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'It wasn't meant to be mine, yea?' – The impacts of automation on the Brazilian Welfare State

A case study of the Covid-19 data-driven emergency aid
Auxílio Emergencial

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to shed light on an alarming high-tech wall of exclusion rapidly being built up in Brazil, representing a frightening threat to the poor and marginalised groups. By engaging with the emerging critical studies of the implications of automation, artificial intelligence, and data-driven systems on social protection initiatives, this dissertation is a contribution to, hopefully, start filling a gap in the studies of the digital welfare state in Latin America. Therefore, to investigate how automation and data-driven welfare schemes can exacerbate poverty and inequality in Brazil and impact individuals' self-determination, this is a case study of the Brazilian emergency cash transfer programme Auxílio Emergencial - a digital-delivery and data-driven welfare scheme implemented in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Through thirteen in-depth interviews with participants from five different states - who kindly shared their experiences and perceptions of Auxílio Emergencial - this study points out that the challenges go away beyond the digital divide spectrum, leaving the population to deal with 'sophisticated tools' that can aggravate poverty and undermine their self-determination.

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INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Brazilian Government implemented an emergency cash transfer programme named *Auxílio Emergencial* (Emergency Aid) to minimise social and economic burdens caused by an unprecedented crisis. Due to intense pressure from the public sphere, mainly structured by NGOs and CSOs (Pereira, 2020), this programme was approved in April 2020 to financially assist families with a monthly income of less than three minimum wages - R\$3,135 (near \$600). The first round of *Auxílio Emergencial* comprised three monthly payments of R\$600 (close to \$115) - an amount that was later reduced in subsequent rounds. By 2020, more than 67 million families received the benefit, which contributed to alleviating extreme poverty rates in Brazil that year and, consequently, the impacts of the pandemic on vulnerable populations (Nassif-Pires *et al.*, 2021).

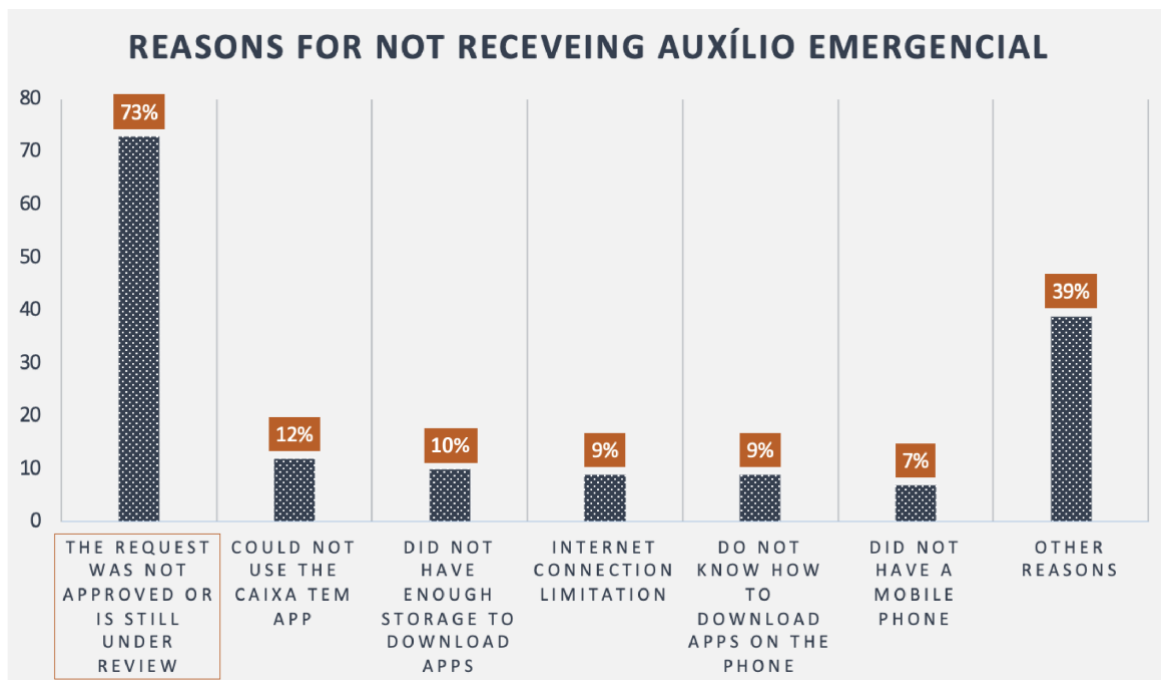
Auxílio Emergencial was a fully digital-delivery and data-driven welfare initiative: the application was through the official website or mobile app, and the payment was in a digital bank account managed by the State-owned financial institution *Caixa Econômica Federal*. However, due to arguments that digitisation would help avoid public agglomerations and guarantee social distancing, millions were excluded from this emergency aid. For instance, a study conducted by Gonzalez and Araujo (2021) shows that among the social classes D and E, which encompassed the poorest and most vulnerable Brazilians, the digital divide (i.e. unequal opportunities to access and use digital devices) was a huge wall between those in need and the Government emergency assistance. Not having a smartphone, for example, was the reason for not getting the benefit for 20% of the population in classes D and E – a percentage that decreases to 7% when considering the entire population of Brazil. This study considered the quantitative data from a report on Internet use in Brazil during the Covid-19 pandemic (CETIC.BR, 2020), which shows other alarming information: 38% of all Internet users had applied for *Auxílio Emergencial* and received the aid, while 20% had **tried** to apply but **failed** to receive it. According to CETIC's report, the expectation was that digital divide barriers would

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be the main reasons for the unsuccessful access to the benefit. However, the study found out that the most frequently mentioned reasons for not accessing *Auxílio Emergencial* were related to a request denial or because the application is still under review (see graphic below).

Graphic 1



Source: CETIC.BR (2020)

Indeed, the digital divide is a huge wall that exacerbates inequality in Brazil. However, the data-driven aspect of *Auxílio Emergencial* is an example of some even more sophisticated walls being built up. For example, 'who' decided who was eligible or not to receive *Auxílio Emergencial* was an automated tool implemented by Dataprev, the *Brazilian Social Security Information and Technology Enterprise* responsible for the public database of all social protection programmes. How did it affect the population, though? According to a Government report (TCU, 2021), automated cross-checked data tools used by Dataprev to review the requests were 'successfully' responsible for rejecting 57 million inquiries from *Auxílio Emergencial*. Moreover, until August 2020, nearly 3.7 million Brazilians who had been previously approved

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to receive the aid were removed from the system due to fraud prevention technologies, which saved R\$ 8.8 billion (near \$1.7 billion) of public money. Later, the same automated tools removed 8 million people from the second round of *Auxílio Emergencial*, which started in September 2020. Thus, more public money was saved. However, the report concludes that technological improvement must be made, as fiscal surveillance errors led the Government to spend nearly R\$54 billion (near \$10 billion) to wrongfully pay almost 14 million people who should not have received the aid in the first place.

As I discuss in the following chapters, alarming studies about the implications of the digital welfare state have shown that automation and artificial intelligence implemented in welfare initiatives have a considerable capacity to harm the poor and exacerbate inequality and poverty. Moreover, these data-driven welfare systems are considered high-tech threats to human rights when not regulated. Therefore, this dissertation is an effort to situate Brazil amid this emerging field that still lacks studies considering the Latin American context.

By going beyond the digital divide concept, I conducted a case study of *Auxílio Emergencial* through users' experiences and perceptions gathered from thirteen in-depth interviews performed with people from five different Brazilian states. The aim is to understand how automation and data-driven welfare initiatives can exacerbate poverty and inequality and impact individuals' self-determination. I start the next chapter, thus, presenting a compilation of relevant interdisciplinary literature that has enlightened this research. Then, the methodological rationale and research design are outlined, followed by the analysis and interpretation of the data collected.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Poverty and inequality in Brazil

According to the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (OPHI, 2018), of 1.3 billion people living worldwide under multidimensional poverty, 43 million are in Latin America. Among this total, 20% live in Brazil, where also is located part of the most severely poor population of Latin America. Studies analysing the Brazilian context of inequality and poverty thus are vast and from different fields, examining the multiple layers of the problem. Over Brazil's history, for instance, inequality has been even more exacerbated by income and property concentration (Amann and Baer, 2009), with dramatically unequal and unfair access to basic resources.

Thereby, Brazil remains with the highest rates of inequalities worldwide despite having a sufficient national production of resources that could guarantee the minimum required for each citizen (Ivo, 2005). For de Araújo and de Lima (2005), this is a consequence of the growth cycle that Brazil experienced from the 1930s to the 1980s, which produced a range of imbalances that neutralised poverty and inequality as characteristics of the Brazilian reality. This argument follows the claims of the *dependistas* theorists, who argue that poverty and inequality in Latin America are sustained by a dependent-development model (Cardoso, 1979), which turned the Global South's economy dependent on international trade, especially the exportation of raw materials to the Global North.

This is evident in the case of the Covid-19 in Brazil. For instance, despite all economic and social impacts of the pandemic, the Brazilian agribusiness ended 2020 'achieving good performances and showing significant growth potential for 2021' (EFA News, 2021), while 50% of the Brazilian population suffered from food insecurity, with 19 million facing hungry (Exame, 2021). Furthermore, other recent studies and reports have shown how the Covid-19 drastically exposed and exacerbated inequalities in Brazil (Batista, 2021). Jones *et al.* (2020) claim that Brazilian historical inequalities, combined with the Covid-19 impacts, led the most vulnerable communities in Brazil to face a health syndemic situation triggered by economic

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burdens, unequal access to food, and malnutrition. The latter, moreover, most threatened the urban poor who struggled to access fresh food due to 'supply-chain models that perceive favela communities as 'economically inviable' or excessively violent' (Jones *et al.*, 2020).

