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Social Protection and Climate Disasters: Brazil’s Responses to the 2024 Rio Grande do Sul Floods

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Social Protection and Climate Disasters: Brazil's Responses to the 2024 Rio Grande do Sul Floods

Raquel Tebaldi[1]

May 2025

Abstract: The 2024 floods in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, prompted the largest and fastest response to an extreme weather event in the country's history. Brazil is a compelling case for analysing shock-responsive and climate-adaptive social protection because of its high level of decentralisation and significant maturity of its social protection system. Brazil is also highly susceptible to climate risks, and as climate change intensifies, bringing more frequent and severe weather events, strengthening the resilience of social protection systems becomes increasingly vital. This case study examines the Brazilian government's emergency responses, with a particular focus on the federal and state interventions, drawing from documental analysis and key informant interviews. The analysis shows how significant levels of emergency support were mobilised by federal and state governments, and the system features that enabled a quick response, such as the use of technology for mapping affected areas and the use of existing government databases. Nonetheless, actors faced challenges in terms of coordination between different levels of governance and in terms of emergency preparedness. This study provides some reflections on the obstacles encountered by federal and state actors and points to areas for further improvement at the system level.

Keywords: adaptive social protection; shock-responsive social protection; climate change; climate crisis; Rio Grande do Sul floods.

JEL code: I38; H53; H84;Q54.

1. Introduction

The floods impacting Brazil's southernmost state, Rio Grande do Sul, in May 2024 are considered one of country's biggest climate-related disasters (MIDR, 2024b), with an unprecedented scale that surpassed the flooding events already experienced by several of the state's municipalities in 2023. The variability in rainfall that led to this extreme weather event was associated with the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) combined with a series of factors that led to an unusually high level of precipitation over an extensive area of the state (Marengo et al., 2024). Over 90 per cent of municipalities in the state were impacted, 183 people died, over 800 were injured (Defesa Civil RS, 2024) and at the peak of the flooding over 600,000 people were displaced or in shelters (Rio Grande do Sul State Government, 2024a) as shown in Figure 1.

This extreme weather event prompted the largest and fastest disaster response in the country's history (MIDR, 2024b). Families displaced by the floods in Rio Grande do Sul in 2024 could access multiple responses delivered by the federal, state and municipal-level governments. This paper focuses on the federal government's "*Auxílio Reconstrução*" (AR) and the state government's new

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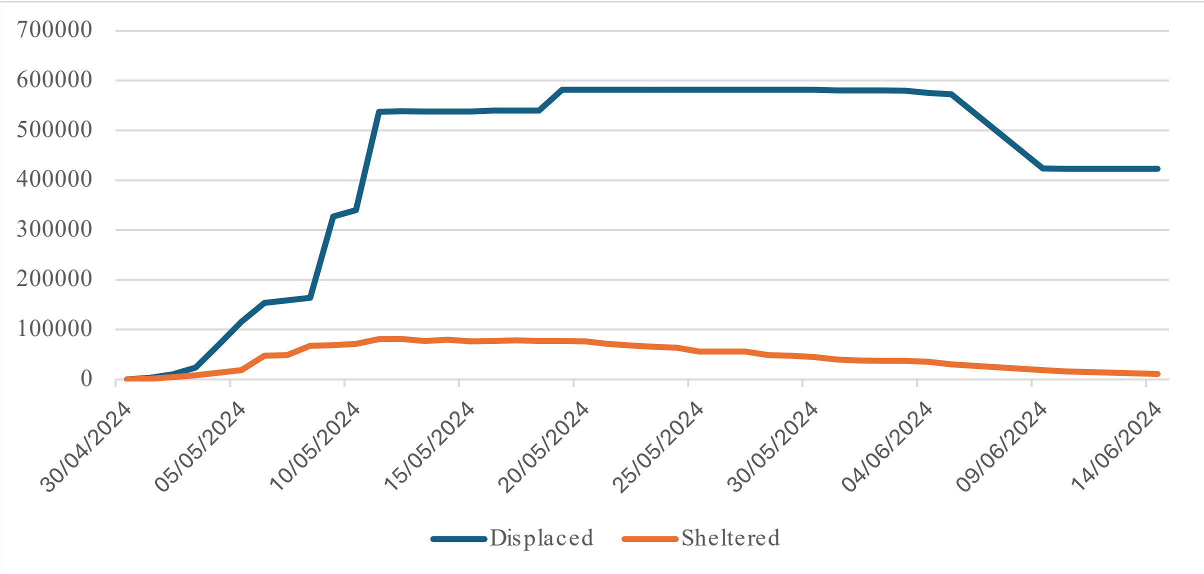
edition of "*Programa Volta Por Cima*" (PVPC), which had already been previously initiated to respond to the 2023 floods which affected a smaller group of municipalities.

