

# GOVERNMENT BLINDNESS TO SOCIAL PROGRAMS

*What we cannot see from  
the 4T project*



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## What we cannot see from the 4T project



### SYNTHESIS

The nature of social programs tends to concentrate on aspects related to people's wellness, where the main goal is that they reach optimum levels of life quality. It tries to ensure effective access to the rights related to availability, quality, and access to medical service, education, solid institutions, zero hungry programs, and the end of poverty to mention some. However, the scenario framing the social programs in Mexico places in evidence the priority that social politics has in the gov-

ernment's agenda by showing a lack of solid structures institutionally, budgeting, and, above all, regulations that guarantee meeting objectives efficiently, objectively, equitably and, transparently.

Besides the economic-sanitary problematic that the country is facing is evident that the alternative that the government has been following to support the vulnerable groups has been limited. Since the launching of the social programs of the current government, the privi-

leged groups had been the ones serving the elderly citizens and the young population without working conditions. They have been left unattended to several priority groups, such as the early childhood groups. In the same way, it has been evident that the deployment of beneficiaries has attended different criteria than the ones indicated by the dynamic of poverty, let us see the political-proselytism paths under which social policy has been governed.

On the other hand, the discursive rhetoric used by the government refers to the distancing of the social politics implemented by previous administrations, while its practice had not been so different. It is about the same governmental welfare format, without any dramatic changes in the most ambitious reforms that stand for the most vulnerable groups. Without any clarity on its structures and with a strategy that lacks solid foundations, the implementation of a package of social programs ruled by “the census of prosperity”, began. This strategy differs from the ones implemented by previous administrations since it counts on a group (political and not technical) that has determined the entrance as well as the permanence of the beneficiaries of the different programs.



*Image:* people with minimum resources do not receive any support from the government social projects. Photo: Cuartoscuro en <https://tinyurl.com/y93hvfpp>.

**Without any clarity on its structures and with a strategy that lacks solid foundations, the implementation of a package of social programs ruled by “the census of prosperity”, began.**

## HOW TO VISUALIZE POVERTY AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN MEXICO?

The impacts of any kind of social program with effective and efficient foundations reflect on people's social standards. However, it is not the only element that determines the social wealth; it is also the behavior of economic activity and government management that has a tight relationship with social development.

Since before the COVID-19 virus effect arrived in our country, the operative issues with social programs were evident. Effects that had been substantial at economic, political and, social levels and since then threatened to severely affect the levels of poverty and social wealth of the Mexicans.

In this sense, the sum of the impact that has occurred over the last years, plus those resented over the last months, has been reflected in the indicators of labor poverty. The lack of action in social politics as a response to the effects of COVID-19 has been made evident mainly by this indicator which, for April, reported 53.1%, also a 54.9% and 48.1% for May and June, respectively. Therefore, over half of the population reported a labor income lower than the weighted av-

erage of extreme poverty<sup>1</sup> lines by income (rural and urban) for 2T2020.<sup>2</sup>

The overall picture of the labor market is reflected in the Labor Tendency Index of Poverty (ITLP for its acronym in Spanish) and, at the same time, allows us to visualize the behavior of the population with insufficient labor income to acquire the food basket.<sup>3</sup> We can now notice that from the first trimester of 2019 and until the first trimester of 2020, the number of people that didn't have enough income to acquire the basic food basket decreased, going over the index of 0.996 in 2T2019 to 0.9119 in 1T2020.

However, the scourges of COVID were reflected in the number of total remunerations of the busy people, the same that presented a drastic fall of -19.1% from

