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# Food and Nutritional Safety Facilities and nutritionists' actions: elements for reflection

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## ABSTRACT

### Objective

To describe and review the role of nutritionists in three Brazilian Food Security facilities: popular-restaurants, food banks, and community kitchens.

### Methods

This study comprises a review of the scientific literature combined with an assessment of regulations and technical documents addressing the role of nutritionists in Food Security facilities.

### Results

A total of 29 studies were included in the sample after screening for the inclusion and exclusion criteria: 12 addressed popular-restaurants, 11 food banks, and 6 community kitchens. The studies indicated that there was an insufficient number of nutritionists in the facilities when compared to the requirements set forth in today's regulations, which ought to be reviewed and updated taking into account the current context. Furthermore, it was difficult to obtain accurate data on the number of nutritionists working in these facilities in Brazil.

### Conclusion

In order to enhance the role of nutritionists in food and nutritional security, actions are required at all levels, including improving professional training, expanding job openings in the public food and nutrition programs, monitoring and inspection by legal councils and raising awareness and mobilizing the professional category to value and acknowledge the actual need of nutritionists and their duties in the food and nutritional security teams.

**Keywords:** Food security. Human right to adequate food. Nutritional sciences. Nutritionists.

## INTRODUCTION

In Brazil, in 2021-2022, 41.3% of the households were identified as having food security and 15.5% as having severe food insecurity (FI), that is, 33 million Brazilians were facing hunger [1]. On the other hand, the results of the 2023 *Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios Contínua* (PNAD, Continuous National Household Sample Survey), indicated that 72.4% of the Brazilian households were in a situation of food security, and 4.1% were in a condition of severe FI [2]. This reduction in the rates of severe FI can be attributed to a set of economic, social and structural factors, such as,

for example, an increase in family income and education; improvement in basic sanitation conditions; growth of employment rates and/or insertion in the labor market; improvement in the food dietary quality; access to health services and drinking water; among others [3]. However, as pointed out by the *Rede Brasileira de Pesquisa em Soberania e Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional* (REDE PENSSAN, Brazilian Research Network on Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security), the reinstallation of the *Conselho Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional* (CONSEA, National Council on Food Security and Nutrition) in 2023, played a crucial role in this process. However, despite the improvement in the aforementioned indices, 27.6% of the Brazilian households still experienced FI in 2023, whether mild, moderate or severe. Therefore, it is assumed that strategies are required to ensure the fostering of the population food and nutrition security (FNS), at all levels of the food supply chain and access in this country [4].

In this connection, besides CONSEA, the role of the *Sistema Nacional de Segurança Alimentar* (SISAN, National Food Security System) and its components is highlighted, with emphasis on the food and nutritional security equipment (EqSAN), which aim to contribute to the fight against hunger, aiming at ensuring healthy, culturally appropriate and safe food to achieve the fostering of human dignity [5,6]. However, it is important to highlight the incipience of the process of decentralization and adherence to SISAN at the municipal level, as opposed to adherence at the state level, a fact that limits the scope and impact of the system nationally [7].

Despite the aforementioned challenges, the SISAN infrastructure involves the operationalization of EqSAN, requiring support, financing and institutionalization of different intersectoral, coordinated and complementary programs and actions, addressing all aspects of the food system, with a view at promoting the human right to adequate food (HRAF) [6]. According to the regulations, EqSAN include: *Popular-Restaurants, Food Banks, Community Kitchens* and other facilities such as street markets, public markets food outlets, food supply centers, public grocery stores, organic and agroecological markets, support units for the distribution of family farming products and, more recently, solidarity kitchens [8,9]. Among the many actors involved in the operationalization of EqSAN, nutritionists deserve special mention, due to the nature of the actions developed in such settings. According to Resolution No. 600/2018 of the *Conselho Federal de Nutrição* (FNC, Federal Nutrition Council) [10], the professional's performance in these facilities is provided for in the segment - *Política Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional* (PNSAN, National Policy for Food and Nutrition Security), in the subsegment - SISAN: Food Banks (public, private and foundations), Popular-Restaurants, Community Kitchens and other food security facilities. Furthermore, according to the sole paragraph of Law No. 8,234, of September 17, 1991 [11], "the participation of nutritionists in multidisciplinary teams, created by public or private entities and intended to plan, coordinate, supervise, implement, execute and evaluate policies, programs, courses at different levels, research or events of any nature, directly or indirectly related to food and nutrition, as well as to prepare and review legislation and codes specific to this area is mandatory".

Taking as reference the three EqSAN listed in Resolution No. 600/2018/CFN [10], the following information is reported on the institutional page of the *Ministério do Desenvolvimento e Assistência Social, Família e Combate à Fome* (MDS, Ministry of Development and Social Assistance, Family and Fight against Hunger): "regarding the minimum team of the Community Kitchen, Popular-Restaurant / Food Bank, considering that the management and maintenance of the facilities are carried out by the municipality or the state personnel, the composition of the team is their responsibility. We point out that, according to the CFN Resolution, "a nutritionists' presence is mandatory" [12-14].

Based on the above, this article aims to reflect and offer proposals on the work of professionals in three EqSAN: Popular-Restaurants (PR), Food Banks (FB) and Community Kitchens (CK). The choice of these facilities is justified by their greater connection with government spheres and by their financing and management standards that follow already established bureaucratic and institutional processes. In addition, these facilities aim to ensure the direct access of the FI population to food, whether through adequate meals or with the supply of fresh food, and they can and should act in an articulated manner with each other. Finally, the facilities chosen are the EqSAN with the oldest official registrations, such as, for example, the PR.

## METHOD

This is a review of the scientific literature [15,16] associated with the analysis of regulations and technical documents [17] on the performance of nutritionists in three Brazilian EqSAN: PR, FB and CK.

