



PRESS RELEASE

CUIDO60 & FOOD MONITOR PROGRAM

Deterioration and increase in food service prices

The Family Assistance System (Sistema de Atención a la Familia, SAF), created in 1998, is the main program aimed at supplementing the nutrition of the low-income population in Cuba. It operates through a network of canteens that aims to guarantee, at reasonable prices, the nutritional requirements of this population segment. The SAF, however, has been widely questioned in terms of its scope and quality, especially after the Tarea Ordenamiento (TO), whose implementation has received a significant rejection from the public. The authorities have had to publicly acknowledge that, in the process of implementing the TO, there have been "*deviations from the approved policy and things that were not done well*" (Mesa Redonda, 2021).

According to official figures from January 2021, the SAF had a network of 1,445 canteens that offer processed food at subsidized prices to 76,175 people in vulnerable situations, mostly over 60 years of age (Granma, 2021). In addition, it offers take-out and home delivery services. However, there is no data on the coverage and operation of both modalities. We know that the home delivery service is restricted to the existence of "the conditions that allow it", but not how and who defines them, with what criteria and procedures.

In the last month the complaint made by Paula Lobón has been known, who tells the story of an 88 year old senior citizen, who lives alone and walks more than 20 blocks, twice a day for lunch and dinner, since he cannot claim the two installments together. On the other hand, his pension is 1500 pesos, of which he paid 35 pesos in one day between lunch and dinner, which means a monthly average of 1050 pesos, making other expenses necessary for his monthly subsistence unsustainable. This case reflects the situation of many elderly people in the country, who have to move every day to get food despite the different limitations they may have, denying the right to a comprehensive system that provides food and nutritional security under dignified conditions.

This has resulted in many elderly people no longer using this service due to its high costs, both economic and travel. Prior to the (TO), the price of lunch and lunch of the SAF was on average 1 CUP each and the services were subsidized for 100% of its beneficiaries. After January 2021, prices increased to between 8.00 and 13.00 CUP and were only subsidized for 15.9%, through Social Assistance (*El Toque*, August 4, 2021). The pro-government press itself acknowledged a decrease in the number of people attending the canteens (*Granma*, 2021). Faced with restrictions on access to the state offer, the elderly turn to the services of canteens that religious organizations and civil society groups are offering, especially to this group. However, food shortages, inflation and difficulties with the management of donations are also having a negative impact on these services.

Another case evidencing the critical situation is the public denunciation by renowned journalist Ángela Julia Osendi Díaz. Her testimony focuses on the serious situation people face in Cuba due to the shortage of food, medicines and basic resources, as well as the lack of adequate medical care in hospitals. She highlights how the hope that existed in the past on the island has vanished and how the current reality shows a country in which the regime seems to want its people not to eat, while they themselves are getting fatter and fatter every day. Julia is tired and sad for having lost her life believing in a fallacy she calls "Machiavellian and atrocious".

As we warned in previous days, the food crisis in Cuba and the lack of access to basic food products, such as beans, coffee, peas and oil, has worsened due to fuel shortages and internal transportation problems. Food distribution has been uneven and products such as chicken have been eliminated from the food supply book due to the lack of imports and negotiations with U.S. producers. In addition, the situation is aggravated by the rising prices of imported products and limited access to food for the elderly and vulnerable. The lack of effective measures by the State and the prioritization of spending on tourism instead of social issues are becoming an increasingly critical problems.

With this note, we warn about the impact on nutritional health that these new cuts in food will have, especially on the population over 60 years of age, which is already being affected by the food security crisis on the island. Let us recall that Article 12 of the Inter-American Convention on the Protection of the Human Rights of Older Persons promotes that the elderly have the right to food and nutritional security, a comprehensive system of care, social services coverage, as well as the protection and promotion of health in order to maintain their independence and autonomy.

It is urgent for the State to take measures to guarantee adequate and balanced food for this population group, ensuring that the SAF meets the needs of the population it seeks to benefit, and seeking alternatives to guarantee the basic inputs of the basic food basket, as well as regularity in its delivery. Food security for the most vulnerable groups must be a priority.