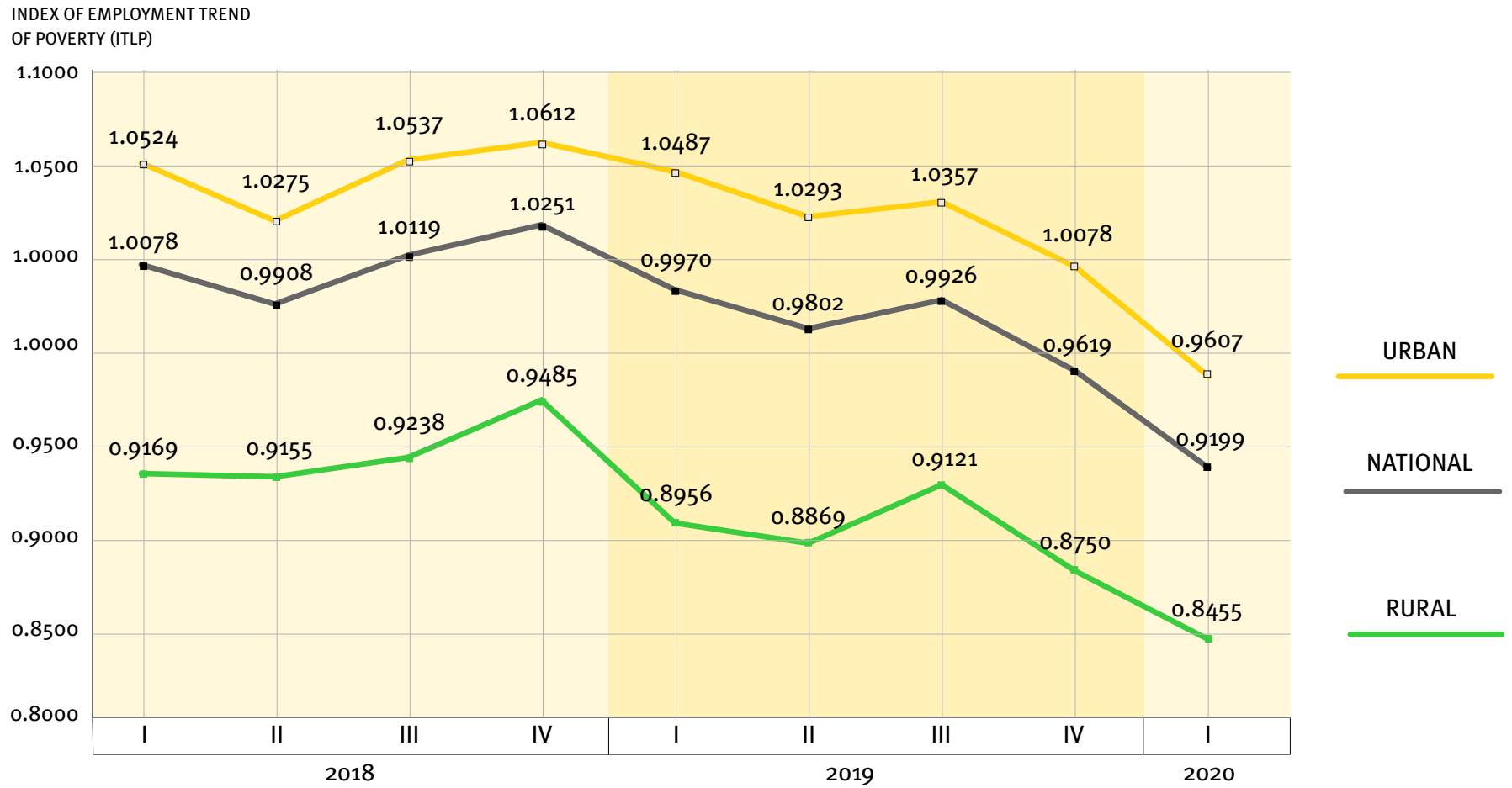
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1 Extreme poverty: a person who finds itself in extreme poverty, suffers three or more deprivations out of six possible within the index of labor income, besides, it finds itself under the line of minimum wellness. CONEVAL glossary: <https://tinyurl.com/yxlvgt4a>.

2 Nomenclature used to indicate the second trimester of 2020 (2T2020).

3 If the ITLP increases, the population of insufficient labor income to acquire the basic food basket increases and vice versa.

**CHART 1. THE EVOLUTION OF ITLP (INDEX OF THE EMPLOYMENT TREND OF POVERTY (NATIONAL, URBAN AND RURAL))**



Source: In-house elaboration with CONEVAL (Council for Evaluation of Social Development Policy for its acronym in Spanish) data.

the first to the second trimester of 2020. This phenomenon had the same behavior as the labor purchasing power displaying a fall of  $-20.5\%$  from one trimester to the other.

On this perspective, the rigidity that the social programs are under, added to the lack of emergency policies to handle the effects of COVID-19 to demolish or counteract the scourges in the poorest groups suggest that the social field management finds itself limited and without tools to face the short-term effects as well as the long-term effects left by the pandemic.

It is understandable to consider that although economic activity in Mexico has declined significantly,<sup>4</sup> social policies have remained intact, leaving those who need them most unprotected. Under this scheme, it is worthy to ask ourselves: How much is proposed in social programs to address needs? And in this sense, how effective has it been so far during the sexennium?

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<sup>4</sup> INEGI (National Institute of Statistics and Geography for its acronym in Spanish) reported a significant drop of  $18.9\%$  in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**The scourges of COVID were reflected in the number of total remunerations of the busy people, the same that presented a drastic fall of  $-19.1\%$  from the first to the second trimester of 2020. This phenomenon had the same behavior as the labor purchasing power displaying a fall of  $-20.5\%$  from one trimester to the other.**

## SOCIAL PROGRAMS IN THE 4T

Among all the standard programs led by the federal government, you can find The Pension for the Well-being of Elderly People, Pension for the Wellbeing of People with Permanent Disabilities, The Young Building the Future, and Sowing Lives, in charge of the welfare secretariat (mostly) which will receive \$189,970 million pesos during the 2021 fiscal year.

However, despite the marginal increase compared with the intended in 2020,<sup>5</sup> the so-called “Republican austerity” stops dependencies from satisfying their multiple needs with the available resources. That precludes the adequate implementation of social programs and limits its performance meeting objectives that, from its formulation, presents a lack of definite diagnosis validated from the problems being addressed.