The Brazilian Welfare State

The dependent-development model mentioned above directly influenced how the Brazilian Welfare State emerged. For instance, by analysing the trajectory of the Welfare State in Brazil from the 1930s to the 1990s, Medeiros (2001) concludes that the Brazilian State utilised social protections policies as tools to maintain social and political orders and control the working class, with a centrally concerning with the effects of international trade in the national economic development. Thus, authoritarianism and social repression compromised the development of the Brazilian Welfare State (Medeiros, 2001). Furthermore, as Lira (2005) discusses, political corruption has been a factor that historically increases and sustains poverty and inequality in Brazil due to a diversion and misuse of public resources that favour the 1% richest Brazilian population instead of being imploded on social protection policies and programmes.

Moreover, scholars argue that the rhetoric of poverty in Brazil, and in Latin America more broadly, became 'a mechanism of 'amplified consent' to serve the neoliberal agenda' (Ivo, 2005: 65), and also as populist tools on the hands of both left and right governments since the 19th century (Sabatini, 2021). In that respect, Fenwick (2017) points out that Brazilian pro-poor strategy, especially during the presidency of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, has focused more on expanding access to complementary social services, such as Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes (CCTs), rather than investing in the quality of public services, such as health and education.

Brazilian CCTs thus have been the object of several studies in the last decades, especially regarding their efficiency in reducing poverty (Amann and Baer, 2009; Bither-Terry, 2014; Haddad, 2009) and combating hunger (da Silva *et al.*, 2005). The most vastly studied Brazilian

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CCT, for example, is *Bolsa Família*. Optimistic scholars claim that BF 'proved to be contributing to greater social equality in Brazil' (Haddad, 2009: 200) and generating 'positive impacts on income concentration' (Azzoni *et al.*, 2009: 259). On the other hand, others evaluate it as insufficient to impact capital formation, claiming that it can only reduce poverty and inequality indexes in the short run (Cavalcante and Uderman, 2009). However, although CCTs have not been sufficient to eradicate poverty or alleviate inequality, they have helped reduce the severity of poverty that impacts households; thus, families may remain poor but see some improvements in their well-being (Bither-Terry, 2014).

The digital transformation of the Brazilian social protection system, as presented next, happens within the above-explained context of intrinsic inequality and a welfare strategy compromised by political interests of social control and authoritarianism.

Digital Welfare State

The introduction of the Brazilian digital welfare state: from E-government to Digital Government

With the advance of the Internet and the introduction of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) worldwide, Brazil experienced the introduction of an E-government paradigm in the 2000s by 'the delivery of government information and services online through the Internet or other digital mean' (West, 2004: 16). Nowadays, 100% of the Brazilian public departments have access to the Internet and computers at all governance levels (CETIC.BR, 2019). However, as vastly studied in social policy and computer science literature, Brazil is recently transitioning from the E-government paradigm to a Digital Government one (Cristóvam *et al.*, 2020), following OECD recommendations (Thorstensen and Zuchieri, 2020). Thus, a digital transformation is underway in the country, representing 'a problem of public policy rather than a discussion of ICT availability' (Filgueiras *et al.*, 2019: 201).

This digital revolution started in 2015 when Federal Government launched an online public services portal (Filgueiras *et al.*, 2019). Later came the Digital Government strategy published in 2016 (Thorstensen and Zuchieri, 2020), which was recently updated in 2020 by the Brazilian

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Federal Decree N^o 10.332, which establishes new objectives to be achieved until 2022. One of the objectives, for example, is to introduce an 'integrated Government' strategy, using cross-check data technology on all governance levels to amplify the availability of digital services, reduce costs, and remove 'from the citizen the burden of displacement and presentation of documents' (Brasil, 2020).

Furthermore, in July of 2021, the *Brazilian Artificial Intelligence Strategy* (MCTI, 2021) - a government white paper - was published, presenting the main approaches for the implementation of AI in areas such as education, workforce, public service delivery, public security and research, innovation, and entrepreneurship. One of the objectives, which also follows the Digital Government strategy, is to implement AI in at least 12 public services by 2022 and incorporate AI in data analysis and public policies formulations (MCTI, 2021: 44). Unsurprisingly, the publication of this AI strategy came after the implementation of *Auxílio Emergencial* in 2020. At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, Schiefler (2020) argued that this unprecedented crisis should trigger the development of a more 'digital and modern' State in Brazil, listing the use of Big Data and artificial intelligence as one of the ways of greater efficiency and quality in public services. Later, therefore, as an example of how 'contexts that present fiscal crises can serve as catalysts for a change that allows for the adoption of digital transformation' (Filgueiras *et al.*, 2019: 213), the data-driven *Auxílio Emergencial* was implemented as an emergency response to the poor.

The emerging discussion on the challenges imposed by the digital welfare state

At the beginning of the XXI century, Castells (2002) argued that the speed of technological transformation in all spheres of our lives was a challenge for scholarly research to provide 'an adequate supply of empirical studies on the whys and wherefores of the Internet-based economy and society' (Castells, 2002: 3). Almost twenty years later, the rapid and even more sophisticated pace of innovation imposes new threats to society and researchers, leaving us to understand the implications of automation, artificial intelligence, and data-driven systems for human rights. In that respect, critical studies have emerged to raise the main concerns imposed

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by the *digital welfare state*. This is an emerging field, which main objects of studies are summarised on *The Digital Welfare State and Human Rights Project's* website as:

The rapid spread of biometric identification systems; the automation of systems to establish eligibility for welfare benefits, as well as the calculation and payment of benefits; digital systems built to detect and prevent welfare fraud; algorithms and other tools to score individuals on the basis of risks or needs; and the increase of online platforms to interact with and keep track of welfare beneficiaries¹

Indeed, the introduction of the Internet in all spheres of society enabled us to coordinate tasks and manage complexity with flexibility and good performance (Castells, 2002). However, this 'micro-electronics revolution', as called by Castells, also opened space for dominant processes of inclusion/exclusion in societies, exacerbated by 'light-speed-operating information technologies' (Castells, 2010: 501).

Many studies have analysed this inclusion/exclusion process in Latin America and Brazil. For instance, according to Barry (2014), the region has always had to deal with a darker side of ICTs, which usually most burden poor populations lacking the infrastructure, education and digital literacy required to enjoy a productive use of ICTs and technological devices. On the other hand, ICTs and the Internet are still seen as important tools to improve governance efficiency on poverty reduction programmes, at the same time that indirectly help reduce government corruption and promote civic engagement (Barry, 2014). Within this *efficiency paradigm*, which considers technology as a tool to improve the quality of public services, are the majority of studies analysing the ways and challenges for a digital transformation in Brazil (e.g. Cristóvam *et al.*, 2020; Cunha, 2019; Germani, 2016; Gonçalves and Ricciardi, 2016; Heckert and Aguiar, 2016; Queiroz, 2018).

¹ From: <https://chrgj.org/focus-areas/technology/digital-welfare-state-and-human-rights-project/> [accessed on August 28th, 2021]. The project is undertaken by the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice of the NYU School of Law.

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With an optimistic view, a Brazilian scholar (Purificação, 2019) argues that the digitalisation of public services in Brazil led to faster and higher quality services, at the same time that promoted a greater individuals awareness of their rights through a more facilitated Government-citizen communication. However, the country is seen as a latecomer on digital transformation undertaken in the world (Cunha, 2019). As argued by Cunha, through a computer science perspective, it is the role of the Brazilian State to undertake a digital revolution, improve the Internet connection for all citizens, and 'promote the training of human capital to use and create digital public services' (2019: 32).

Critical studies, therefore, are mainly assessing the *digital divide* as the main challenge for the introduction of a Digital Government. As defined by the OECD (2001: 5),

the term 'digital divide' refers to the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socioeconomic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access information and communication technologies (ICTs) and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities.

Therefore, the digital divide refers to the inequalities of access but also to an educational imbalance and knowledge gap (Castells, 2002) that imposes unequal skills to make the best use of digital devices. For instance, according to *The Inclusive Internet Index* (2021), Brazil is among the 100 countries with the best rates of Internet inclusion, ranking in the 36th overall position. However, the country has a low score in 'Internet readiness', ranking as the 69th globally, because of the challenges faced with digital literacy, as stated by the report.

By considering the concept of the digital divide, ground-breaking studies have addressed the problem in Brazil by assessing, for example, the gender gap when accessing e-government services (Macaya *et al.*, 2021); the impacts of the digital divide on democracy (Ruediger, 2002); the role of digital literacy, therefore, education for digital inclusion (Mattos and Chagas, 2008; Sorj and Muschert, 2013); and the ways that it has impacted the poor during the Covid-19 pandemic, preventing a significant population from accessing online education or applying

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for *Auxílio Emergencial* (Cristóvam *et al.*, 2020; Muniz *et al.*, 2021; Viana, 2020). However, digital inclusion imposes a crucial and complex challenge: at the same time that it can benefit those on the wrong side of the digital divide, it can also harm this same group with new technological tools reproducing 'old forms of prejudice and injustice' (Gangadharan, 2012). Therefore, it is not only a matter of who is online or not or have access or not (DiMaggio and Hargittai, 2001), but also a matter of inequality of individuals online' skills. In that respect, Gangadharan (2012) convincingly warns that:

for the poor, communities of colour, indigenous groups, and migrants, being a part of digitally mediated worlds means being made vulnerable in ways that resemble past instances of surveillance and exploitation.

Therefore, a shift to *digital inequalities* is necessary, as they 'tend to lessen individuals' agency while enhancing the power of technology creators, big tech, and other already powerful social actors' (Robinson *et al.*, 2020: 11). For this reason, by mainly advocating for digital inclusion, the field of social science in Brazil is still missing the discussion about how data-driven and automated welfare initiatives can undermine individuals' self-determination (Alston, 2020; Eubanks, 2019).