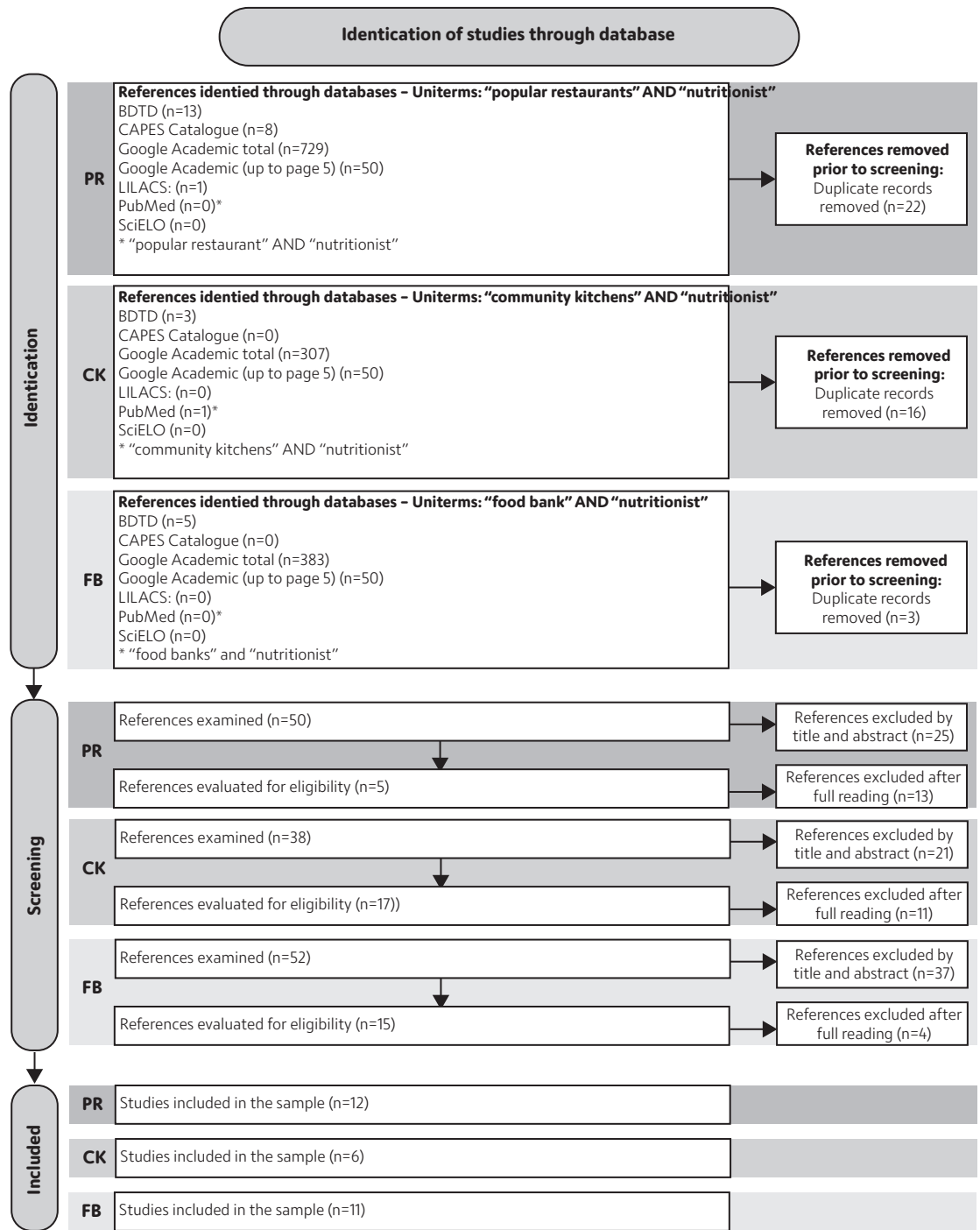
The exploratory bibliographic search on the three EqSAN objects of this article was carried out in the following electronic databases: Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO.org), PubMed® (MEDLINE), Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD); Catalog of Theses and Dissertations of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES); LILACS - Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences; and Google Scholar. With the exception of the PubMed® (MEDLINE) database, the following search strategies were used in the other databases: (“popular-restaurants” AND “nutritionist”); (“food banks” AND “nutritionist”) and (“community kitchens” AND “nutritionist”). In PubMed® (MEDLINE) the search strategies were: (“popular-restaurants” AND “nutritionist”); (“food banks” AND “nutritionist”) and (“community kitchens” AND “nutritionist”). Searches were initially conducted in July 2024 and updated until January 2025.

The following inclusion criteria were adopted: scientific articles, theses, dissertations and course completion papers that presented quantitative and/or qualitative data on the presence and/or performance of nutritionists in EqSAN. There was no year restriction thus allowing the identification of these studies trajectory from the incorporation of the facilities into the national public FNS agenda until 2024.

The exclusion criteria covered duplicates, books, book chapters and papers presented at events/congresses. In the Google Scholar, due to the specificities of this platform, the selection was limited to the first five pages, excluding duplicates and citations. There are reports of use of the first five [18], the first ten [19], the first 14 [20] and the first 20 pages [21], among others. In general, Google Scholar is used as a complementary database, restricting the search to a predefined limit [18-21].

After the selection, the articles underwent exploratory and selective reading, followed by interpretative analysis to identify the presence or absence of nutritionists in the EqSAN, the number of such professionals in the facility and considerations about their performance. Figure 01 presents the flowchart of the bibliographic search.

The FNC was inquired for data on the number of nutritionists working in the EqSAN, and the MDS was requested information on the number of facilities. In addition, official websites were searched, especially those of the SDM and FNC, focusing on regulations and standards. Data from the Food and Nutrition Security Survey (MapaSAN 2022), coordinated by the SDM, covering 1,845 municipalities that responded to the SISAN management questionnaires; FNS actions and public FNS facilities [22] were also considered.



**Figure 1** – Flowchart of the bibliographic review on Popular-Restaurants, Food Banks and Community Kitchens.  
 Note: CK: Community Kitchens; FB: Food Banks; PR: Popular-Restaurants.