Brazil is vulnerable to the effects of climate change (World Bank, 2021), so it is crucial to ensure better emergency preparedness through its social protection system. The scale of the 2024 flooding events and of the responses, combined with the significant challenges they faced, warrants a detailed analysis that can support efforts to improve social protection system-level resilience building. The disaster has also already led to significant changes in federal-level social assistance emergency processes. For instance, it prompted the creation of FORSUAS, *Força de Proteção do SUAS*, a national rapid-response team within the social assistance system (SUAS) to provide immediate aid in emergencies and disasters across the country, prioritizing vulnerable populations (MDS, 2025a). The creation of a Permanent Committee for Responses through Social Protection in Calamities and Emergencies, launched by the Ministry of Social Development (MDS) in 2025 also follows from these events, and it will now be in charge of monitoring MDS's specific goals related to the national climate plan (*Plano Clima*[2]) and to the national civil defence plan (MDS, 2025b).

Figure 1 – Numbers of people displaced and numbers of people living in shelters due to the floods in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil (April to June 2024)



Source: author's elaboration based on data from the Rio Grande do Sul State Government (2024a). The report from 14 June 2024 is the last one to contain both data on displaced and sheltered.

Employing a case study approach based on desk review and interviews with key informants involved with the responses, this study seeks to contribute towards the documentation of these important emergency response efforts. The analysis also provides reflections on the key challenges encountered by federal and state actors and areas for further improvement at the system level.

The study proceeds with the following structure: Section 2 outlines the framework of analysis and the methodology; Section 3 introduces the case study with an overview of the financing and

[2] See: https://www.gov.br/mma/pt-br/composicao/smc/plano-clima

normative frameworks of the federal and state-level responses; Section 4 reflects on the existing coordination and preparedness mechanisms and the process of identifying the affected areas; Section 5 presents the design of the interventions; Section 6 provides information on the enrolment and delivery processes; Section 7 highlights implementation capacity challenges; Section 8 describes existing monitoring and evaluation efforts and gaps; and Section 9 concludes with the main lessons from the case and highlights points for further reflection.

2. Framework of Analysis and Methodology

Social protection systems' role in dealing with such covariate shocks is increasingly recognised worldwide, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic prompted an unprecedented scale-up of these policies (Barca, 2020; Gentilini et al., 2020; O'Brien et al., 2018). The framework of analysis of this case study is based on the body of work on shock-responsive and adaptive social protection (Beazley et al., 2024; Costella et al., 2023; O'Brien et al., 2018), which highlights the set of system and programme-level features that enable scalability and better emergency responses as well as contribute towards climate adaptation.

More specifically, this literature points to the need for readily available financing, pre-existing emergency protocols, inter-sectoral coordination structures, updated and complete recipient databases that can be drawn from (and simplified intake mechanisms where new information is needed), accessible payment systems, among other system and programme features which enable a more effective response to a large-scale shock (Beazley et al., 2024; O'Brien et al., 2018). Emerging work is also being undertaken to highlight how social protection can be leveraged to address the impacts of climate change, including increased poverty levels due to extreme weather events (Costella et al., 2023).

Based on these prior analyses, the guiding research questions for this case study are, therefore, the following:

1) How aligned were the federal and state-level responses to the 2024 floods with existing recommendations on shock-responsive and climate-adaptive social protection?
2) What were the main challenges and lessons identified by key stakeholders involved with the responses at the state and federal levels?
3) What changes to emergency social protection protocols has this event prompted in federal and state processes to future disaster responses?

The analysis presented in this case study is based on a desk review and documental analysis focused on official government documents and web pages about the interventions at state and federal levels, as well as data analysis of the datasets the government has made available with the total recipient numbers and allocated budget. This review is complemented by interviews with five key informants at municipal, state and federal levels, conducted in February and April 2025, as listed in Appendix 1.

The selection of interviewees was based on their active involvement in the design and/or implementation of the emergency response measures. At the state level, interviewees were identified in the State's Department of Economics and Statistics, which was directly in charge of the mapping of affected areas and the PVPC design. At the federal level, an official request for an interview was submitted to the electronic information system used by the Ministry of Integration and Regional Development (MIDR). Interviews were also held with social assistance government representatives at the municipal level and at MDS. Interviews were semi-structured, containing questions designed to fill gaps identified in the documental review.

3. Institutional Context and Financing of the Emergency Responses

The Brazilian social protection system provides substantial coverage of the population through various programmes and relies on a network of decentralised social assistance services provided by social workers and other professionals (SUAS) as well as several databases at the federal level, including the Single Registry which contains information from over 40 per cent of the national population[3]. Brazil's system has also responded to several stress tests over time, most recently during the COVID-19 pandemic, when quick emergency support was provided to over 60 per cent of the population (Brollo et al., 2024) by leveraging the interoperability between several of the government's databases (Malhotra et al., 2022). The Rio Grande do Sul state government had also already developed its own cash transfer programmes for dealing with extreme weather events in 2023, when several municipalities were hit by severe flooding.

