with well-defined functions, including a reception area, a room or more for interviews that allows for individual assistance and a room for meetings with groups of families, a room for collective use, an administrative room, as well as conventional service areas, such as a pantry and a bathroom (MDS, 2009, pp. 50; 57). It should be larger if it offers socializing services and socio-educational activities for groups or training and productive insertion, and should have adequate furniture for the activities carried out.

According to the MDS (2009), it is advisable to have a telephone line and a computer connected to the Internet, so as to speed up procedures and data recording. In addition, a map of the territory covered by the CRAS should be fixed in a visible place, indicating its location and that of the other services available in the territory and nearby. In addition, the space must have its own visual identity, i.e. the CRAS co-financed by the Federal Government must have a standard sign in front of the institution, a model of which can be obtained from the MDS.

In this respect, the CRAS environment must be welcoming to facilitate the expression of needs and opinions, with space for individual assistance that guarantees privacy and preserves the integrity and dignity of families and individuals. It must also provide means of accessibility for the elderly and people with disabilities (Decree - Law No. 5.296, of 02/12/2004, which regulates meeting the specific needs of people with disabilities), as well as providing means and instruments for information, communication and welcoming users.

From this point of view, the CRAS should be a reference unit for families living in a given territory, so the physical space of the CRAS should reflect its main concept: social work with families, through the Comprehensive Family Care Program, as the physical space is a determining factor for the recognition of this SUAS equipment as a locus in which social assistance rights are ensured (MDS, 2009, p. 48). In this regard, I consider these caveats to be



important, since I will deal with the social assistance services provided at CRAS in the next section.

Social assistance services developed

Having understood the concept of CRAS and the characterization of its target public, as well as the human and material resources provided for this equipment, it is important to consider that, according to PNAS (2004), CRAS is a space designed to provide social assistance services to families and individuals in their community context, This is because these services are targeted at families in the area they cover, with a view to guidance, family and community interaction, inclusion in services provided by Basic Social Protection, social surveillance, and monitoring of social indicators and the impact of actions.

In this sense, Social Assistance PSB services are considered to be those that empower the family as a unit of reference, strengthening its internal bonds and those with the community, through the offer of a set of local services aimed at families whose family and community bonds have not been broken (CNAS, 2004, p. 20), such as those aimed at promoting integration into the job market, through Productive Inclusion Programs and Poverty Reduction Projects, the Comprehensive Family Care Program (PAIF) and Coexistence Centers, by way of illustration. In addition to these, I would mention Socio-educational Services, Socialization and Awareness Raising Actions for the Defence of Rights and Non-Formal Education and Information Centres (CNAS, 2004, p. 20).

According to the MDS (2004), among the programs and projects offered by the CRAS, in addition to the Bolsa Família Program (PBF), which I mentioned earlier, the Pró-Jovem Urbano and the Plano Setorial de Qualificação e Inserção Profissional (PLANSEQ) stand out. Pró-Jovem Urbano has programs and actions aimed at the integral development of young people and intends to create the necessary conditions for them to achieve social inclusion, from the perspective of citizenship. PLANSEQ is offered to beneficiaries of the Bolsa Família Program (PBF), which is not a condition of the program. The action is linked to the PAC (Growth Acceleration Plan) projects. It aims to meet the demands for qualified regional labor, expanding the opportunities for occupational inclusion of workers benefiting from the PBF, as it stimulates coordination between the labor and social assistance sectors, at federal, state and municipal levels (MDS, 2004).



It is worth noting that the Comprehensive Family Care Program (PAIF), developed in the CRAS, within the scope of the PSB, with the aim of contributing to the prevention and confrontation of situations of vulnerability and social risk, expresses a set of socio-assistance actions related to information, guidance, referrals and intersectoral coordination with follow-up for socio-assistance benefits and services or for other sectoral policies, meetings with the local network, articulation and strengthening of local social groups, professionals from other sectoral services, social movements and other bodies, proactive search, reception (reception at CRAS, interview and home visit), promotion of access to income and, especially, socio-family monitoring, with socio-educational services for families, including home care and production of socio-educational material, among other services (PNAS, 2004).

Along these lines,

"There has been a strong focus on regulating Basic Social Protection and, within it, the operation of the CRAS. It is a question of regulating the preventive, territorialized and socio-familial matrix dimension of the new social assistance model systematized by the Federal Family Care Program - PAIF. It is also about regulating the gateway to the SUAS through the CRAS" (SPOSATI, 2006).

In this respect, it is up to the CRAS, the "gateway" to the SUAS, in addition to developing the Comprehensive Family Care Program (PAIF), to guarantee information and guidance for families on the network of PSB services that exist in their area of jurisdiction, carried out directly or indirectly by the local government. In this way, the implementation of the CRAS in the municipalities is intended to provide the population with easy access to basic social protection services, as well as a network that will make it possible to discover the local needs, so that policies can be better articulated and targeted.

As a public unit that aims to ensure the citizenship of user families, CRAS, as a focal point for access to and promotion of social assistance rights in the territories (MDS, 2009, p. 14), guarantees its users the rights to:

"having a dignified and adequate place to be attended to; receiving information on how and where to express their rights and requests for social assistance; knowing the name of the person who attends to them (technical professional, trainee or CRAS administrator); listening to, being informed about, defending and forwarding their demands for social provision guaranteed by the social assistance policy; receiving explanations about the services and care in a clear, simple and understandable way; having access to their data records, if they so wish, among other rights" (MDS, 2009, p. 14).

In short, it is from this perspective of reinforcing users' rights through the social assistance services provided to their clients in the CRAS, as an important piece of social



assistance equipment, that I conclude this analysis. In this sense, the work also highlighted the advances and limitations that the PNAS faces in its implementation, as well as highlighting the importance of recognizing public policies as an important instrument for guaranteeing citizens' rights.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, the Social Protection System, according to the PNAS (2004), should be the right of all citizens without any restriction, and is subdivided into Basic Social Protection and Special Social Protection. The management of the SUAS must be decentralized and participatory, regulating and organizing Social Assistance actions throughout the territory, presupposing shared and co-financed management by the three spheres of government, with a definition of their competencies.

Thus, the research sought to recover important events in the Brazilian reality in relation to social policies, characterizing the period that was marked by a welfare conception and presenting *a posteriori* the principles and guidelines that configure a new form of organization of Brazilian Social Protection based on the right.

It should be emphasized that in this reality of inequalities, the fundamental issue is the existence of needs and the lack of conditions to meet them. In this sense, although Social Assistance is a social protection policy articulated with other policies aimed at social promotion, affirming itself as a right, restricted and mistaken conceptions are still common in the institutions that make it possible.

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