The three EqSAN assessed aim to combat hunger, ensure FNS and promote the HRAF, operating with their own specificities (Chart 2). Thus, the results will be presented separately for each EqSAN, starting with its historical characterization, followed by the analysis of the nutritionists' performance.

## Nutritionists' role in popular-restaurants

Popular-Restaurants are facilities that were created in the 1940s [23-25]; their purpose is to ensure a proper space for meals, as well as food and nutrition education (FNE) actions, the promotion of food sovereignty and dialogue with other FNS actions [25-28]. In 2004, they were included in the Zero Hunger Program [25] and, currently (2024), they are managed by the MDS as a federal agency.

The MDS defines Popular-Restaurants as facilities intended for municipalities with more than 100,000 inhabitants that have a high number of people living in poverty or misery. Access to PRs must be universal, with priority given to specific population groups in situations of food and nutritional insecurity and/or social vulnerability [12].

According to the data provided by the federal coordination of the program with the MDS, in November 2023, there were 478 Popular-Restaurants in Brazil. Out of these, 128 (26.8%) were funded by the MDS and 350 (74.3%) received funding from local governments, private institutions or civil society [29].

According to the MapaSAN 2022 data, 248 PRs in this country were reported among the municipalities that took part in the survey. The Northeast region had the largest number of PRs (34.8%), followed by the Southeast (33.9%), South (18.5%), North (11%) and Central-West reported the lowest number of such facilities, totaling 1.8% [22]. The average cost to prepare a meal served at lunchtime in 2022, ranged between R\$ 8.57 to a maximum R\$ 35.00. The average price charged for a meal at lunchtime at the PRs was R \$1.95; an average of 1,117 people was served daily [22].

The PRs operational characteristics (objective, methodology, audience and minimum functional requirement) are summarized in Chart 1.

**Chart 1** – Description of Popular-Restaurants, Food Banks and Community Kitchens' main characteristics. Brazil, 2024.

Popular-Restaurants	
Objective	Expand the supply of nutritionally adequate meals at affordable prices to low-income, socially vulnerable populations and those in situations of food and nutritional insecurity; and also promote adequate and healthy nutrition and the appreciation of regional eating habits.
Methodology	Provision of nutritionally adequate meals at affordable prices, giving priority to specific population groups in situations of food and nutritional insecurity and/or social vulnerability.
Public	Universal access, giving priority to specific population groups in situations of food and nutritional insecurity and/or social vulnerability.
Minimum requirement	Estimated one thousand meals/day minimum production, at lunchtime, 5 days/week.
Food Bank	
Objective	Ensure food and nutritional security by recovering food that is lost and wasted throughout the production chain, but is still suitable for human consumption.
Methodology	Receiving donations of food that is unfit for sale, but that maintains its nutritional properties and poses no risk to consumption. Transfer of this food to non-profit civil society institutions that produce and distribute meals free of charge.
Public	Non-profit civil society institutions with a social purpose that produce and distribute meals free of charge.
Minimum requirement	Recovery of food from food losses and waste, with delivery for meal production in organizations that serve people who are in social, food and nutritional vulnerability.
Community Kitchens	
Objective	Ensure access to a healthy and adequate meal for those in situations of social vulnerability and food and nutritional insecurity, and carry out activities of productive social inclusion, strengthening collective action and community identity and food and nutritional education actions.
Methodology	Provision of meals, preferably free of charge, and the development of actions related to strengthening citizenship, generating employment and income, professional training, education in food and nutritional security and healthy eating, among others.
Public	Universal access, yet giving priority to the care of individuals referred to social assistance services, such as Centros de Referência de Assistência Social (CRAS, Social Assistance Reference Centers).
Minimum requirement	Minimum 100 meals/day production, 5 days/week.

Source: Ministério do Desenvolvimento e Assistência Social, Família e Combate à Fome [12-14].

It is worth noting that, in connection with the data requested from the CFN regarding the presence of nutritionists in the three investigated facilities, there is no mapping or system for recording the number of professionals working in EqSAN in the country. However, the FNC presents minimum numerical reference parameters for nutritionists' work for the subsegment – SISAN [10]. For PR and CK, the FNC parameters include two variables: the number and quantity of meals served (lunch and/or dinner). Based on this information, the number of professionals required and the workload are stipulated. For example, PR or CK that offer between 100 and 500 meals at lunchtime or at dinnertime should have a nutritionist with a weekly workload ranging from 15h to 20h. For the food outlets that serve up to 1,000 meals/lunch, 2 nutritionists (30h/week) are recommended; between 1,001 and 1,500 meals/lunch: 3 nutritionists (30h/week); between 1,501 and 2,000 meals/lunch: 4 nutritionists (30h/week); above 2,500 meals/lunch: 4 nutritionists + 1 for every 1,000 meals/day. These numbers will be higher if the facility produces two kinds of meals per day, for example, lunch and dinner, or lunch and breakfast. For FB (public, private and foundational set ups), the recommendation is one nutritionist with a workload of 30 hours per week in each establishment [10].

The literature review on Popular-Restaurants and the work of nutritionists in Brazil yielded 12 papers, published from 2009 to 2024, as shown in Chart 2.

Of the 12 studies in the sample, only two, published in 2009 and 2023, reported numerical data on the presence of nutritionists in Popular-Restaurants [28,38]. The oldest study is a dissertation that evaluated 10 PRs located in the State of Rio de Janeiro. At the time, the study identified, on average, three nutritionists per PR [28]. Despite such number of professionals on the staff, according to the FNC recommendations, the ideal would be at least 4 nutritionists per PR taking into account the 2,530 meals/day/lunch produced on average [10].

The 2023 study is a doctoral thesis whose investigation purpose was the Popular-Restaurants existing throughout the country [38]. The study included a sample of 87 PRs set up in Brazilian capitals; it identified that 98.8% of the facilities had nutritionists in charge (RN). Considering the 87 facilities that responded informing about the number of nutritionists on their staff, the sum of these professionals totaled 114 nutritionists. In other words, there was an average of 1.3 professionals per PR in the country. In this same study, it was reported that each PR served an average of 1,213 meals per day, only at lunchtime. Therefore, based on the provisions of the FNC, an average of 3 nutritionists would be required per Popular-Restaurant in those facilities that served only lunch and 4 professionals for those that served more than one meal. In other words, the number of professionals was far below what was necessary and/or established [10].