The social programs were implemented under the Federal Executive promise to impulse the development subject to the mandate by the national development plan (PND for its acronym in Spanish) 2019-2024. Same that retakes in axis 2 of social politics,

<sup>5</sup> In 2020, \$187,554 million pesos were allocated to the Secretariat of Welfare.

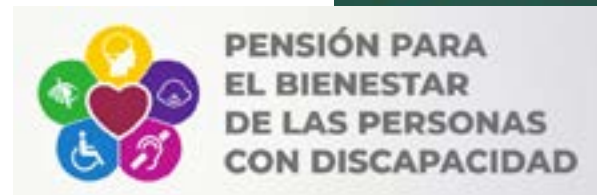


TABLE 1. OBJECTIVES AND NUMBER OF SOCIAL PROGRAMS (MILLION PESOS) 1/2

INSTITUTION	PROGRAM	OBJECTIVE	AMOUNT
<b>BIENESTAR</b>			
	The Welfare Program for Elderly Adults	It provides a pension to the elderly indigenous and non-indigenous 65+ adults as a warranty of the social protection right.	122,623 million pesos
	Pension for the Wellbeing of People with Disabilities Program	It provides financial support to people with permanent disabilities to allow access to better life quality.	13,391 million pesos
	Sowing Life	To ensure that agricultural individuals with incomes below the rural welfare line, in rural areas, have sufficient income to make the land productive.	21,198 million pesos
<b>SEP</b>			
	The Benito Juarez National Wellbeing scholarship program	It provides scholarships for school permanence and retention of the students registered in public High schools for either formal schooling or blended learning located in indigenous areas or highly marginalized areas.	7,618 million pesos
	Youth Writing the Future	To grant scholarships for the school permanence and conclusion of the students of the Public Institutions of Superior Education considered with total coverage.	777 million pesos



TABLE 1. OBJECTIVES AND NUMBER OF SOCIAL PROGRAMS (MILLION PESOS) 2/2

INSTITUTION	PROGRAM	OBJECTIVE	AMOUNT
<b>SEDATU</b>			
	National Reconstruction Program	To attend the municipalities affected by the earthquakes, through the promotion of projects and actions for the reconstruction of housing and infrastructure.	2,843 million pesos
	Urban Improvement Program	Contribute to the reduction of urban and social segregation of people living in blocks with medium, high, and very high levels of urban and social segregation in cities of 50,000 inhabitants or more that are part of the National Urban System (SUN for its acronym in Spanish) 2018.	326 million pesos
<b>STPS</b>			
	Youth Building the Future	To provide scholarships, health insurance, and training certificates issued by the work centers to the linked apprentices, promoting productive inclusion.	12,708 million pesos
<b>SE</b>			
	Microcredits for Wellbeing (Tandas for Wellbeing)	To strengthen the productive and entrepreneurial capacities of micro-entrepreneurs who live in marginalized conditions, through support in the form of financing, advice, and training.	240 million pesos

Source: In-house elaboration with information from the welfare secretariat and PEF (Expenditure Budget of the Federation) for the 2020 fiscal year.



*Image:* “The Secretariat of Wellbeing deployed until September 18 thousand 314 census officials in the whole country, who earn a salary of 10 thousand 217 pesos per month.” Photo: Cuartoscuro at <https://www.sinembargo.mx/18-12-2019/3698409>.

nine social programs that were designed under “building a country of wellness” guidelines.

However, the nine programs established on the PND and illustrated in Table 1, meet different objectives that could hardly get visualized as a detonator to decrease social gaps. The design of such programs presents some weaknesses, which CONEVAL itself revealed in the evaluation of the design with fieldwork,<sup>6</sup> which include the social programs 2019-2020.

<sup>6</sup> These evaluations of design with fieldwork 2019-2020 are part of a short and long-term evaluation agenda. Available on: <https://tinyurl.com/y5voyf9r>.

From the beginning, they have not prioritized the vulnerable groups and consider, to a small extent, the impact of this sanitary crisis.

The functionality of such programs is limited to monetary granting (scholarships or resources) they will help the target population at some point but, elements such as program quality, availability of social benefits, or access to the services are being avoided. However, since pretty much the beginning of this administration, the programs had been under scrutiny, immerse into critics due to their way of operation, and their non-existent or inoperable normativity.

## ¿SOCIAL PROGRAMS OR POLITICAL PROSELYTISM?

Since before December 1st, 2018, the so-called “Servants of the Nation” served as a filter inside the government strategy. They had two important functions:

1. They were in charge of verifying the information of the beneficiaries from the main existing social programs in 2018 and
2. They had the direct responsibility of processing the applications of new incorporations to the new social development programs through the “census of prosperity” under the methodological principle “poor people first”.

However, a series of inconsistencies joined the census process highlighting the legal weakness that they operated with, as well as the lack of transparency where the number of beneficiaries suggests electoral dynamics.