However, some studies beyond the digital divide have been taken in Brazil under a *Science, Technology and Society (STS)* approach. For example, Cukierman (2011) urges the urgency to introduce computer engineers and developers to a socio-technical framework to make them aware of the social consequences of what they develop. Feitosa (2010) takes this socio-technical view to analyse how Brazilian database codified systems can affect citizens, especially marginalised groups. When analysing the CadÚnico, which is the *Unified Registry for Social Programmes* in Brazil – and mainly known as the 'entrance door' for *Bolsa Família*, he concludes that the ways in which the concepts of family, poverty and extreme poverty are understood and interpreted in the society are reflected in the codes applied in registration forms. According to him, this phenomenon reduces individuals and their complex life journey to just

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'letters filling in gaps on various pulp sheets' (Feitosa, 2010: 54) that determine if a family is eligible or not for a social welfare programme. Therefore, he argues, 'technical' developers must be critical of the political and social dimensions underpinning their work and not see codified systems as neutral or harmless.

As presented in the next section, Feitosa's conclusion is closer to the work of political, social and computer scientists advocating for a social justice approach in a data-driven and automated age.

Automation, algorithms, and data-driven poverty management systems

Technology, innovation and the use of artificial intelligence have been evaluated with great enthusiasm as life-changing tools that can reduce costs and bureaucracies (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014), as well as amplify government accountability and improve the quality of public services (Schiefler *et al.*, 2020). However, as critically pointed by Eubanks (2019: 9), 'the cheerleaders of the new data regime rarely acknowledge the impacts of digital decision-making on poor and working-class people'. Indeed, they raise concerns about how automated and machine learning systems can leave people behind but usually generally consider unemployment rates that can arise because of technological progress. This perspective, for instance, is presented by Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014), arguing that we must adapt and learn new skills because the 'future is inevitable'.

However, as concerned by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, these digital technologies innovations, when employed on welfare and poverty management programmes, can become 'Trojan Horse for neoliberal hostility' (Alston, 2019: 12) and introduce new challenges for human rights and social justice. As these high-tech tools are more and more used to 'automate, predict, identify, monitor, detect, target and punish' (Alston, 2020), digital welfare states can turn individuals into numbers and variables (McCully, 2020), and in applicants, instead of right holders (Alston,

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2019). Furthermore, the digital welfare state reduces poverty and vulnerability 'to problems that can be 'solved' or 'fixed' by technological innovation' (McCully, 2020).

A terrific study on this issue was conducted by the political scientist Virginia Eubanks (2019), who investigated how poor and vulnerable people are affected by automated systems in the US for policing, profiling, and managing poverty. As she states, technological systems for poverty management are designed to classify, punish, target, track and control the poor, perpetuating a tradition that not only excludes but 'sweeps millions of people into a system of control that compromises their humanity and their self-determination' (Eubanks, 2019: 181).

Similarly is the work of Cathy O'Neill (2017), an American data scientist that brings daunting views on how Big Data can cause damages to individuals while perpetuating injustices. As she argues, even though algorithms can be designed with the best intentions by computer scientists and mathematicians, many of the models that make decisions about our lives can encode 'human prejudice, misunderstanding, and bias into the software systems' that tend 'to punish the poor and the oppressed... while making the rich richer' (O'Neil, 2017: 3). These models, also called Weapons of Math Destruction (WMD) by O'Neill, become even more harmful for already vulnerable and discriminated communities as they banish individuals' ability to contest an automated system's verdict, even when it may be wrong or unfair. Furthermore, as O'Neill points out, mathematics cannot be treated as neutral, inevitable, and infallible. When it is seen as so, humans' responsibility is taken off the equation. Yet, this neutrality perception can wrongly lead computer scientists and engineers to mainly understand their work purely as technical and not related to social and political issues (Feitosa, 2010), bringing critical ethical concerns.

Thus, 'we must come together to police these WMDs, to tame and disarm them' (O'Neil, 2017: 218), as is also proposed by Taylor (2017) and her data justice framework. According to Taylor, marginalised groups are more likely to be targeted for surveillance and also 'to have less opportunity to resist that surveillance' (2017: 3). Therefore, she suggests, a framework is necessary to

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take into account the need to be represented but also the possibility of the need to opt-out of data collection or processing the need to preserve one's autonomy with regard to data-producing technologies (2017: 8).

Similarly, Gangadharan (2021: 114) argues that marginalised groups must have the option of a technological refusal 'to assert themselves and collectively determine a technologically mediated world in which they wish to belong'. For Madden (2019), being poor in the digital age means experiencing hypervisibility – as digital tools increase the government surveillance capacity – and invisibility – as data-driven systems undermine 'agency or resources to challenge unfair outcomes' (Madden, 2019). Moreover, automated poverty management initiatives take human interaction out of the equation (Alston, 2019; Eubanks, 2019), dehumanising 'the process of providing vital support to those most vulnerable and in need' and replacing human assessment by 'inscrutable algorithmic and statistical models' (McCully, 2020). Lastly, it gives to governments algorithms that prevent and detect frauds - and save huge amounts of money – but that also determine 'who gets food and who starves, who has housing and who remains homeless, and which families are broken up by the state' (Eubanks, 2019: 13). Therefore, scholars urge for 'the regulation of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, to ensure compliance with human rights' (Alston, 2019: 11).

The literature on how the *digital welfare state* can harm and punish the poor, hence, exacerbating inequality, is particularly relevant for this study. However, the majority of them considers the context of Global North countries (Ala-Fossi *et al.*, 2019; Eubanks, 2019; Jørgensen, 2021; O'Neil, 2017; Zoonen, 2020), China (Creemers, 2018; Pissin, 2020; Taylor, 2017) or India (Masiero, 2017; Taylor, 2017), leaving a gap of studies in Latin America. Therefore, this research situates Brazil in this emerging field of the digital welfare state, aiming to, hopefully, be a contribution to start filling a gap on this topic.

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Conceptual framework and research question

For the purposes of this research, I build on the critical studies of the digital welfare state, especially on the main findings of the leading scholar Virginia Eubanks (2019), to investigate the extent of their implications in the Brazilian context. According to Madden (2019), 'efforts to create a more ethical technology sector must take the unique experiences of vulnerable and marginalised users into account'. Hence, this study aims at understanding the impacts of automation on individuals' self-determination by considering their perspectives, experiences, and perceptions to answer the following research question: *In what ways are automated welfare initiatives in Brazil acting to exacerbate poverty and inequality?*

I stand with Sen's capability approach to poverty, which understands it 'as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely lowness of incomes, which is the standard criterion of identification of poverty' (Sen 2001: 87). The capability-poverty approach does not see deprivation of income as the main cause of poverty, although considering it one of the factors that impoverishes people. Rather, the capability-poverty approach shifts the primary attention from income (as a mean) 'to ends that people have reason to pursue, and, correspondingly, to the freedoms to be able to satisfy these ends' (Sen, 2001: 90). Therefore, considering Iris Marion Young's (2004) deliberative democratic model, social justice is only possible by pursuing people's self-determination (i.e. freedom from domination) and self-development (i.e. individual's capabilities).

Furthermore, I conduct my analysis through a Bourdieusian lens, thus considering that power over the oppressed can be invisibly exercised 'with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it' (Bourdieu, 1991: 164). Therefore, I consider Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic power in this study's analysis to perceive the unconscious forms of how domination is legitimised and accepted, along with the ways that social space can organise individuals' practices and representations (Bourdieu, 1998).

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In order to answer the research question, thus, I conduct a case study of *Auxílio Emergencial*, which was chosen because of its relevance and implications to the Brazilian social protection system. To evaluate it, I go beyond the digital divide discussion aiming to assess how automation can impact the Brazilian poor and working-class. It is essential to acknowledge that this study does not intend to analyse the economic efficiency of *Auxílio Emergencial* to reduce poverty and inequalities, nor if the automation of this initiative had implications on the socioeconomic spectrum. The main objective of this study is to understand the effects of a digital-delivery and data-driven welfare scheme on individuals' self-determination. Thus, *Auxílio Emergencial*, as a single case study, must be seen here just as 'a single example of a larger phenomenon' (Gerring, 2006: 42), which purpose is 'to shed light on a larger class of cases' (Gerring, 2006: 20).

RESEARCH DESIGN

Methodological rationale

As presented in the literature review, while the digital welfare state rapidly advances in Brazil, studies about how data-driven systems and automation can impact the population are scarce. Furthermore, the studies considering the digital divide concept are usually done by applying quantitative methods, which are limited to exploring the meanings and implications of social phenomena, although crucial to gathering data and analysis that can be useful in further studies and to improve public policies. Therefore, considering that quantitative inquiries must be 'preceded by foundational qualitative inquiry' (Erickson, 2018: 36), this study aims to start filling a methodological gap on the topic of the digital welfare state in Brazil to explore the range of social implications and meanings (Gaskell, 2000) carried by these digital schemes. To do so, I chose the programme *Auxílio Emergencial* as a case study, as mentioned above.

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Since 'the goal of most qualitative research is to learn from the data' (Richards, 2005: 25), my intent is to shed light on some of the themes (Bernard and Ryan, 2010) that arise when taking into account individuals' experiences and views (Creswell, 2009) of the data-driven systems as a relatively new phenomenon in Brazil. Therefore, I use in-depth interviews as a method because of their versatility and value (Gaskell, 2000) 'to understand the meaning of respondents' experiences and lifeworlds' (Warren, 2002: 83). I chose individual interviews instead of focus groups because the first is a more helpful tool for the nature of this research, for it allows access to hidden feelings or beliefs that participants may not even be conscious of (Berger, 1998).