The other studies informed on the role of nutritionists, suggesting the need for the professional's appreciation and effective presence in the PR. The authors highlighted that the presence of nutritionists in the food production units is essential for the production of quality and safe food in terms of hygiene, in order to ensure the safety and health of the consumer [33-36]. Furthermore, they enhanced the relevance of the professional's role in the performance of FNE actions in the equipment, in the promotion of health associated with food safety and the assurance of the right to citizenship and food [36] and in the encouragement and rescue of food culture [39].

The article by Zimmermann et al. [40] highlights the implementation of FNS policies and programs in the capitals Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais) and Curitiba (Paraná), due to the pioneering role in the creation of food supply policies in the mid-1980s and due to the continuity and diversity of the actions developed. The authors emphasized that the success of such municipalities involve, among other management actions, the hiring of professionals, particularly nutritionists to expand the capacity for action and regulation of food policies.

**Chart 2** – Studies on Brazilian popular-restaurants and the presence and/or performance of nutritionists in those establishments. Brazil, 2024.

1 of 2

Authorship and year	Type of bibliographic source	Research objective and number of PR investigated (N)	Method/ Type of study	Main findings and/or reflections
Oliveira (2009) [28]	Master's Dissertation	To assess the hygienic and sanitary conditions of the production process of meals in popular-restaurants located in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Number of PR (N=10)	Exploratory, cross-sectional study carried out between 2007 and 2008. Application of an inspection script in order to assess hygienic-sanitary conditions and identify non-conformities that could interfere with the quality of the meals served and the percentage of adequacy of hygienic-sanitary conditions (PAHSC) was calculated.	Each PR had an average of 3 nutritionists on staff. Each PR produced an average of 2,530 meals/day/lunch.
Ginani (2012) [30]	Doctoral Thesis	Assess the nutritional, sensory and cultural quality of popular Brazilian menus (N=37)	To identify the different instruments that were used in the evaluation, a systematic search of the literature on methods, instruments and parameters for menu analysis was carried out. Two instruments were selected to assess nutritional quality, MQI and QEMP. To assess cultural aspects of food, another instrument was developed, the IRFP (Identifier of the Presence of Regional Foods).	The authors point out that good evaluations in the MQI test may be related to the presence of a nutritionist in the restaurant, highlighting him/her as the professional technically qualified to provide the preparation of quality meals in all their aspects.
Portella et al. (2013) [31]	Scientific journal article	Evaluate the inclusion of nutritionists within the Psychosocial Care Network. Santa Maria / Rio Grande do Sul (N=0)	Literature review, using databases, gray literature and platforms of the Federal Government of Brazil, including articles without limitation of year of publication, dissertations, books, laws, ordinances and federal laws	The authors emphasize that the inclusion of nutritionists in psychosocial care (including food and nutritional security facilities) is essential.
Boas (2013) [32]	Master's Dissertation	To evaluate the supply of healthy regional foods and preparations in the Popular-Restaurants program before and after intervention through a culinary workshop. Number of PR (N=37)	Longitudinal and intervention study. Data collection took place in 2010, through the application of a questionnaire called Regional Food Offer adapted from the model created by Botelho (2006)	The PR whose nutritionists participated in the workshops or received information about them showed an increase in the monthly frequency of regional preparations.
Silva (2014) [33]	Undergraduate Course Completion Work	Describe quality management strategies for popular-restaurants based on evidence through an integrative review (N=not applicable)	Integrative literature review	The research also highlighted the importance of nutritionists in restaurants and in educational processes as strategies that contribute to the quality of services.
Volpini-Rapina et al. (2016) [34]	Scientific journal article	Preparation of a questionnaire on good handling practices and application to employees of food production units with and without a technical manager on site. Number of PR (N= 8)	Evaluation study with the application of a questionnaire consisting of 10 multiple-choice questions based on the Manual of Good Food Handling Practices. Analysis of the results submitted to calculations of mean, standard deviation and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)	The lack of technical responsibility and training of handlers resulted in erroneous practices that put the health of the population at risk.
Calazans et al. (2018) [35]	Scientific journal article	Evaluate the meals offered in food and nutrition units included in the Popular Restaurants Program of the State of Rio Grande do Norte. Number of PR (N=32)	This is a descriptive, cross-sectional study conducted in four popular-restaurants in 2017. The research included: 1. Document analysis (of the terms of reference of the contracts and acknowledgement of the standard of the menus and preparation technical sheets); 2. On-site measurement (Identification of serving utensils, household measures and weighing of portions); 3. Non-participant observation of a management team and technical managers of the units meeting	The authors highlight the pressing need for nutritionists to contribute to the adaptation of the menus offered, and for these professionals to appropriate the concepts and actions related to the promotion of healthy eating among the population benefiting from the PR.

**Chart 2** – Studies on Brazilian popular-restaurants and the presence and/or performance of nutritionists in those establishments. Brazil, 2024.