From this perspective, the deploy of the servers of the Nation followed a different guideline to the “poor people first” principle from the census of prosperi-

ty, since the number of interventions<sup>7</sup> of the social programs prioritizes entities such as Mexico State (26,016,722 interventions), Mexico City (13,758,606 interventions), Chiapas (8,369,148 interventions), and Veracruz (8,008,521 interventions),<sup>8</sup> where most of the numbers match the entities with the highest number of citizens subscribed to the electoral list (Chart 2).

Although is difficult to understand, taking as a reference the social vocation with which this government has been promoting itself, it feels like an attack on the development obeying different causes that are not part of the social needs; such as extreme poverty or social deprivation, by implementing programs ruled by the performance of the electoral list.

On top of that, another area of attention appears with the evidence of a lack of government actions to-

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<sup>7</sup> Interventions: Amount of support delivered through the social development programs not considering the interventions made to the elderly adults’ welfare program.

<sup>8</sup> Adjusted calculations to the number of interventions not considering the interventions to the elderly adults’ welfare program.

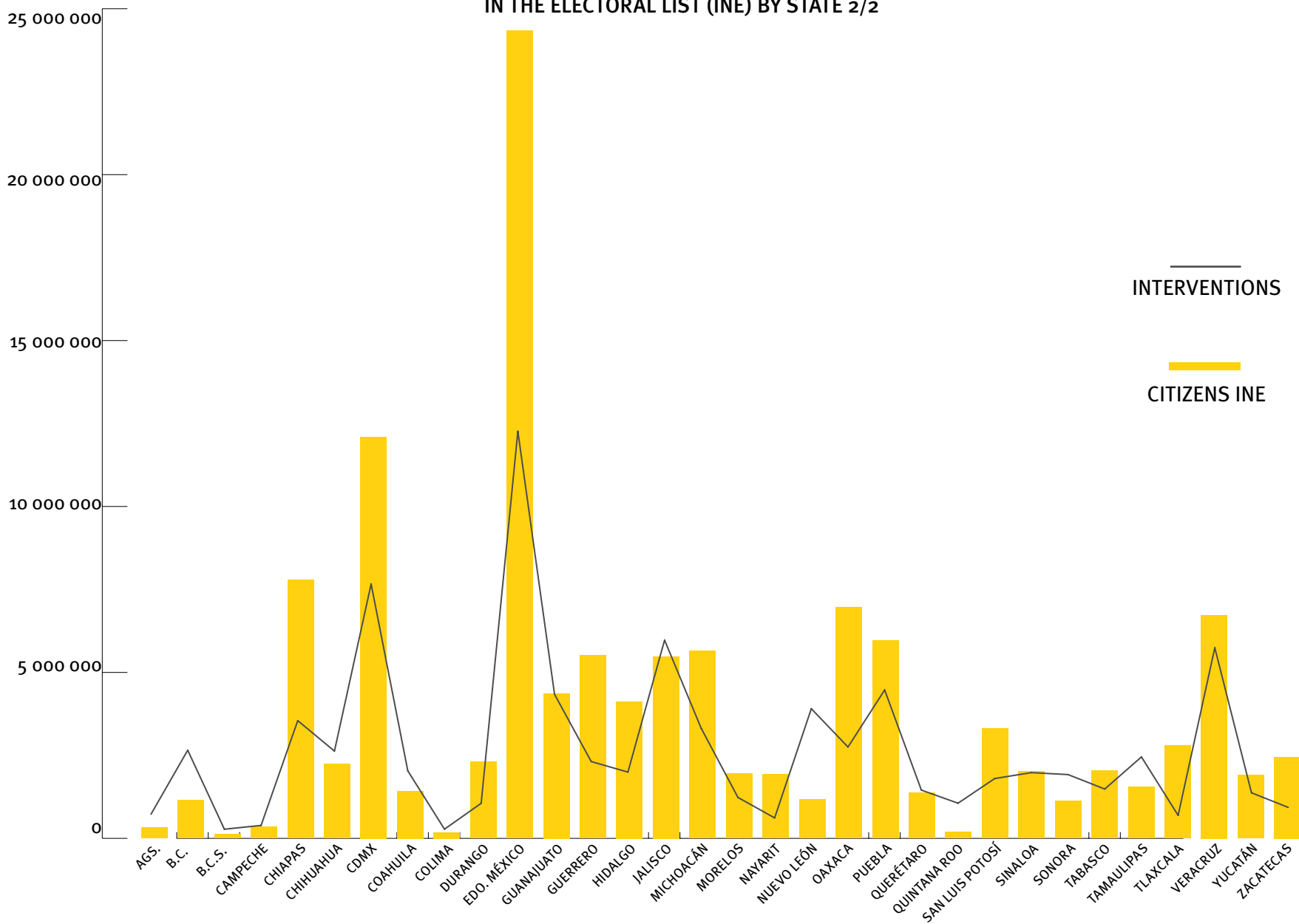
**CHART 2. NUMBER OF INTERVENTIONS OF SOCIAL PROGRAMS VS THE NUMBER OF CITIZENS REGISTERED  
IN THE ELECTORAL LIST (INE) BY STATE 1/2**