Sampling design

I conducted all steps of my research while based in London, UK, as the Covid-19 pandemic impeded me to travel to Brazil. Therefore, as the nature of my research involves digital divide barriers, I had to design my sampling by considering all my limitations to access those who would most fit into my analytical criteria (Warren, 2002). One of my interests was interviewing members of rural and urban impoverished communities who had difficulties applying for *Auxílio Emergencial* because of all technological challenges faced (e.g. bad or non-Internet connection, non-access to smartphones, digital illiteracy, etc.). However, it was a limitation as I had to conduct all interviews by telephone or video calls. Therefore, my first inclusion criteria (Robinson, 2014) were: (1) have applied or tried to apply for *Auxílio Emergencial*; (2) have access to a cell phone or computer to be able to talk to me. I did not include socioeconomic status as an exclusionary criterion because I started from the assumption that if the participant applied to receive the aid, she/he considered it as essential for her/his well-being.

However, I considered that interviewing only people who would not face a technological difficulty to talk with me would limit the range of views and experiences (Gaskell, 2000) about *Auxílio Emergencial*. Thus, I decided to have a second group of interviewees: NGO workers who directly helped members of impoverished communities to apply or receive *Auxílio Emergencial*. The choice for NGO workers was made due to the relevance and

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impact of the charity sector in Brazil during the Covid-19 pandemic (Alves, 2021) and because they would bring perceptions of a population that I could not access due to my geographical location limitation. Therefore, 13 participants (see Appendix A for the full list) were selected in this study under these two groups criteria. One of the participants was considered part of both groups because she is an NGO worker and had also tried to apply for the programme.

The participants were selected through a referral chain sampling (Robinson, 2014). Firstly, I strategically contacted friends and acquaintances from different cities and states of Brazil, asking if they could indicate someone from both sample groups. Then, some of them indicated some people who had already agreed to give me an interview. As my research question is nationally situated, the heterogeneity of my sample was important to 'provide evidence that findings are not solely the preserve a particular group, time or place' (Robinson, 2014: 27). Therefore, I interviewed participants from four of five regions of Brazil, from different age range, socioeconomic groups, and gender. However, only two participants were male, as the majority that put themselves to participate in social sciences studies are generally females (Robinson, 2014).

Interview guide and dynamics

I designed an interview guide for each group of participants based on previous theoretical research and news report about beneficiaries' experience with the digital characteristic of the emergency aid. However, as I was distant from the Brazilian context for being abroad, I conducted the first interview as a reconnaissance of my field (Gaskell, 2000). This was essential to help me design the final guides (see Appendix B), as I could gather important topics that were not covered in my draft guide yet.

I conducted semi-structured interviews, which format allowed me 'to pick up on statements made and openings given you by the respondent' (Berger, 1998: 60). Thus, my interview guides provided me with the main topics I needed to cover, not the exact questions. Each interview dynamic was different from another as I was interested in the participant's own narrative of

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the facts and experiences (Gaskell, 2000). Seven interviews were conducted by video call and five by phone call. Although video calls were preferable, it was considered the participant's choice and access to an Internet connection. All interviews were conducted in Portuguese.

Coding framework and analysis

I chose Thematic Analysis for analysing my data because of its flexibility and exploratory characteristic (Braun and Clarke, 2021). This method 'aims to identify themes within the data' that 'are not decided prior to coding' process (Ezzy, 2002: 88). Therefore, this was the most sustainable method for my research because I was interested in exploring the main issues and problems involving data-driven systems that could not be anticipated (Ezzy, 2002). Considering that preparing the data is an important part of the process (Creswell, 2009), I carefully transcribed all interviews, taking all spoken language and expressions (Gaskell, 2000). Then, I printed all transcripts and conducted an inductive open coding (Ezzy, 2002). After being familiarised with my data and the main topics raised from the open coding process, I went to a second-round using NVivo, where I explored the relations and comparisons between the themes (Ezzy, 2002). I reviewed my themes and topics multiple times to a deepening identification, interpretation and analysis of my data (Braun and Clarke, 2021), which I present in the next chapter. The result of this coding process can be seen in Appendix D.

Ethics and reflexivity

I started recruiting the participants for this research only after my supervisor approved all ethical considerations. As all interviews were conducted virtually, by telephone or video call, the participation consents were collected as follow: four written consents by email and nine verbal audio recorded consents. I verbally explained what is written in the 'Information for Participants' document (see Appendix C) for those providing verbal consent. The participants received all information regarding their involvement in this study, followed by questions for their permission for audio-recording and participation consent (Robinson, 2014). All names

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were replaced with pseudonyms to ensure participants anonymity. Moreover, all transcripts and audio-recordings were stored to guarantee data protection. To not misrepresent data or alter the results (Crow, 2000), special attention was taken when translating the materials to ensure that participants responses in Portuguese would have a coherent meaning when translated to English.

As mentioned above, I could interview people from four regions of Brazil, from five different states. This was only possible because of the advantage of telephone and video call interviewing over face-to-face interviewing (Opdenakker, 2006). However, these interviewing formats also imposed some challenges for me as a researcher. For instance, body language and a broader understanding of the situation where the interviewee was situated could not be analysed as an extra source of information (Opdenakker, 2006). However, I did not face many difficulties finding people willing to participate in this research. My impression was that people were urged to talk about this issue as if they would not usually be invited to do so. Therefore, even though I had to deal with the geographical limitations mentioned above, my data was enriched by participants' willingness to share their experiences and opinions. I also tried my best to conduct the interviews in a conversation format to establish the relationship of trust and confidence needed (Gaskell, 2000). As a result, some interviews were longer than I expected, as usually participants started sharing more in-depth feelings and information after 20 or 30 minutes of conversation. I believe this happened because it was necessary to penetrate participants' hidden beliefs and unconscious defences (Berger, 1998). Also, I chose not to mention (except when asked) that I was conducting the interview from London to not intimidate the participants and put myself in an imbalanced power relationship.

Finally, I acknowledge that my Brazilian identity and my previous assumptions and expectations about this research's topic could influence my findings and interpretations (Richards, 2005). Thus, I reflected on that when conducting and writing this research to eliminate my bias as best as I could (Bernard and Ryan, 2010). Furthermore, I am conscious that interviewing may lead to invalid assumptions about events because the researcher needs

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to rely on the participants' tale of experiences, which can be provided through a distorted lens (Gaskell, 2000). Therefore, all analysis and observations presented in this research are open to reinterpretation (Smith, 2000) in light of new studies and other theories.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

**Please note that all names were replaced with pseudonyms to ensure participants anonymity.*

I started each interview by inviting the participants to talk about themselves. Usually, their narrative would begin by saying their age, where they live and how many people are in their households. However, most of them would also talk about their employment status, explain whether they pay rent or not, and have a fixed remuneration. The interviewees' first personal narrative already showed how income and employment play a vital role in shaping the Brazilian identity. Furthermore, the information about housing and fixed remuneration later appeared again of their justification of why applying for *Auxílio Emergencial* was essential for them to cope with the burdens of the Covid-19 pandemic. By starting with this narrative, they were unconsciously already trying to give a satisfactory reason for why they had applied for the benefit. As if they could be judged as less worthy of financial help than other people, who could be considered poorer or more in need than them.

Many people are unemployed and many, many people are in need of everything... there are people who have to pay rent. Thank God, I don't have to pay rent. I have my own house, but it is not because we have our own house that we don't go through similar difficulties. We do. Everybody does, right?
(Aline/São Paulo)

This fear of judgment and a necessity of justifying their choices to pursue what they consider valuable for their well-being were just a first glimpse of their experience with *Auxílio*

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Emergencial, and, furthermore, of the effects of automation on their self-determination. Therefore, to help us understand the extent of these effects, I start by summarising some of the participants' experiences. Before going on, however, please notice that the interviewees offered different views and perceptions of both digital platforms available for the programme's application: the official mobile app and website. The benefit's payment was made through a digital bank account managed by *Caixa Econômica Federal*. To access the payment, the users had to download and use a secondary mobile app named *Caixa Tem*.

Auxílio Emergencial user's experiences

- **Ana/São Paulo:** a master's student, living by herself, almost 600km away from her family. She received three payments but had stopped receiving the aid in the fourth month without any notification. She still has not discovered the reason, although guessing it was due to a temporary job she got for three months. She is no longer taking this job but cannot contest the system.

- **Joana/Pará:** Had received the first payment but stopped receiving it in the second month. After many attempts to discover why, by going countless times to a *Caixa Econômica* agency, she found out that the system accused her husband earns a monthly salary. She is no longer living with him for months, as they are going for a divorce. The staff could not help her, though. They could only tell her what they could visualise in the system.

- **Maria/Pernambuco:** Had received the benefit for six months but suddenly stopped getting it. She is a hairdresser, and her husband a sociologist, who got fired during the pandemic. He had to rent a car to work as a Uber driver, while she had to 'take the risky' with Covid-19 and bring clients to her home to raise money. She does not want to contest the system, fearing being accused of being in debt with the Government; thus, having to return the money they got before getting blocked.

- **Gisele/São Paulo:** After three months of getting just an 'under review' notification on the app, she got a denial response claiming that her benefit was not approved because her

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daughter was registered with a monthly salary of R\$1,200 (near \$300). However, her daughter got fired during the pandemic, but Gisele could not contest the automated-decision because her daughter's work registration is still valid in the government system.

- **Daniela/Ceará:** Before the pandemic, she and her family were selling food boxes in the streets of Fortaleza. When Covid-19 broke up, she and her sisters tried to apply for the benefit, but they could not go over the registration process due to constant problems with the system. They tried to reach in-person help at *Caixa Econômica* – unsuccessfully. As an NGO worker, she helped low-income families to apply for *Auxílio Emergencial*, sometimes lending her smartphone. Out of ten families she helped, six did not receive the aid.

- **Aline/São Paulo:** Has two children, her husband is a self-employed car mechanic. After many 'under review' notifications, she gave up. The same did her sister, who also has two children – she saw the police from São Paulo killing her husband 'by mistake' at the beginning of the pandemic. Their brother, however, got approved to receive the benefit. He is single, has no children and lives with Aline. He went through the same application process.

