

THE IMPACT OF THE DIGITALIZATION OF WELFARE INITIATIVES



**A CASE STUDY OF THE BRAZILIAN
COVID-19 EMERGENCY AID -
AUXÍLIO EMERGENCIAL**

"Auxílio Emergencial" is a Brazilian emergency aid created at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic to minimize social and economic impacts for vulnerable families. More than 67 million people were benefited from the program during the first three months that it was available. A recent study conducted by the University of São Paulo showed that "Auxílio Emergencial" was responsible for decelerating the increase of inequality and poverty in Brazil during the last year. However, because of the pandemic's unprecedented impacts in a country already suffering from historical inequality and poverty, this aid could benefit even more people if its application was not digitally conditional. With the governmental discourse "to guarantee social distancing" and surveillance, the application to "Auxílio Emergencial" had to be done only through an official mobile app or website, which brought many challenges for those digital illiterate or without internet access.

It has been argued that the digitalization of welfare programs instead of include, can actually exclude, discriminate and even impoverish people, especially those digital illiterate and with no or inadequate access to technologies. In this view, this research proposal aims to do a case study of Auxílio Emergencial to understand to what extent inequality and poverty could be even more exacerbated because of a rapid technological improvement (triggered by the pandemic) in social protection systems.

METHOD

Semi-structured interviews with two groups of people:

1) NGO/CSO leaders working directly with impoverished communities, and 2) People from urban areas in need of some financial support throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and that had applied (or tried to apply) for the "Auxílio Emergencial".

The aim is to understand the effects of this digital delivery and data-driven emergency aid during the pandemic on the lives of the most vulnerable, as well as their perceptions about the communication of the program and the digital challenges they faced when applying to it.

RESEARCH QUESTION

IN WHAT WAYS HAVE AUTOMATED WELFARE INITIATIVES IN BRAZIL AND THE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AROUND THEM ACTED TO CHALLENGE OR EXACERBATE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY?