STATE	CITIZENS INE	INTERVENTIONS	STATE	CITIZENS INE	INTERVENTIONS
Aguascalientes	977 361	917 17	Morelos	1 463 027	1 945 743
Baja California	2 833 232	1 157 887	Nayarit	869 138	1 936 230
B.C.S.	540 744	612 44	Nuevo León	4 037 714	1 179 855
Campeche	651 164	995 11	Oaxaca	2 925 860	6 957 173
Chiapas	3 691 020	7 784 704	Puebla	458 0751	5 963 168
Chihuahua	2 807 944	2 241 146	Querétaro	1 676 498	1 378 834
Ciudad de México	7 655 381	12 096 136	Quintana Roo	1 295 415	861 73
Coahuila	2 234 131	1 428 629	San Luis Potosí	2 011 542	3 304 362
Colima	541 940	593 66	Sinaloa	2 182 900	2 015 165
Durango	1 292 855	2 314 404	Sonora	2 126 114	1 124 062
Estado de México	12 086 667	24 342 288	Tabasco	1 706 420	2 034 315
Guanajuato	4 455 263	4 368 052	Tamaulipas	2 638 588	1 549 892
Guerrero	2 504 009	5 516 437	Tlaxcala	943 021	2 800 810
Hidalgo	2 197 740	4 121 929	Veracruz	5 805 476	6 728 573
Jalisco	6 026 688	5 482 141	Yucatán	1 597 287	1 899 634
Michoacán	3 465 265	5 648 478	Zacatecas	1 174 730	2 455 373
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>90 995 885</b>	<b>123 755 536.5</b>

Source: In-house elaboration with information from PUB (Registration of Beneficiaries for its acronym in Spanish).

CHART 2. NUMBER OF INTERVENTIONS OF SOCIAL PROGRAMS VS THE NUMBER OF CITIZENS REGISTERED

IN THE ELECTORAL LIST (INE) BY STATE 2/2



Source: In-house elaboration with information from PUB (Registration of Beneficiaries for its acronym in Spanish).

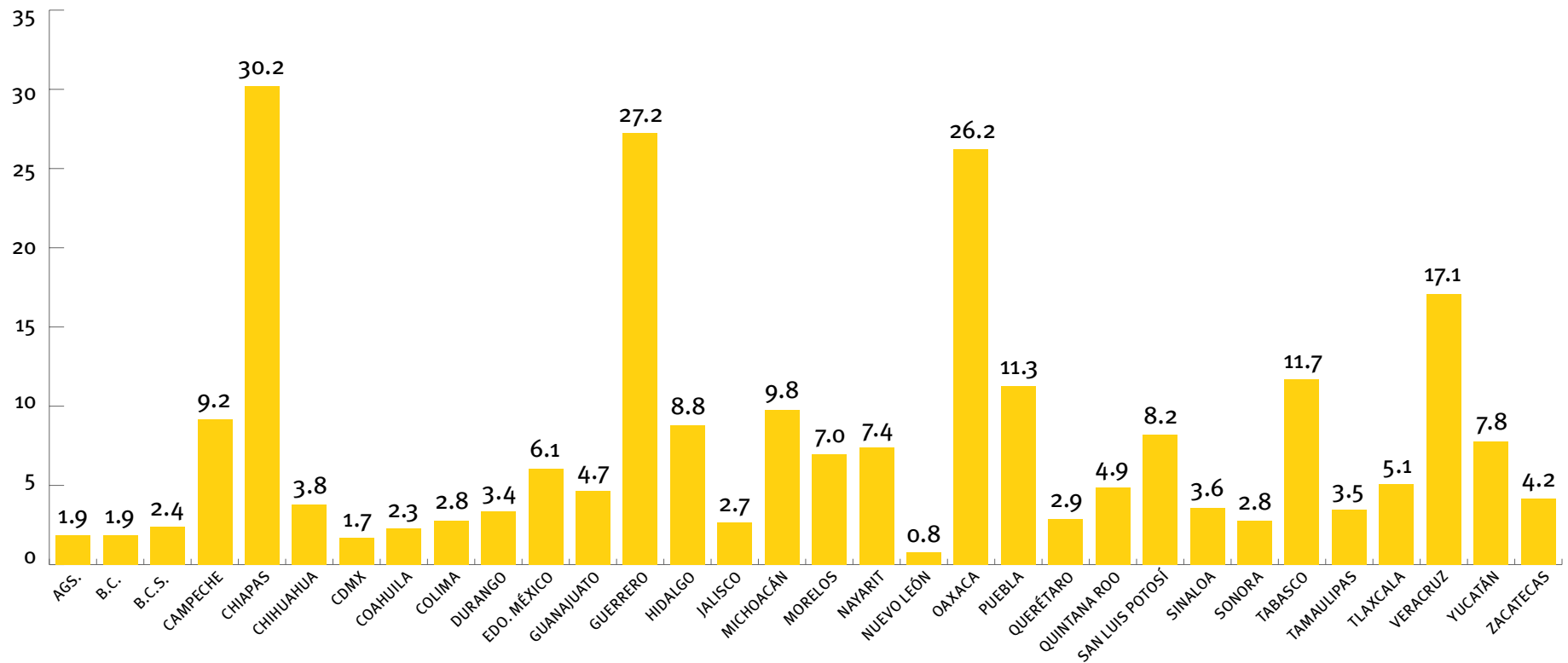
ward the poor. In the middle of an ascending number of needs generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the deployment of all the government social programs has not been proportional to the areas of the highest rates of poverty in the country.