- **Julia/Pernambuco:** After seeing her fourth payment clawed back by the system, she got her access to *Caixa Tem* denied in the fifth month. The app had been automatically updated, forcing her to log in again from the beginning. She put a wrong email account without realising it, which instantly red-flagged her for fraud. She could not access the app or the money. She went to *Caixa Econômica* to seek help and stayed there from 8am to 5pm. The staff member said he had fixed her email on the system, but her access was still blocked when she got home. However, her access was liberated after asking for help from a relative who works internally at *Caixa Econômica*. Without his help, she said, she would be blocked forever.

These stories, kindly shared by this study's participants, point out a similarity: the challenges with *Auxílio Emergencial* were away beyond the digital divide aspect. Therefore, I present below some of the main themes that emerged from the interviews, which are related to the concerns raised by the literature on the digital welfare state.

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'It was crashing a lot...'

In the first part of the interview, participants generally shared their digital experiences during the application process. Although only one participant (Pedro) described his experience with the app as easy and straightforward, all participants, to some extent, complained about the functionality of the app. As represented in the quotes below, the first common complaint was that the app kept crashing or presenting some errors that forced it to close, which would prevent them from filling in the application form.

It would overload, and then the app would close. You know when it shuts down randomly? Or it would say that some information didn't match, that the system was, eh... too busy. And then, it took me a week or so to finish the process and place my application into the app. (Ana/São Paulo)

Per day, we tried to do it... PER DAY, about five to six times. Nothing would happen. Then, suddenly, it would block you... 'you've reached your limit'. So, it would block you, and you'd have to wait a few days. Then, you'd do it again, and nothing would happen. Nothing happened! (Daniela/Ceará)

Furthermore, the waiting time to use the app generally generated anxiety, frustration, and a fear of not getting the benefit. In addition, this also had impacts on their daily activities, as they had to wait hours and hours just to try to use the app.

If we had something else to do, we would do it, but then, when we got back, we would have already lost our place in the queue, you know? (Patrícia/São Paulo)

The general perception, as analysed, was that this 'app overloading', as they usually described it, happened due to poor technical capacity, as '*it was not robust enough for the number of people trying to use it*' (Alberto/São Paulo). And, so, due to lack of governmental planning and interest in fully attending to the population that would need this benefit to cope with the burden of the pandemic.

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This was the challenge of the app: to meet the high demand, yea? I don't think they'd imagined that many people would...wait...for sure, they had to imagine it, because everyone wanted it [the benefit], right? (Ana/São Paulo)

'Under review, under review, under review...'

As mentioned in the introduction, among those who did not receive the benefit, 73% declared the reason was because the request was not approved or because it is still under review. Concurring with that is another recurrent topic on participants' experiences: they would often open the app and *'it would always say 'application under review''* (Aline/São Paulo). The benefit's review process, therefore, significantly affected the beneficiaries. For instance, when I asked a participant how she felt during the three months she waited for an answer, she responded with frustration: *'Ah, we kept waiting until we got a no'* and with a sense of unfairness and sadness: *'It made me sad. I see so many people that don't need it and are receiving it, you know'* (Gisele/São Paulo).

So, occasionally, they would register and then it would be there 'under review', right. *'Gee, Rute, it's still under review. What's going on?'* [...] for some of them, it took too long, you know. And then they got hopeless. Some of them would tell me, *'ah, I won't make it'* and so on. So, I think this delay was very, very bad. (Rute/Paraná – NGO worker)

Rute works for an NGO that had to distribute food parcels during the pandemic because, as she explained, families were facing severe food insecurity when all lockdown measures took place and impeded them to raise money from recycling collection. While many of them were still waiting for the review of the request, they had to rely on families, friends, NGOs and churches to have something to eat. Thus, this waiting for a review undermined their dignity, as some families were ashamed of needing to ask for help.

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Uff, having to wait for a right, yea? So, for them, I think they felt like... really begging, you know? I mean, this waiting was something very... it didn't bring dignity, let's say this way. (Rute/Paraná – NGO worker)

Similarly, Eubanks argues that these automated systems too often 'simply grind down a person's resolve until she gives up things that are rightfully hers: resources, autonomy, respect, and dignity' (2019: 194). For instance, when I first asked Aline how she had applied for *Auxílio Emergencial*, 'giving up' was already in her answer: '*It did it on the app. Someone told me about it, and I downloaded it. But anyway... After two attempts, I actually gave up*'.

Researcher: After you filled in all the information, it came up as 'under review'?

Aline: Yes, it was like that. And it went on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and at the end, nothing happened.

Researcher: Then you gave up?

Aline: Then I gave up.[...] I gave all information they asked for. There wasn't any lie on that. So, you know?... So, it wasn't meant to be mine, yea?

Aline's perception that the benefit 'was not meant' to be hers shows how these automated tools have a high potential to easily become neutralised and accepted in a social space where rights are already perceived as a matter of 'luck' by the oppressed. This consciousness is also perceived below in Gisele's description of her experiences with other welfare programmes.

Like, never, since my daughter was little, I've never had any luck in getting Bolsa Família, or any income from the Government. Not even getting a can of milk, you know? We don't know which is the mystery because there're people who don't need and can get them [benefits], right? And it seems that things end up being more difficult. Hey, like my uncle. My uncle is an alcoholic, and he's getting the money [*Auxílio Emergencial*]. If he was getting it to buy food... but no, he gets it to buy booze.

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And then we get frustrated, don't we? But those are the Government's messes, right?

What can we do? (Gisele/São Paulo)

'Who really need the aid, is not receiving it'

Gisele's quote above also expresses another recurrent topic in the interviews. Most participants shared the common perception that the benefit was wrongly distributed due to flawed surveillance criteria.

I don't know how they do this surveillance. Cause many people who didn't need it is getting the aid. (Maria/ Pernambuco)

I don't think there was really a criterion, you know. 'Ah, this person really needs it or not'. Cause I know people, friends of mine here at Uni, for example, who are rich, who have money but received the aid. (Ana/São Paulo)

'Most of them don't even have documents...'

Inequality in the access to Brazilian national registration documents also appeared as some of the reasons for the benefit not being well distributed. The quote below, for example, express an NGO worker's opinion when asked if the benefit reached the homeless in her city.

No way! My dear, they don't have, they don't even have access, no! They don't have access first because they're unregistered individuals. They don't have any documents.[...] There's no one, no organisation that says: 'look, I'll help you get your Birth Certification'. They're still far away from CPF and RG. And also, they're individuals with no access to the Internet. (Daniela/Ceará – NGO worker)

RG and CPF are Brazilian documents only issued for those with a Birth Certificate. The applicant had to provide all household members' CPF numbers to apply for *Auxílio Emergencial*. However, this condition was a barrier for many called 'invisible Brazilians' by the Government, which estimates that 50 million people – around 25% of the population – had no

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valid documentation to apply for the benefit (Fantástico, 2020). Furthermore, around 3 million Brazilians have no Birth Certificate, which impedes them to access health, education and any other public service (IBGE, 2018), as they are not considered Brazilian citizens. Alberto, for instance, when asked if they needed to go to *Caixa Econômica* at any point, said:

I think it wasn't necessary because we... are citizens, right. We have all our documents. When we were working, both of us always declared income tax, so, all our data is there.[...] So I imagine that, for many people who don't have this, don't have some documents, it's practically impossible to access this benefit. (Alberto/ São Paulo)

'People should be free to do whatever they want with the money, you know?'

Another recurrent topic was beneficiaries' capabilities to access the money and have the freedom to use it when and how they would prefer. The payment, for instance, was through a digital bank account which should be managed in a secondary smartphone app called *Caixa Tem*. Besides the perceptions that this imposed more challenges for those with a lack of digital skills and access to smartphones and Internet connection, there was an overlapping issue in most interviews: people were impeded from withdrawing money. They could see it in the digital account and use it through the *Caixa Tem* app, but they would have to wait some weeks or months to withdraw.

I felt that...like...how can I explain to you?... they would give us the aid, but not, you know? (Rosa/São Paulo).

I wanted to pay for my things, and I couldn't do it cause I couldn't withdraw the money at that moment. And I'm not very good at using... well, I'm a little insecure using a mobile phone, going to a store with an app and using my phone there. I really don't understand much about these technologies, you know? So, I prefer to, you know, withdraw, and pay in cash. (Bruna/Pernambuco)

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Many of them shared that the solution was to transfer money to a friend/relative's bank account, who would withdraw it – an unequal capability for many Brazilians.

They usually don't have many relatives who have a bank account. So, it's difficult, you know.[...] The Government said you could pay bills, water, electricity, all through the app. But, girl, they don't know how to pay bills! They want cash! [...] like, ah, this habit that we got to go in a restaurant, a bakery and pay with a credit card...They don't have that, you know? Too far away from their reality. They want 'cash' in their hands, you know? (Rute/Paraná – NGO worker)

When mentioning similar problems with electronic welfare cards, Alston (2019:10) points out that 'users have expressed feelings of disempowerment, embarrassment and shame' due to the stigma that receiving welfare can carry. I go further saying that not only the welfare-tag can cause shame, but also the lack of skills to use digital devices, as shared by a young interviewee that unsuccessfully tried to use the *Caixa Tem* app in a shop:

I felt very ashamed, I thought it was my mistake, you know? *'My God, it's happening because I don't know how to use this. I'm embarrassed here'*. Then I tried to teach her [the shopper] how to do it, but later I said *'never mind, I think the problem is with my app, I don't know how to use it'...*well, maybe the problem was that her machine wasn't registered yet to receive *Auxílio Emergencial*. But I wasn't thinking clearly. I was embarrassed and gave up. (Bruna/Pernambuco)

Lastly, in evidence with a concern raised by McCully (2020), the automation on the digital bank account allowed the Government to easily claw back the welfare money, as experienced by Julia. She saw her fourth payment disappearing from her bank account because she waited too long to use it. Thus, the system simply withdrew it without notification, warning, or explanation.