Authorship and year	Type of bibliographic source	Research objective and number of PR investigated (N)	Method/ Type of study	Main findings and/or reflections
Calazans et al. (2019) [36]	Article published in a journal	To promote dialogue between social participation and institutional FNE within food and nutrition programs, based on the Popular-Restaurants Program in the state of RN. (N=34)	Production of educational materials aimed at users, helping them understand aspects related to healthy eating, and the creation of an illustrative guide aimed at food handlers	The authors conclude that promoting adequate nutrition requires the nutritionist to act as an educational agent and foster changes that promote food autonomy and the recognition of food as a right.
Sousa e Oliveira (2022) [37]	Scientific journal article	To present the experience of implementing Food and Nutrition Education (FNE) actions in public facilities in Lauro de Freitas, Bahia, seeking a critical reflection of this practice in light of the guidelines of the Brazilian Food and Nutrition Education Framework. Number of PR. (N= 1)	Case study, of the experience report type, based on experiences and documentary research, such as articles published on the city hall website, local blogs, reports and photographic records	The authors highlight the importance of the nutritionist in carrying out FNE actions in the facilities, encouraging the transfer of knowledge to those who attend the PR.
Oliveira (2023) [38]	Doctoral Thesis	To assess the adequacy of Brazilian PRs to the FNS promotion parameters and verify their association with characteristics of the context in which the PR is located (N=87)	The methodological procedures were developed in three stages. Integrative review of evaluation studies on PR; Evaluation of the PR of the capitals of Brazil, having as analysis parts the guidelines that govern the PR and the National Policy of FNS, through an evaluation matrix that includes two dimensions: Organizational Political Dimension and Technical-Operational Dimension; Study of association between the level of adequacy of the PR and context variables.	The importance of training and raising awareness among managers and technical managers of PR for the operation of the facility as a tool to promote FNS and HRAF, in addition to offering meals, is highlighted.
Oliveira et al. (2024) [39]	Scientific journal article	Track Systemic Arterial Hypertension (SAH), Diabetes Mellitus (DM) and Obesity and provide health guidance to the socially vulnerable population that visits a popular-restaurant in a city in the state of Minas Gerais. Number of PR (N= 1)	Experience report	The article mentions the importance of nutritionists in PRs by stating that hiring a nutritionist should be recommended, with the aim of preparing menus in accordance with the guidelines of the Food Guide for the Brazilian Population and the Workers' Food Program.
Zimmermann et al. (2024) [40]	Scientific journal article	To analyze and compare the state capacities of two Brazilian metropolises in conducting food policies, Curitiba and Belo Horizonte. (N=9)	Bibliographic and documentary review. Additionally, 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted with (former) secretaries, (former) managers and representatives of civil society working in the two municipalities in 2021.	Among several factors that contributed to the construction and continuity of food policies in the cities studied, the authors also mention the hiring of several professionals, such as nutritionists, biochemists, agronomists, administrators, economists, geographers, among others.

## Nutritionists' role in food banks

Food banks emerged in Brazil at a later date than the Popular-Restaurants and the food bank experiences in North America and Europe, which began in the 1960s and 1980s, respectively [41]. The first Brazilian Food Bank was set up as an initiative of the civil society in São Paulo in 1994 [42], and soon after it became the *Mesa São Paulo* program, run by the Serviço Social do Comércio (SESC). Within the scope of SESC, this program gained national scale and deploys currently more than 100 units in operation [43].

At the state government level, the *Banco Municipal de Alimentos de Santo André, São Paulo*, was one of the pioneering experiences, created in 2000 [41]. In the same year, a group of companies, unions, entities and service groups came together and created a Food Bank in Rio Grande do Sul. In 2007, with the aim of expanding the food bank activities and drive its benefits to other locations, the Rio Grande do Sul Food Bank Network was created. Later, in 2010, with the participation of all active FBs, the Brazilian Food Bank Network was inaugurated [44]. It is worth noting that the FB model for combating food loss and waste and providing the HRAF was also incorporated as a target of the FNS public policies from 2003 onwards, in the Zero Hunger Strategy, integrating the axis of actions that articulate access to food [45].

According to the database provided by CGESAN/MDS, there were 325 FBs in Brazil in November 2023. Out of these, 94 (28.9%) were financed by the MDS and 231 (71.1%) received funding from local governments, private institutions or civil society [29].

It is worth noting that Brazil Federal Union, through SESAN/MDS, supports the implementation of food banks in the States, the Federal District and in the municipalities, as well as in Supply Centers, in partnership with state or municipal governments, through financing initiatives for the preparation of basic architectural and engineering projects, execution of works and installations, and acquisition of equipment, permanent materials and new consumables, with a view to making food supply viable and combating losses and waste in urban and metropolitan agrifood systems [46,47].

As defined by the Brazilian Network of Food Banks, established on September 17, 2020, by Decree No. 10,490, food banks are “physical and/or logistical structures that offer the service of collecting and/or receiving and distributing free food items from donations from the private and/or public sectors and that are directed to public or private institutions characterized as providers of social assistance, civil protection and defense services, educational and justice units, health establishments and other food and nutrition units” [48].

Tenuta et al. [49] enhances that food banks are facilities or infrastructure with three basic objectives: I) combat food loss and waste; II) ensure food and nutrition security and III) provide food and nutrition education. The same authors, who assessed 217 Brazilian food banks operating in 2019 and 2020, identified four management modalities namely: (a) food banks of federated entities (in the survey, there were only units under the management of municipal governments); (b) food banks of Supply Centers; (c) food banks of civil society organizations; and (d) food banks of autonomous social services (the survey showed that there were only units under the management of the *Serviço Social do Comércio*, belonging to *Rede Mesa Brasil*). Furthermore, those authors observed that the units were spread throughout Brazil, with a greater concentration in the Southeast region (65.63%), followed by the Northeast (28.57%) and then the South region (19.61%) [49]

Regarding the services provided by the food banks, Tenuta et al. [49] found that 41.5% (n=90) of the facilities had families in situations of social risk as their main beneficiaries, while 36.9% (n=80) mainly served children, by delivering food donations to childcare institutions. These two beneficiary profiles were the most significant in the four food banks management modalities. Considering that food banks can receive a wide range of products, the aforementioned study investigated the kind of food most frequently delivered in the facilities; it was found that 85.2% (n=185) included “fruits and vegetables (natural, chilled or frozen, dried and dehydrated – without the addition of other ingredients)” as the most common type of food included in the operational stocks [49].

The food banks operational characteristics (objective, methodology, target audience and minimum functional requirement) are summarized in Chart 1.

The literature review on FB and the work of nutritionists in Brazil yielded a sample of eleven studies, published from 2014 to 2024. Chart 3 presents a summary of these studies according to the parameters investigated.