According to the CONEVAL, the highest rates of extreme poverty are located in Chiapas, Guerrero, Oax-

aca, with a percentage of 30.2%, 27.2%, and 26.1%<sup>9</sup> respectively. Followed by Veracruz with 17.1% and Tabasco with 11.7% (Chart 3).

<sup>9</sup> Calculations weighted by the size of the population of each federal entity to 06/2020.

**CHART 3. PERCENTAGE OF INHABITANTS IN EXTREME POVERTY OF THE TOTAL POPULATION BY STATE**



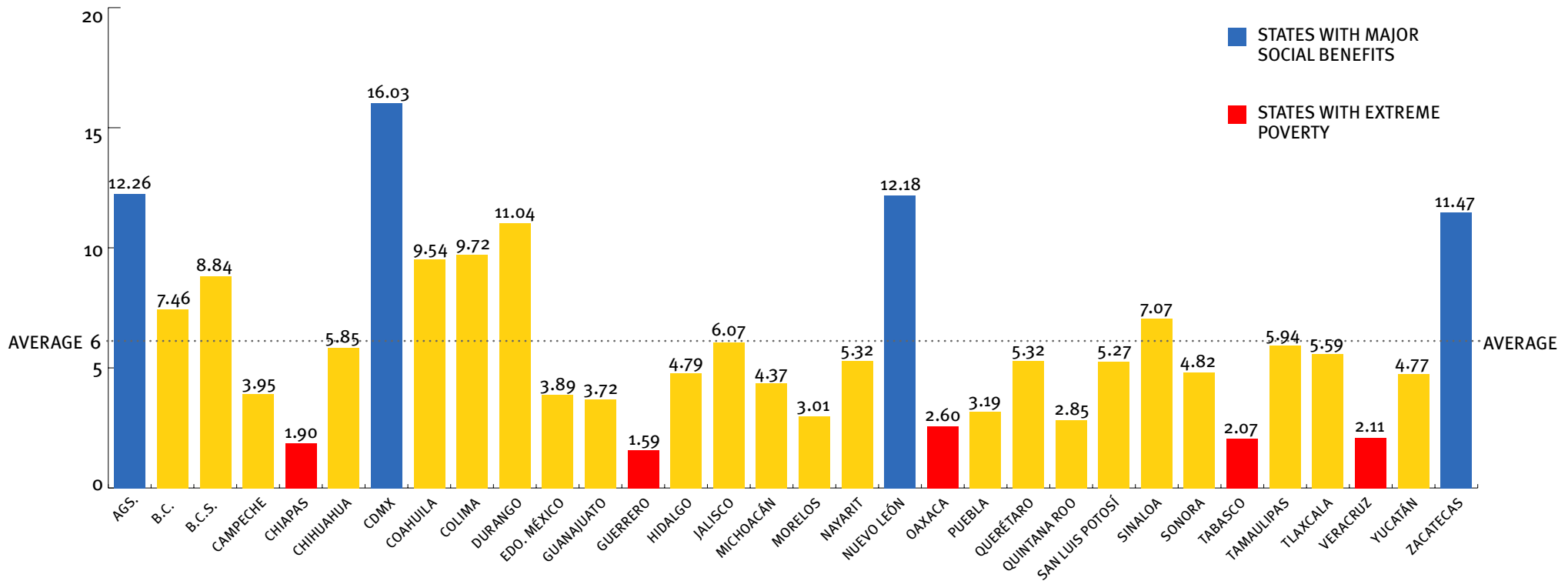
Source: In-house elaboration with information from CONEVAL and CONAPO (National Population Council for its acronym in Spanish).