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This was their assumption: if in 90 days you haven't used it, it was because you didn't need it. And the reality wasn't like that, you know. Even more with all the problems we faced with access, cause sometimes *Caixa Tem* was crashing a lot or taking forever to log in. So, in this situation, I think many people would really prefer to, 'ah, I'll keep the money here to save for an emergency'. And it wasn't like that. We felt...At least I felt that I was really in the Government's hands. Because they would give me some money that I *had* to spend, you know. It wasn't my own money, which I could save. (Julia/Pernambuco)

Thus, these are some evidence of how automation and digitalisation undermined beneficiaries' freedom and self-determination to use the money whenever and how they wanted to, especially considering that *Auxílio Emergencial* was an emergency aid.

'I don't even know how to contest it'

One recurrent issue with automated systems, which constantly appears in studies on this topic, is an inability to contest the systems, combined with a lack of understanding of why the benefit was blocked or denied. The same problem was identified in this study.

Well, they cancelled my benefit, and I don't know why. I think it was because of my temporary job, but anyway... I tried to contest, and until today, I couldn't do it. I couldn't talk to anybody. They give a phone number there, but it doesn't work. You call, and it says: '*if it is about Auxílio Emergencial, use the app*'. But then the app gives you the phone number again. (Ana/São Paulo)

While many simply give up on trying to contest, as Ana did, the only option left to others is to keep trying to resist and fight back for their rights, even if it means spending days and days after an answer that may never come. Joana, for instance, went countless times to *Caixa Econômica* hoping to find a solution – that she still has not got.

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...people won't leave. They stay there at *Caixa Econômica* to get a solution.[...] Some people have the solution; all figured out. Others don't. A lot of people in the queues leave there in the same situation. I know because when I went there, I talked to three people or so, and they would tell me that they'd been going there the whole week, with no answer. That they still hadn't received the money. They were entitled to it, but they didn't receive it. (Joana/Pará)

'There're very long queues at Caixa Econômica'

For the participants, it was because of all these challenges – app blocking for an error with a password or email, benefit being denied with no explanation, red-flagging for fraud, lack of digital skills or even a human necessity to talk with another human being – that long queues were seen at *Caixa Econômica Federal* agencies around the country. This was a problem vastly covered by the Brazilian press.

I can even send you a video next week showing the long queues. Well, I don't need to send you; you can go on YouTube to see how long they're. (Daniela/Ceará)

Therefore, the digitalisation of the welfare was inefficient in avoiding agglomerations during the pandemic, which was one of its primary goals. Furthermore, as argued by Eubanks, social workers who are there receiving queries to help the population became a powerless extension of algorithms, as their function was redefined as 'information processing' (2019: 195).

Some of the employees are okay...but some are rude and say: '*look, you no longer have this right*'. They even say like this: '*You have no right*'. Then we come back home with no answers. At *Caixa Econômica* there was only one attendant who got the copies and gave them to me. '*Look, here's all of your Auxílio. You don't get paid anymore, but I don't know why*', he told me. Then I said okay. But that's all he did. '*Look, here it's. Now why it's blocking your Auxílio, I don't know*'. And that was it. (Joana/Pará)

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'No access to the Internet; no access to information'

Regarding the digital divide, some participants shared their perceptions about how the issues they faced could have burdened more other people with different access and capabilities. Thus, exacerbating inequalities.

A case reported in the news was about a guy who didn't have a smartphone. So, he borrowed his friend's smartphone and bought a SIM card because you needed to have your own number.[...] So, imagine the struggle of this boy... in that queue all this time... Nobody would lend a phone for a whole day for a person keep trying to make this application. So he'd take the SIM card out, put the SIM card in, then go back to the queue... it is very complicated, isn't it? (Patrícia/São Paulo)

Moreover, according to participants' perceptions, not just the digital divide has left many excluded from the benefit, but also inequality in access to information.

Perhaps some families didn't even know, didn't even know they're entitled to it. They didn't even know where to look for this information. Maybe they could have gotten it, but no, they didn't even know how to go after it, and so on. (Rute/Paraná – NGO worker)

If you think about it, those who are poor, really poor, who are exactly whom the programme wanted to address, won't have access to it, because they don't have access to the Internet, they don't have access to a smartphone, they don't have access to information... (Ana/São Paulo)

'Communications failure...'

The programme's strategic communication was also mentioned as a problem. Many shared some suspicious if *Auxílio Emergencial* was true; therefore, they would just download the app after some relative or friend had confirmed it was real. The media constantly appeared as their primary source of information, which was sometimes confusing, especially regarding the

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payment procedures. Julia, who had a payment clawed back by the system, said she did not find any information about this procedure on the programme's website or app.

I googled it, right[...] I found on some news reports that they were considering 90 days to withdrawal if the person didn't use it. But it wasn't highlighted on the report; it was a piece of it.[...] man, it was like a trap for us. This was the feeling.
(Julia/Pernambuco)

Furthermore, some of them said only fixed and general answers were provided on the app and website sections for 'frequently asked questions', which did not consider questions and problems that people would have.

'It wasn't for this help [from NGO], I think many people would be starving'

From some participants' evaluations of the effectiveness of *Auxílio Emergencial*, it was possible to notice that the aid was not sufficient to provide food security – especially considering the challenges to access it. Thus, churches and NGOs were usually mentioned as playing an essential role by providing food parcels when the Government was inefficient to do so. This concurring with Ivo's (2005: 80) argument that these organisations represent in Latin America 'an alternative to state intervention, where this is absent'. Gisele, for instance, shared she went to a public Reference Centre for Social Assistance (CRAS) near her home but did not get any help, not even a food parcel, which made her feel as 'nothing', as she said, and 'abandoned' by the Government.

Ah, you get there, and nobody gives a damn. When I went to CRAS, a woman with five little children was there to get a food parcel. The lady said 'no'. You think if this lady had a job, she would submit herself to this kind of thing? Of course not! Cause nobody wanna take advantage of anybody, right? (Gisele/ São Paulo)

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'Is the digitalisation helping anyhow?'

When I asked a participant's opinion about the entire process being digitalised and if it was helping the population in some extent, she replied:

No. It's not helping anyone[...] Here in Belém we see people... everyone... *Caixa Econômica* here is full of people, super, super crowded. People stay there from sun to sun after this money.[...] Then, 'oh there's an app'... and all I hear people saying is: but no one can open this app, no one gets anything through this app. That's why we come, because... they say that we're not supposed to go to *Caixa Econômica*; that we shouldn't be in agglomerations, but no one can do it using the app. (Joana/Pará)

In contrast with the quote above, some participants said they liked the flexibility and practicality to do everything online, from home, thus not having to apply or going after the money in-person.

Look, I'm not gonna lie, okay? I think it's good. Because I don't...gee, it's very horrible to face bank queues. Well... I know that we run a lot of risks, but it's convenient, yea? (Maria/ Pernambuco)

However, although agreeing that it is more convenient to use an app, some shared concerns about how digitalisation can harm and exclude people instead of helping them when it is not well planned and implemented. Thus, suggesting that improvements should be made to avoid failures.

I think it's indeed necessary to digitalise since the primary intention is to facilitate the system, yea? To facilitate access, to facilitate people entering in any programme and so on. At the same time... I worry about this difficulty that often appears due to logistical and programming errors.[...] So, many people can have, occasionally, problems with their CPF, and so on. Like, it should be something that predicts

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mistakes, predicts failures and occurrences, and has a better way of dealing with them. (Julia/Pernambuco)

The quote above shows another observation I got from the interviews: participants that were university students or recently graduated indicated concerns about the automation on these welfare programmes, usually mentioning words/concepts like algorithms, robots, programming, artificial intelligence, and so on. This denotes that these concepts and discussions are closer to those with higher cultural capital.

Lastly, there was a common fear of being a victim of scammers, thus, leaving them insecure about their data protection.

[People were] scared of giving their documents and information to someone who isn't authorised, you know? Because there was a lot of embezzlement of money... then everyone was scared to input their CPF there, their info, and get scammed. (Joana/Pará)

This data protection insecurity was also present on concerns about how the Government would use individuals' information, which could lead to unfair judgments and analysis when the data on the system no longer match their reality – as indeed happened with many participants. As shared by Bruna, governmental access to all your data leaves a feeling that citizens are constantly under surveillance and control. Her quote below, thus, fully expressed the challenges imposed by those automated systems, as discussed by scholars that have inspired this research.

You don't know who is there evaluating you. If it's actually a person or just those little robots that they program, you know?[...] *'Oh, you only approve who fits this profile here. If it doesn't fit this profile, you disapprove'*. Then, whether you want it or not, I think it brings some insecurity because... I don't know. Afterwards, people started to say that they were going through a fine-tooth comb, and many people had

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received unduly and had to return the money. So, we wonder, are they really going through a fine-tooth comb? Or not? Or is this an argument to scare people? Because, really, you know. Like any programme, there are flaws. I think some people received unduly. But we don't even know from where these flaws come, unfortunately. So, whether you like it or not, you're insecure because the issue of outdated data comes up time after time. Then they say, '*you will have to give it back because you received it unduly*'. But then the information there is no longer true. The data that was registered before is no longer part of my reality. (Bruna/Pernambuco)

CONCLUSION

The Brazilian Government already sees *Auxílio Emergencial* as a case study to the 'digital transformation of others public services' because of the 'positive aspects' of the high-tech tools implemented to cross-check data, prevent frauds, automate the eligibility analysis, and digitalise the registration process - thus, to save public money (Gov.br, 2020). However, the beneficiaries' perceptions and experiences presented here indicate how these same high-tech tools can threaten the population, especially the poor. As argued by Eubanks, 'when automated decision-making tools are not built to explicitly dismantle structural inequalities, their speed and scale intensify them' (2019: 190). Therefore, in a country where marginalised groups historically have to deal with all forms of symbolic power and violence undermining their self-determination and dignity, these automated systems become 'sophisticated tools' to perpetuate social exclusion and inequality in a context where the oppressed usually sees rights as a matter of 'luck' and not rule-of-law.