Three of the eleven studies listed in Chart 3 were evaluations of food banks in Minas Gerais [50,43,55]; there was another study that was a national survey and characterization of food banks operating in Brazil [42].

All those studies investigated if a nutritionist worked at the facility. The findings of Tenuta [42,43] demonstrate that a significant portion of the food banks operating in the country did not comply with the FNC recommendation of one nutritionist working per unit. The aforementioned national survey indicated that 57% of the facilities had a nutritionist to provide technical guidance [42].

The other three studies evaluated food banks in Minas Gerais; however only Tenuta, [43], when evaluating public food banks, assessed whether there were one or more professionals working in the unit, without evidencing the parameter for such definition. Furthermore, the author highlighted that 66.67% of nutritionists had temporary employment relationships, via contracts or held commissioned positions. It is understood that, for the operationalization process to be carried out effectively, such employment relationships ought to be permanent and not subject to management changes. Costa et al. [50] found a similar scenario, corroborating the concern regarding the fragility of the nutritionists’ employment relationship and their high turnover. According to the authors, the employment fragility of those who work in food banks constitutes a crucial point for evaluating the continuity and stability of this policy [50].

The other seven studies mentioned make relevant references to the presence of nutritionists working in food banks, discussing their skills and abilities as activities specific to their profession [51-54, 56-58].

We suggest that future studies focus in more detail the characteristics and limits of the nutritionists’ work in food banks. It is essential to highlight the relevance of this professional’s activity in such facilities, given their particular *modus operandi* when collecting food that does not meet commercial standards and when serving people in situations of social, economic and health vulnerability. Therefore, it is imperative to have a technical manager capable of assessing the health quality of donations, in addition to carrying out educational actions aimed at the consumption of adequate and quality food.

**Chart 3** – Studies on Brazilian food banks and the presence and/or performance of nutritionists in the facility. Brazil, 2024.

1 of 2

Authorship and year	Type of bibliographic source	Research objective and number of food banks investigated (N)	Method/type of study	Main findings and/or reflections
Costa et al. (2014) [50]	Scientific journal article	1. Construct variables for food bank evaluation. 2. Assess the banks' response capacity in collecting, distributing and reducing food waste. (N = 6)	Cross-sectional descriptive study carried out from March 2010 to July 2011 in food banks established in the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais.	Most food banks do not meet the staffing requirements recommended by the Ministry of Social Development, especially due to the lack of social workers and coordinators on staff, with the latter function being assumed by nutritionists, in addition to not having stable and sufficient teams. In the sample assessed, 100% had such professionals.
Galisa (2014) [51]	Doctoral Thesis	Promote bioethical reflection on the contributions of the Food Bank program to the nutrition of the people involved and to the environment. (N = 6)	Cross-sectional research covering all Food Banks in the city of São Paulo, based on an analysis of the year 2012, from a survey of official websites and a semi-structured interview adapted from Bastos; Costa, 2007.	Highlights the various activities and duties of a nutritionist in a food bank. In the sample analyzed, 100% had a professional.
Tenuta (2014) [43]	Master's Dissertation	To evaluate food banks, based on the structure-process-result triad, with regard to material, human and financial resources, physical and organizational structure of food banks and their processes of coordination with partners, collection, processing, storage and distribution of food products, assistance to beneficiaries and education in food and nutrition. (N = 10)	Descriptive cross-sectional study, employing a quantitative approach with qualitative analysis, conducted from November 2012 to November 2014 in ten operational municipal food banks in Minas Gerais, affiliated with the Ministry of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger. Data were collected through Quarterly Activity Reports and a semi-structured questionnaire.	It highlights the need for the nutritionist to be integrated into the work team responsible for implementing a food bank, as well as organizing the operational processes, especially since this is an activity exclusive to this professional. In the sample analyzed, 60% had a nutritionist.
Paula et al. (2017) [52]	Scientific journal article	Present a proposal for a Good Practices Guidelines (GPG) with a broader view for application in FB. (N = Not applicable)	Adaptation of GPG used for food services and regulatory frameworks regarding Good Practices at national and international levels.	One of the relevant factors for the implementation and maintenance of GMP is the presence of a qualified Technical responsible (TR) and the study highlights that the presence of a nutritionist, or another professional in the food sector duly qualified to coordinate GMP actions in FB, although currently not a requirement, but a recommendation from the Ministry of Social Development, is, above all, a potential for the service.
Silva (2018) [53]	Final Course Work	Systematize experiences related to educational processes implemented in the context of a FB of the Mesa Brasil SESC Program in the city of João Pessoa - PB, with emphasis on the paths, potentialities and weaknesses experienced. (N = 1)	Research with a qualitative approach and descriptive character, systematized in the form of an experience report based on the principles of action research, using participant observation and documentary consultation as means for producing data.	The role of the nutritionist in the field of assistance, such as the food bank, makes it possible to promote FNS and HRAF through the valorization of FNE as an emancipatory practice when carried out in an articulated way with different realities, complying with plurality of knowledge and the multiple aspects involved in the area of food and nutrition.
Benavides (2021) [54]	Final Course Work	Strengthen the strategic and operational management processes of the Food and Nutrition Area of the Bogotá Food Bank, and contribute to the Food and Nutrition Security of the beneficiary population. (N = 1)	Qualitative, applied, descriptive and cross-sectional study, in which the proposal for the set up of a Nutritional and Healthy Gastronomy Consulting Center was developed using the Archer method of the value model.	Highlights the various activities and duties of a nutritionist in a food bank.

**Chart 3** – Studies on Brazilian food banks and the presence and/or performance of nutritionists in the facility. Brazil, 2024.