However, the PUB (Registration of Beneficiaries)<sup>10</sup> indicates that the government social programs have assisted entities such as Mexico City, Aguascalientes, Nuevo León, and Zacatecas first (graph 4, blue bars) with the highest average numbers of social benefits for each inhabitant in state of extreme pov-

10 Registration of Beneficiaries (PUB) available on: <https://pub.bienestar.gob.mx/pub>.

erty(16.0, 12.2, 12.1, and 11.4 respectively) completely forgetting about the most in need entities: Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Veracruz, and Tabasco (Graph 4, red bars) the same that receives the lowest average numbers per inhabitant in the state of extreme poverty. It is even more incongruent the assignation of social supports by the level of extreme poverty in the

CHART 4. AVERAGE NUMBER OF SOCIAL BENEFITS PER INHABITANT IN EXTREME POVERTY



Source: In-house elaboration with information from CONEVAL, CONAPO, and PUB.

country. The gaps are getting wider. This information places in evidence the incongruences of the program and the ineffectiveness of its operability in reaching the objective of serving the poorest, those who find themselves in extreme poverty.<sup>11</sup>

## THE DISCONNECTION BETWEEN POVERTY AND SOCIAL PROGRAMS

The information is not different from the rest of the federal entities, where the proportions of poverty<sup>12</sup> had not been handled by entity either. Only the average number of social benefits per inhabitant in a state of poverty shows that Nayarit, Baja California Sur, and CDMX are within the most beneficiated entities (Chart 5, grey bars), while in Chiapas and Guer-

<sup>11</sup> The states of Aguascalientes and Nuevo León stand out having the lowest levels of extreme poverty and a lot of social support.

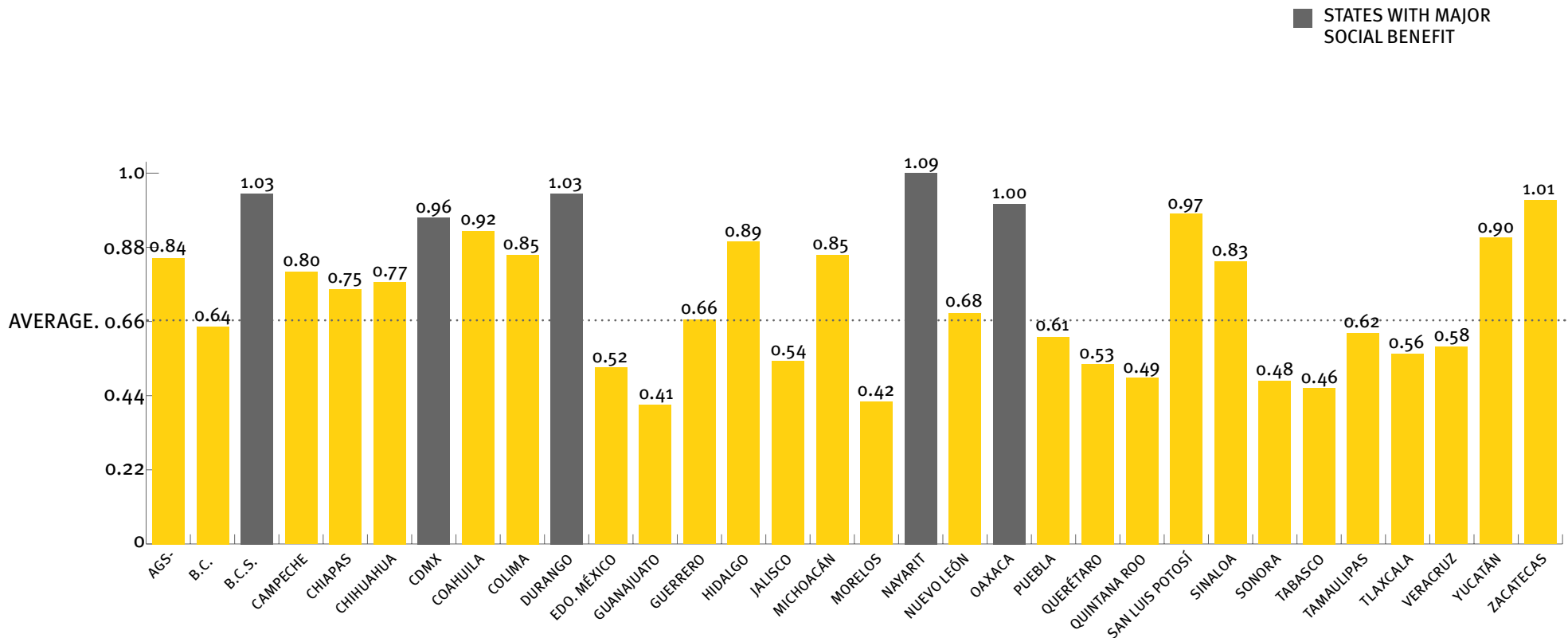
<sup>12</sup> Poverty: A person who finds itself in a state of poverty has at least one social deprivation (within the six indicators of educational lagging, access to health services, access to social security services, housing quality and spaces, basic housing services, and access to feeding) and whose income isn't enough to acquire goods and services required to satisfy its basic dietary and non-dietary needs. CONEVAL glossary: <https://tinyurl.com/yxlvgt4a>.

rero, the assistance doesn't even handle a person in a state of poverty. (Only 0.75 and 0.65 inhabitants in a state of poverty are being assisted by the social programs respectively).