Moreover, the findings of this study impose a challenge to the arguments in favour of a digital transformation in Brazil as a way to improve the quality, efficiency and speed of Brazilian public services. These are thus just some of the challenges that this case study found out: long waiting queues (online and in-person), lack of agency to contest an automated decision, fear

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of data protection, concern about having to return the money, absence of reasons to understand why a benefit was cancelled or denied, no freedom to use the money as they shall want to, and the dehumanisation of the entire process, which replaces social workers for systems that do not allow human intervention. Furthermore, these challenges were faced during unprecedented health and economic crisis aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Indeed, technology can significantly improve society and be an excellent weapon to tackle poverty and inequality. However, it is only possible when it is designed and programmed within ethical and social justice concerns to dismantle all negative implications on the lives of those who will depend on algorithms predictions and verdicts. Thus, to contribute to this discussion, this study attempted to raise some of the main challenges imposed by automated and data-driven welfare systems that go beyond the digital divide problem. Therefore, this dissertation shed light on an alarming high-tech wall of exclusion rapidly being built up in Brazil, but that still lacks studies and public discussions about how we can disarm its destruction power.

Further research must advance, especially considering other Brazilian welfare programmes. Besides studies assessing individuals' perspectives through a more diverse sample design, it is also necessary to analyse the impact of political discourse to legitimise and neutralise the introduction of these technologies into the social protection system. Furthermore, further studies should also analyse the role of the media, as it appeared in participants' narratives as their primary source of information. Moreover, in-depth studies should explore how welfare strategic communications could be improved, as they significantly impact welfare delivery and individuals' rights consciousness.

To bring this study to a close, thus, I shall mention that one quote kept coming to my mind while conducting this research. '*It wasn't meant to be mine, yea?*', said Aline – a girl of my age, living at the same place where I am from, facing challenges that I have never had to face. If I could, I would tell her: Aline, it was probably meant to be yours! This dissertation, though, was a modest attempt at doing so. Thus, I conclude by saying that we must keep fighting for

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justice until (here I borrow O'Neil's words) we disarm all these new sophisticated weapons of exclusion and oppression. For a simple reason: *our rights are meant to be ours!*

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Group	Gender	Age	Location	Interview format	Consent form
Ana	1	Female	20-30	Southeast - Sao Paulo	Video call	Written - email
Patrícia	1	Female	30-40	Southeast - Sao Paulo	Video call	Written - email
Alberto	1	Male	30-40	Southeast - Sao Paulo	Video call	Written - email
Joana	1	Female	60-70	North - Pará	Phone call	Verbal
Maria	1	Female	40-50	Northeast - Pernambuco	Phone call	Verbal
Rosa	1	Female	50-60	Southeast - Sao Paulo	Phone call	Verbal
Daniela	1 and 2	Female	40-50	Northeast - Ceará	Video call	Verbal
Bruna	1	Female	20-30	Northeast - Pernambuco	Video call	Verbal
Gisele	1	Female	40-50	Southeast - Sao Paulo	Video call	Verbal
Pedro	1	Male	20-30	Northeast - Pernambuco	Phone call	Verbal
Julia	1	Female	20-30	Northeast - Pernambuco	Video call	Verbal
Aline	1	Female	20-30	Southeast - Sao Paulo	Phone call	Verbal
Rute	2	Female	30-40	South - Paraná	Video call	Written - email

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Appendix B – Interview guides (group 1 and 2)

GROUP 1 INTERVIEW GUIDE – Beneficiaries

Background information:

- Name
- Age
- Profession
- Number of members in the household
- Where she/he lives
- Why she/he needed to apply for this aid program (*get an idea of the financial challenges faced during the pandemic*)
- If she/he has a smartphone/computer, if she/he is digitally literate and if she/he has internet data/Wifi easily

What I need to know from beneficiaries:

- Was the communication about the program clear enough to understand all steps to apply for it?
- From where have you mostly received information about the program before applying for it? The media? Friends? NGOs/ civil society leaders? Government?
- How was your experience when applying (or trying to apply) for the aid program?
 - Did you have any difficulty using the app or website? Was it easy or complicated to use it? Was the app working properly?
 - Could you successfully apply for the program or not?
 - Could you talk with someone during the application process?
- Were you eligible for the first, second and third rounds?
 - If you were denied a second/third round, do you know the reason? Could you contest that?
- If you were eligible for the aid program, tell me your experience when getting the money
 - How was it? Did you get it in cash or through the *Caixa Tem* app?
 - Was it easy to use the *Caixa Tem* app?
 - For how long did you have to wait to use the money?
 - Did you try to pay through the *Caixa Tem* app? (at groceries shops, pharmacies, etc). Was it easy? The app was working properly when trying to use it to pay?
- How did you/your family use the money? Was this aid enough to provide you with food security during the pandemic?
- Do you think this initiative to provide the benefit digitally was good or bad? Why?
- Do you think it would be a good idea to apply this model to other or future welfare programmes?

GROUP 2 INTERVIEW GUIDE – NGO workers

Background information:

- Name
- Age
- Profession

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- Name of the organisation
- She/he position in the organisation (voluntary, worker, leader, etc.) and for long
- Where the organisation is located
- Where the community attended is located
- The extent of the contact with the community attended during the pandemic (helping in which ways? For how long?)

What I need to know from organisations' leaders/workers:

- When *Auxílio Emergencial* was approved, were people from the community aware of that?
- In your perception, from where do you think people were receiving information about the program before applying for it? The media? Friends? NGOs/ civil society leaders? Government?
- In your opinion, was the communication about the program clear enough to let people understand all the steps to apply for it? Did you personally have difficulties understanding it properly before helping others?
- How is the 'digital scenario' in the community? Do people have smartphones, data or Wifi? Do they have computers?
- As far as you know, how was people's experience when applying (or trying to apply) for the aid program?
 - Did they have any difficulty using the app or website? Was it easy or complicated to use it? Was the app working properly?
 - Could they successfully apply for the program or not?
 - Did your organisation help in this process in any way?
- As far as you know, how was people's experience when getting the money? For how long did they have to wait to use it?
- In your opinion, did *Auxílio Emergencial* fully attend basic needs of those facing financial challenges during the pandemic? Was it enough to provide food security to the families in poor communities?
- Do you think that this initiative to provide the benefit digitally was good or bad? Why?
- Do you think it would be a good idea to apply this model to other or future welfare programmes?

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Appendix C – Information for participants and consent form

The impact of the digitalisation of welfare initiatives

Department of Media & Communication, LSE

Information for participants

Thank you for considering participating in this study, which will take place in June of 2021. Please, carefully read all the information below **and follow the guide marked in red at the end of this page.**

What is this research about?

This is a study about the impact of the digitalisation of welfare initiatives, taking as a case study the *Auxílio Emergencial*, launched by the Brazilian government in 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

How will it work and what will my involvement be?

I will conduct an interview with you, like a conversation, for 30 to 40 minutes. You must be acknowledged that it will be audio recorded. We can do it by phone or video call (Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp, etc.), as you prefer, at a date and time that fit better for you. The aim is to know how your experience was during the *Auxílio Emergencial* application process and your opinions and perceptions about how the program was conducted.

What will my information be used for?

Your participation will collaborate with my research as a master student at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Therefore, your answers will contribute to my dissertation paper.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary, which means that it is your choice to give this interview or not. In case you accept to participate, you will still be allowed to withdraw at any part, even after you concede the interview (you just need to communicate with me until July 1st of 2021). If you withdraw from the study, I will not retain the information you have given thus far. Furthermore, if any questions during the interview make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer them.

Will my data be kept confidential?

Yes, the records from this study will be kept as confidential as possible. All your data will be anonymised – which means that your name and other personal data will not be mentioned in a paper resulted from this research. I might mention only the city/state where you live. Only myself and my supervisor will have access to the files and any audiotapes. All data collected will be kept safe and protected.

What if I have a question or complaint?

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You can get to touch with me at any time via the phone/WhatsApp +44 07934-265929 or via the email m.c.lima-silva@lse.ac.uk. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the conduct of this research, please contact the LSE Research Governance Manager via research.ethics@lse.ac.uk.

If you accept participating in this research, please, print the following page, fill up the form and sign it. Then, take a picture or scan the document and send it back to me by email. If you do not have printer access, you can reply to my email confirming that you have read the information above and accept to participate in this research.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

This study has undergone an ethics review in accordance with the LSE Research Ethics Policy and Procedure. The LSE Research Privacy Policy can be found at: https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Secretarys-Division/Assets/Documents/Information-Records-Management/Privacy-Notice-for-Research-v1.2.pdf?from_serp=1

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CONSENT FORM

Name of the researcher: Melissa Lima Silva

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY IS VOLUNTARY

I have read and understood the study information sent to me in June 2021. I have been able to ask questions about the study when necessary.	YES / NO
I consent voluntarily to participate in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and that I can withdraw from the study at any time up until 01/07/2021, without giving a reason.	YES / NO
I agree with the interview being audio recorded.	YES / NO
I understand that the information I provide will be used for the researcher's dissertation, and that the information will be anonymised, except for the name of the city/state where I live.	YES / NO
I agree that my (anonymised) information can be quoted in research outputs.	YES / NO
I understand that any personal information that can identify me, such as my name, address, and phone number will be kept confidential and not shared with anyone besides the researcher and the supervisor.	YES / NO

Participant name: _____

Signature: _____ Date _____

Please retain a copy of this consent form.