Authorship and year	Type of bibliographic source	Research objective and number of food banks investigated (N)	Method/type of study	Main findings and/or reflections
Barros (2022) [55]	Master's Dissertation	To assess the Degree of Implementation (DI) of public food banks in Minas Gerais. (N = 11)	Evaluative research, with a typology of analysis of the implementation of structure and processes and contextual factors (type 1b). The description of the intervention was demonstrated by a logical model, which outlined the indicators and criteria of the Analysis and Judgment Matrix to measure the degree of implementation (DI) through the structure and process.	It highlights the importance of the presence of a nutritionist working in food banks, discussing their skills and abilities. In the sample analyzed, 63.6% had a professional on duty
Garcia et al. (2022) [56]	Scientific journal article	To identify the occurrence of household food insecurity among workers in the Food Bank Network of the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. (N = 6)	The food insecurity (FI) situation was assessed using the Brazilian Food Insecurity Scale. Socioeconomic variables, occupational position, lifestyle habits and health conditions were investigated.	Reception, handling, storage and distribution of these foods implies the need to apply good food manufacturing practices, as a prerequisite to guarantee the quality of the food donated to the entities served, highlighting the importance of the performance of the technical manager (nutritionist or other professional in the food area) and food handlers.
Tenuta (2023) [42]	Doctoral Thesis	To analyze the Brazilian experiences of food banks and, based on the results found, make recommendations for their design, management and operational practices, in order to enhance the contribution of these facilities to ensuring food and nutritional security, reducing food losses and waste and promoting food and nutritional education. (N=217)	The research was developed in four stages: 1) construction of a theoretical-methodological framework on the design and theory of Brazil food bank program; 2) development of instruments and techniques for evaluating this equipment; 3) mapping and characterization of the universe of food banks operating in the country; 4) evaluation of the implementation of Brazilian food banks.	It enhances that, based on the documents that regulate the activities of Brazilian food banks, the minimum team must include a nutritionist in the composition of the staff necessary for the ideal functioning of a food bank. In the sample analyzed, 57% employed a nutritionist.
Manzanero et al. (2023) [57]	Scientific journal article	Check the types of food requested by social support entities in the Community of Madrid. (N=1)	Qualitative fieldwork in which 69 social support organizations in the Community of Madrid that collect food through the media and an Internet survey were identified, of which 23 responded to a requested food questionnaire, as well as some specific indications and recommendations	The role of nutritionists and government campaigns could be tools to change perceptions about which foods are most advisable to donate, thus improving the choices of users who regularly rely on these organizations.
Tenuta et al. (2024) [58]		To present the development of a map of processes and results of Brazilian food banks and to propose a set of indicators for their monitoring and evaluation. (N=Not applicable)	Qualitative approach, using documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews with various players in food banks, steps that served to identify the food main components, describe their social intervention and, finally, build the indicator panel.	The study discusses the minimum team for a food bank, understanding the nutritionist professional as necessary for the composition of the staff for ideal functioning.

## Nutritionists' role in community kitchens

In Brazil, the Community Kitchens (CK) gained federal scope when they were included in the Zero Hunger Program in 2000. The CK were designed to be a facility that seeks to ensure adequate nutrition for people in situations of social vulnerability, providing them with balanced, quality meals produced with safe processes. The CK were set up in a cooperation between the Union and the municipalities, and it was the municipality's responsibility to offer the service, delimit the vulnerable area in which the facility would be installed, as well as to hire the technical team, maintain the program and provide the meals [59].

According to the program regulations, the CK must primarily benefit low-income formal and informal workers, the unemployed, students, older adults, single mothers and people at social risk in urban peripheral areas. In addition, the CK must carry out activities of productive social inclusion, enhancing collective action and community identity and FNE actions [13].

According to the data provided by CGESAN/MDS, in November 2023, 425 CK operated in Brazil. Out of these, 304 (71.5%) were funded by the MDS and 121 (28.5%) received funding from local governments, private institutions or civil society [29].

According to data from MapaSAN 2022 [22], CK operated in 166 municipalities, corresponding to 8.8% of the municipalities that provided data on EqSAN. The distribution rate of municipalities with CK indicated a concentration in the Northeast region (37.8%), followed by the South (28.0%) and Southeast (23.8%) regions [22]. However, the survey did not capture, whether or not there was a nutritionist working in the facility [22]. The average cost to prepare a meal for lunch was in the range of R\$ 5.08 to a maximum of R\$ 30.00. In turn, the average amount charged for a meal served for lunch in the month prior to the survey was R\$ 0.62, ranging from R\$0.00 to R\$ 13.00, indicating a significant variation among the different kitchens. However, the average amount of R\$ 0.62 indicated that most CK charged a low amount per meal or offered it free of charge [22]. The CK served an average of 208 people at lunch. Furthermore, 74% of the respondents indicated that there was a workflow or partnership established between the kitchen and the service provided to users in the direct or indirect social assistance network [22].

The operational characteristics (objective, methodology, target audience and minimum functional requirement) of community kitchens are summarized in Chart 1.

The literature review on CK and on the nutritionists' activities in Brazil yielded a sample of six studies, published from 2012 to 2023 (Chart 4).

The studies found a number of nutritionists per facility lower than that standardized by the FNC [10] and the MDS [13]. The studies by Nascimento and Quintão [60] and Rabelo and Ruckert [62] indicated an average of 1 nutritionist for every 3 CK. The study by Perin [63] showed an even lower average, that is, 1 nutritionist for every 5 CK. In the study by Severo and Oliveira [65], the CK were not monitored by nutritionists. And finally, in the national study by Sarti et al. [61], only 28% of the CK investigated reported a nutritionist in charge. The authors of the studies highlighted and promoted the importance of nutritionists in CK, mainly associating the professional with the quality of the diet and improvement of health, with the adequacy of regulations and good practices. And, in an isolated but no less important way, they enhanced the nutritionists' role in the articulation of EqSAN with civil society to act as an intermediary between the latter and the state via the FNS council [60-62,64].

**Chart 4** – Studies on Brazilian community kitchens and the presence and/or performance of nutritionists in the facility, Brazil, 2024.