The elements analyzed so far clearly show that the social programs are not reaching their final objective of serving the poorest. On the other hand, the deployment of beneficiaries seems to obey a pattern with electoral purposes, seeking to be present in entities with the highest electoral list and not with the highest number of poor people.



**CHART 5. AVERAGE NUMBER OF SOCIAL BENEFICIARIES PER INHABITANT  
IN A STATE OF POVERTY**



Source: In-house elaboration with information from CONEVAL and PUB.

In other words, an adequate focusing of the social programs does not exist for the entities with the most needs have been left aside, according to the percentage of their population in a state of poverty.

## DEFICIENCY IN THE DESIGN AND OPERABILITY OF SOCIAL PROGRAMS

In a context full of irregularities and on the command of an operational group without experience in public administration, the social programs were implemented with various operational deficiencies pointed out by the evaluation of the National Council for Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL).<sup>13</sup>

The limitations of the social programs referred by CONEVAL origin mainly in the operative component of each one of the programs, most of the recommendations made by the council mentions that:

1. There are inconsistencies in respect of the current rules and the current operating system.

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<sup>13</sup> Evaluations of the design with fieldwork 2019-2020 made to 17 priority social development programs. Available on: <https://tinyurl.com/y5voyf9r>.

*Image:* “2.5 million children work in Mexico because of poverty” at <http://www.sexenio.com.mx/aplicaciones/articulo/default.aspx?Id=27529>.



2. It originates problems of banking penetration, which limits the coverage of the programs.
3. It places in evidence the lack of coordination between the programs and the dependencies to coordinate and strengthen objectives.
4. Lack of consistency in the approaches of the program's issues.
5. It requires greater precision in the formulation of the social problem to address.

One of the most worrisome limitations referred to the programs is the design problems, such as the diagnosis, tree of issues, the operating rules, and the matrix of results indicators (MIR for its acronym in Spanish).

The design, operation, results, and transparency are components in which the social politics of the current government presents incongruences. Also, gaps in the social area were detected, which would indeed impact the vulnerable groups. In that sense, the effectiveness of the social programs has been determined by the inoperability associated with an insufficient institutional strategy.

Within the postulates in the social field of the PND (National development plan for its acronym in Spanish), there is no definition of a single strategy, finely

detailed and homologated to align the operations and the functional strategies of each social actor. In this way, the obstacles to generating a route that allows the optimum practice of public spending it makes the implementation of a result-based management model (GpR), impossible.

## **LACK OF TRANSPARENCY**

One of the other elements that have been a characteristic in implementing the programs in the social area since it started had been the lack of transparency, due to the insufficient methodology clarity and further results. The first alert was generated when the National coordination development programs hired 17,860 Servants of the Nation, with resources approved by the SHCP (Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit for its acronym in Spanish). However, not even the creation of this rubric and its salary shows a single legal foundation.

By not having guidelines associated with the capacities of the state actors (denominated welfare representatives), nor established rules from the Welfare Secretariat, exposing the violation to one of the main

pillars of the current administration, transparency in the government actions. Without a well-defined line of action and an evident lack of experience in developing this type of work, the government has had to hide the embarrassing strategies surrounding the questionable “Census of Prosperity”.

### IS THERE ANY OTHER DATA?

Opposite to the political speech that the current government shares, in the social field, the dilemma is, “if we are so good, why are we so bad?” Despite that, in theory, the implementation of the social programs, have the objective to benefit society in terms such as poverty, in practice, the government and the strategy itself have fallen short in every aspect to reach the goals originally presented in the program.

The social politics of this new administration promised way more than what they were capable to give. At this time, it is evident that they are not as consistent with topics such as social vulnerability, on one hand, and on the other hand, not to have the capabilities to face this kind of challenge that requires knowledge and technical and administrative expertise.



*Image: AMLO promises 6 months to operate social programs. Photo: at <https://www.milenio.com/politica/amlo-6-meses-plazo-operen-programas-sociales>*

The speech that the vulnerable groups and “the poor come first” anticipates any action or policy from this administration, does not come true in this reality. The evidence reflects that this principle has not been thoroughly followed, is not very realistic, unlikely achievable, and is far from having a radical success in its implementation. It is concerning that social programs are not completely focused on the poverty dynamics in our country, besides the young and elderly adults. Specific groups or selected strata of the population have been left aside plus, the effects of the sanitary crisis have been ignored within the poorest strata of our country. Effective access to social rights is not being considered either.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The characteristics that a social right demands are: accessibility, availability, and quality of all and each of the programs.

**The primary evidence consists of the deployment of the social benefits to pursue an objective that suggests assisting an electoral strategy and not the needs of the poorest,**

therefore the results would hardly be significant by the end of the six-year term to what social field refers. Limiting the government strategy to deliver essentially monetary support with no conditions is to accept that poverty will continue threatening the social wealth of the people. Even though financial support will help to a point to the target population, that will not assure at optimum assistance in a mid-long term, since they are not related or correspond to the plenty exercise of social rights.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The programs do not present quality education, convenient access, far less the right utilization of it only in the education field, to mention an example.