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Appendix D – Thematic Analysis Grid

Themes	Topics	Examples
Automation	Artificial Intelligence - machines replacing humans	I'm studying Marketing, and one of my fights with my professors is that the machines, the robots are taking over. That's a lie. No, they are not. I think it will still take 30, 50 years for the robots, for the machines to take over... I believe that in the end they will wait for the human being, but until they get there, a good population, at least in my reality here in Fortaleza, in the North, Northeast... is very precarious. Maybe they even have a smartphone, many of young people, so, are better than many people, but... (Participant 7 – Daniela/Ceará)
	Data protection and fear of scams	[People were] scared of giving their documents, information, to someone who isn't authorised. You know? Because there was a lot of embezzlement of money... then everyone was scared to input their CPF, their info, and get scammed. (Participant 4 - Joana/Pará)
	Impersonality - Desire and action of reaching in-person help	It's bizarre that you can't eh... talk to anybody to say 'oh, I'm unemployed again. I got a job, but I'm unemployed. It was for three months and I need the aid back. My situation didn't change'. But then, you can't get in touch with anyone to say that. (Participant 1 – Ana/São Paulo)
	Modernity and innovation	I believe people will become more and more accustomed to this digital world and you will see less and less people in person. Because, everything is gonna be digital. Actually, I don't like this idea very much. But whether we like it or not, we live in a world and have to adapt to it. I don't get used to it... I adapt myself because it's necessary. Like I did, you know, during the pandemic. (Participant 8 – Bruna/Pernambuco)

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	<p>Positive aspects</p>	<p>Look, I'm not gonna lie, okay? I think it's good. Because I don't...gee, it's very horrible to face bank queues. Well... I know that we run a lot of risks, but the convenience, yea? (Participant 5 – Maria/ Pernambuco)</p>
	<p>Sense of personal responsibility in the decision-making process</p>	<p>Ah, it was confusing, in the sense of... like, 'am I doing everything I need to do? Everything that is needed?' Because sometimes they can deny for something that I did wrong and that I didn't understand during the process. So I always did it calmly and so on. (Participant 1 – Ana/São Paulo)</p>
	<p>How to contest the system?</p>	<p>There is no way to contest. Because it is already in the final round, it's already ending and she was registered for 6 months. Until it shows up in the government system that her employment has already been terminated, the time has already passed, because her work card hasn't even been processed yet. (Participant 9 – Gisele/São Paulo)</p>
<p>Auxílio Emergencial users' digital experience</p>	<p>App functionality</p>	<p>Per day, we tried to do it, PER DAY, about five to six times. Nothing happened. Then, suddenly, it would block you...' you reached your limit'. So, it would block you, and you had to wait a few days. Then, you would do it again, and nothing happened. Nothing happened! (Participant 7 – Daniela/Ceará)</p>
	<p>Evaluation of Caixa Econômica's staff training and capability to answer questions and resolve problems related to Auxílio Emergencial</p>	<p>I couldn't even get angry with this person for this very reason. Because the way he answered, the way he was there trying to find out what was going on, I realized that it was... they were being, they were being given automatic information. 'Look, you are going to do this. This is the procedure you are going to follow". For any mistake. And that's exactly because of this that he couldn't, apparently, understand which problem was blocking my access. So, he just did a general procedure. (Participant 11 – Julia/Pernambuco)</p>

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<p>Attempts to reaching help by phone call or online</p>	<p>They give a phone number there, but it doesn't work. You call, and it says: "if it is about Auxílio Emergencial, use the app'. But then the app gives you the phone number again. (Participant 1 – Ana/São Paulo)</p>
<p>Fraud prevention</p>	<p>It couldn't be the same password. Then they couldn't remember the password anymore, so then it would block... my God! I remember there was a family that couldn't log in to see if they had a balance, you know? (Participant 13 – Rute/Paraná)</p>
<p>Lack of response when the benefit is denied or stopped</p>	<p>That's why, like, I wanted to talk to someone to know why I excluded from the programme, you know? Eh, why... like, why they took me out. They didn't say anything, they just stopped giving the aid. (Participant 1 – Ana/São Paulo)</p>
<p>Long queues - Public agglomeration at Caixa Econômica Federal</p>	<p>A lot of people spent the night there, and the queue was very long. But there are still a lot of queues at banks. I don't know if it's the difficulty of access. I don't know if it's insecurity. A lot of people are scared, yea?. Like, they don't trust a lot in these digital things. It's... there are several factors, you know. But there are still a lot of people in bank queues, you know? (Participant 5 – Maria/ Pernambuco)</p>
<p>Positive aspects</p>	<p>It was pretty smooth... the whole process of getting to the aid. It was very easy. I was able to download the app, I had no difficulty withdrawing money, or anything. Everything was very easy. The app is also easy to use, there isn't much difficulty. (Participant 10 – Pedro/Pernambuco)</p>
<p>Waiting for a confirmation of approval or denial</p>	<p>Uff, to have to wait for a right, yea? So, for them, I think they felt like... really begging, you know? Like, this waiting was something very... it didn't bring dignity, let's say this way. (Participant 13 – Rute/Paraná)</p>

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		Experiences with the Digital bank account app	Every month we had to see in the app if the money had come in. It was as if you had a huge bank line, and you would wait a long time to get in. Then it got better. Then you didn't wait so long. (Participant 5 – Maria/Pernambuco)
	Subtheme: Receiving the money	inequality of capability to transfer and withdrawn money	I felt that... like... how can I explain to you?... they would give us the aid, but not, you know? They would give it to you, but you couldn't.... I was able to withdraw the first payment at the Caixa Economica, but the others not. The other payments were sent to this digital account, and you could only withdraw after two months. A month or so. So, this is my feeling... sometimes you need to have cash in your hand, right? Not like that, having to wait to be able to withdraw. (Participant 6 – Rosa/São Paulo)
		Waiting to receive the benefit	In the beginning I thought it was so long, even to receive the 300, too. It took too long . Then it came out. But this R\$150, Jesus! I think it took almost a year, didn't it? (Participant 5 – Maria/Pernambuco)
Digital literacy and digital divide		Access to smartphones, computers, and Internet connection	Ah, they don't have access to a mobile phone, no access to the Internet, no access, you know... There's no way to prove an address, I don't know. I think they should cross-data. So I think they don't have access. (Participant 6 – Rosa/São Paulo)
	Help needed to use digital device	No, girl, I remember that there was a family that I had to send screenshots, you know! I had... I downloaded the app, like, I downloaded it on my phone and I took screenshots and sent it to them... with little arrows, like this, you know. Like making subtitles. It was at that level some families. (Participant 13 – Rute/Paraná)	
	Reporting experiences with online learning during pandemic	Look, it wasn't fair, of course not. Like, studying online is not fair either. You have many children studying at home that don't	

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		have access to the internet, or the family has only one mobile phone for four children to study. (Participant 6 – Rosa/São Paulo)
Communication and access to information	Clarity in the official strategic communication	It was always the same thing, we were told to look for an agency. So, it was always something very vague. Always that very vague information, as if there were no failures, you know. As if there were no doubts. My doubts were happening. (Participant 11 – Julia/Pernambuco)
	Eligibility understanding	In the sense that you asked 'ah, if I would have the right'... it wasn't clear, because they don't really say 'ah, you have the right or not'. Sometimes I even thought that I would have the right to earn more because they said that women who are alone could earn more. (Participant 1 – Ana/São Paulo)
	Finding information	I got some from the media, from newspapers, and from Caixa's own site as well. (Participant 2 – Patrícia/São Paulo)
	The role of the media (Google, TV, News)	I heard about it through the news, you know. Through the media. But I was following to see if it would really be released this aid. (Participant 10 – Pedro/Pernambuco)
Benefit effectiveness	Evaluation of the Government effectiveness	I felt supported, you know, because I was getting, really, an amount that was significant to me, since I wasn't working. But I still felt that something more could have been done. (Participant 11 – Julia/Pernambuco)
	Financial impacts of the pandemic and how the benefit helped	The aid came at a very good time because with my mother's death it was difficult to pay for college, right? (Participant 10 – Pedro/Pernambuco)
	Food security and hunger	So for a family of more people in the household it wouldn't be enough, sometimes, not even for food. (Participant 13 – Rute/Paraná)
Social Space	Community and solidarity	There was a child at my door, begging for food. Then my husband took the food parcel

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		we had won and gave it to her. (Participant 12 – Aline/São Paulo)
	Comparisons	If you think about it, those who are poor, really poor, which was exactly who the programme wanted to address, won't have access to it, because they don't have access to the Internet, they don't have access to a smartphone, they don't have access to information... (Participant 1 – Ana/São Paulo)
	The role of churches and NGOs	I see that if this work hadn't been done, as it has been since last year, I think many people would be starving, you know? (Participant 13 – Rute/Paraná)
	Trying to get help at a CRAS unity (Social Assistance Reference Center)	Ah, you get there, and nobody gives a damn. When I went to CRAS, a woman with five little children went to get a food parcel. The lady said 'no'. You think if the person had a job, she would submit herself to this kind of thing? Of course not! Cause nobody wanna take advantage of anybody, right? (Participant 9 – Gisele/ São Paulo)
Self-determination	Sense of unfairness	Some people yes, that I know of, have got it, yes. There are people who have good financial conditions, but lost a lot of things. And there are people that have good financial conditions, didn't need it but got it, you know? That I know too. (Participant 12 – Aline/São Paulo)
	Never mind - giving up after some attempts	It did it on the app. Someone told me about it, and I downloaded it, but also... After two attempts, I actually gave up. (Participant 12 – Aline/São Paulo)
	Labour - Importance of the Brazilian Work Card	And he wasn't even registered with the company anymore, you know, but the company hadn't written him off. So he really wasn't even working at that company anymore. (Participant 13 – Rute/Paraná)

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Justifying how would use the benefit in case it was not denied	I would use it to pay bills, buy groceries, buy things for the house... (Participant 9 – Gisele/São Paulo)
Invisible Brazilians - lack of national ID registration	There's no one, no organisation that says: look, I'll help you get your Birth Certification. We're still far away from CPF and RG. (Participant 7 – Daniela/Ceará)

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