Author-ship and year	Type of bibliographic source	Research objective and number of community kitchens investigated (N)	Method/type of study	Principais achados e/ou reflexões
Nascimento & Quintão (2012) [60]	Scientific journal article	To assess the environmental conditions of three community kitchens in the municipality of Leopoldina (MG). Number of CK (N= 3)	Evaluative research with application of a checklist with 55 verification items	1 nutricionista para 3 CC. Os autores associaram a presença do nutricionista à qualidade da dieta.
Sarti et al. (2013) [61]	Scientific journal article	Carry out a cost-effectiveness analysis of the program, which operates by providing meals in an attempt to guarantee the basic right to food in highly socially vulnerable populations. Number of CK (N= 85)	Cross-sectional study, including analysis of data from units belonging to the program. The data collection instruments consisted of questionnaires that included an assessment of aspects of the structure, process and results of the program.	28% das CC apresentavam supervisão de nutricionista. A presença de nutricionista constituiu a única característica administrativa que resultou em modificação no perfil das unidades de alimentação e nutrição analisadas, ou seja, a presença de nutricionista aparentemente induz melhorias no índice de higiene da CC e elevação do valor calórico diário.
Rabelo & Ruckert (2014) [62]	Scientific journal article	Present the trajectory of the country's food and nutritional security policy, through its regulatory framework. Number of CK (N=24)	Literature review presenting a brief summary of the functioning of the network of public food and nutrition facilities (popular restaurants, community kitchens and food banks) in the city of Porto Alegre	8 nutricionistas para 24 CC. Os autores destacam que as nutricionistas realizavam atividades de capacitação e, principalmente, efetivavam a articulação política, econômica e social na comunidade, através do Conselho de SAN.
Perin (2017) [63]	Master's Dissertation	Analyze the implementation of Community Kitchens in Porto Alegre based on Berman's (2007) Micro-Implementation concept Number of CK (N=16)	This is an exploratory and descriptive case study, conducted from a qualitative perspective. The data for the study were obtained through bibliographic and field documentary research, in which coordinators, nutritionists and managers of seven CK were subjected to semi-structured interviews. Data analysis used the content analysis technique.	3 nutricionistas para 16 CC. O autor destaca que a dinâmica de implementação das CC sofre influência de elementos do contexto político-institucional.
Vasconcelos et al. (2022) [64]	Journal article	Contribute to improving access to healthy food for families in a neighborhood on the outskirts of the Municipality of Sobral through community, organic and sustainable gardens as a strategy to promote food and nutritional education (N=1)	Descriptive study with characteristics of community intervention under the qualitative approach	Não foi descrito o número de CC ou de nutricionista, pois o foco foi o público atendido. Contudo, os autores destacam que o profissional nutricionista mostrava-se indispensável para a manutenção da saúde, contribuindo efetivamente com o processo de mudança dos hábitos alimentares por meio da educação alimentar e nutricional.
Severo & Oliveira (2023) [65]	Undergraduate Course Completion Work	Propose improvements to the network of community kitchens in Porto Alegre managed by the Multiplicidade collective by analyzing its characteristics and main challenges Number of CK (N=2)	Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews with collective managers, kitchen managers and beneficiaries.	Não há acompanhamento de nutricionista nas CC.

It is worth mentioning that a study was found, published in 2009 and not included in the bibliographic databases investigated, which reviewed a sample of community kitchens nationwide and considered the number of nutritionists in charge of the unit at that time. This study included a sample of 111 community kitchens, of which only 25% had a nutritionist on the staff [66].

In general, we observed that in the studies on CK, the discussion about the presence of nutritionists attending the facility, was less notable when compared to the studies with popular-restaurants and food banks.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The difficulty in obtaining accurate data on the number of nutritionists in EqSAN highlights the need for greater organization and appreciation of FNS actions in Brazil. Despite searches in regulatory documents, scientific articles and databases, including requests to the FNC and CGESAN/ MDS, we were not able to locate exact information. Hence, it is suggested that an official database and/or an annual national monitoring system be developed for EqSAN, covering the number of professionals working in those facilities, similar to the National School Feeding Program (PNAE).

In addition, the standardization of EqSAN needs to be updated via government ordinance or decree. Studies indicate that the current legislation [8, 23–25, 38] is outdated, which weakens the attendance of nutritionists in those facilities. Current regulations [12–14], in addition to being obsolete, do not require a mandatory attendance of this professional in the food facilities compromising their recognition in SISAN.

We emphasize that the dismantling of the National Food and Nutrition Policy in recent years has had an impact that still reverberates in EqSAN, but that it has been recuperating vigor since 2023. In this process, actions to promote food and nutrition are necessary at all management and execution levels. Here, we highlight some strategies that can contribute to the process of food and nutrition actions effectiveness, as well as helping the food facilities, namely: i) the need for better training of nutritionists to work in the area of food and nutrition; ii) increasing the number of vacancies for nutritionists in public food and nutrition endeavors and programs; iii) monitoring and inspection by legal councils, such as nutrition councils and food and nutrition councils; and iv) raising awareness and mobilizing the professional category to value and recognize the need and obligation of nutritionists in EqSAN.

Although the FNC establishes recommendations on the number of nutritionists and their duties in those facilities, it is essential to reflect on the expected profile of this professional. FNC Resolution No. 600/2018 [10], with the exception of work in food banks, suggests that community kitchens and popular-restaurants should have duties similar to those of the Food and Nutrition Units. However, these spaces are not restricted in providing meals: these are sites that ensure rights and provide care to populations which are in social, food, and nutritional vulnerability. Thus, the work of the nutritionist must consider not only food production, but also the promotion of adequate and healthy eating, the creation of bonds with beneficiaries, and the understanding of the social context of users and collaborators, who often also face food and nutritional insecurity.

As the main limitation of the study, we highlight the fact that the systematic search for scientific articles in Google Scholar was limited to page 5. On the other hand, we emphasize the breadth and scope of the five other databases included in the review. However, as researchers studying the subject, we chose to maintain this basis in order to illustrate how incipient the national

scientific literature in the area still is. The fragile findings corroborate the reflections generated by the few reference studies on the subject. It is hoped, in this way, that the issues raised here can stimulate the look and consequent increase in the science behind these food outlets that have the role and potential to alleviate hunger and social inequalities in Brazil.

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