When the 2024 floods happened, all these experiences informed the responses. At the state level, the "*Programa Volta por Cima*" (PVPC) was instituted by the State Law 15,977 from 12 July 2023, which enabled the state to offer financial support to affected populations living in poverty in case of extreme weather events. The specific formats of different editions of this programme have been set out by specific executive orders - the 2024 edition of the PVPC was regulated by Decree 57,607 from 10 May 2024. The 2024 edition of PVPC reached 100,784 families with a total disbursement of BRL 251,96 million (around USD 48,7 million[4]) from the state government (Rio Grande do Sul State Government, 2024d). Besides the PVPC, which was entirely supported via public funds and targeted to people living in poverty and directly impacted by the floods, an additional programme was created for people who were just above the poverty line used by the PVPC programme. "*Pix Solidário*" was funded through private donations channelled through the state government. Funds were received through the same bank account opened in the previous year for the receipt of private donations when the 2023 flooding events took place. In total, 36,800 families were reached with donations amounting to BRL 73,658,000 (Rio Grande do Sul State Government, 2024c).

Responding to the scale of the floods in Rio Grande do Sul also required a comprehensive response package from the federal government, and a new emergency programme, the "*Auxílio Reconstrução*" (AR). The federal package of emergency responses, which went beyond social protection alone, comprised the largest financial allocation to address climate emergencies since this normative device allowing the Executive to open extraordinary credit lines in the case of calamities[5] was first introduced in 2001. In practice, over BRL 12 billion (around 2.32 billion USD) were directed to address the floods funded via extraordinary credits, or almost 16 per cent of all

[3] See: https://aplicacoes.mds.gov.br/sagi/ri/relatorios/cidadania/?relatorio=153&file=entrada
[4] Using a conversion rate of 5.17 Brazilian reais per US dollar applicable in May 2024. See: https://www.bcb.gov.br/estabilidadefinanceira/historicocotacoes
[5] Extraordinary credits are opened by the Executive and do not require the identification of specific funding sources at the time of opening. The expenses can be financed through financial surpluses from previous years, excess revenue collection, cancellation or reduction of other expenses, loans and credit operations, or other legally authorised sources.

emergency credits ever requested by Brazilian presidents in the last 24 years (Brazilian Senate, 2024).

The AR programme was initially designed to reach a total of 240,000 families with a budget of BRL 1.23 billion, but was expanded to reach a final total of 419,000 families and with an total allocation of BRL 2.1 billion, around USD 406 million (MEDIDA PROVISÓRIA Nº 1223, 2024; Portal da Transparência, 2025). The normative frameworks associated with the AR programme are outlined in Table 1. The programme's financing and design were determined by several provisional executive-level orders ("*Medidas Provisórias*", in Portuguese) issued between 11 May and 6 August 2024, as there was no pre-designed emergency response. Discussions were held at the highest levels of the federal government to decide which Ministry should implement the response. Though the Ministry of Social Development (MDS) was also initially considered as the entity in charge of social assistance in the country, the implementation responsibility for the AR programme was given to the Ministry of Integration and Regional Development (R. de Morais Balduino Arrais de Oliveira, personal communication, 16 April 2025).

Table 1 – Normative frameworks related to the federal government's emergency responses

Date	Document	Content
11 May	Provisional Decree 1,218	Opens extraordinary credit lines to several government agencies to respond to the floods
15 May	Provisional Decree 1,219	Launches the AR programme
21 May	Ministerial Order 1,774	Ministerial guidelines for implementing the AR programme
23 May	Provisional Decree 1,223	Opens extraordinary credit lines to several government agencies to respond to the floods, including the AR programme
6 June	Provisional Decree 1,228	Institutes the AR programme
7 June	Normative Instruction 4	Instructions for implementing the AR programme
19 June	Provisional Decree 1,235	Provides additional budget to MIDR for increasing the coverage of the AR programme
27 June	Ministerial Order 2,290	Establishes deadline for municipalities to register families for the AR programme (12 July 2024)
12 July	Ministerial Order 2,499	Extends deadline for municipalities to register families for the AR programme (26 July 2024)
6 August	Provisional Decree 1,250	Extends geographical reach of the AR programme to municipalities that had declared state of public calamity or emergency after prior Provisional Decrees

Source: author's elaboration based on the documental review.

4. Coordination, Preparedness and Mapping Affected Areas

When the 2024 floods happened, there was no readily available flood risk mapping to draw on, but the state government administration had already significantly improved its capacity to map flood-affected areas with the use of high-resolution satellite images. Robust proactive flood risk mapping at scale in the state was not yet implemented due to high costs, data gaps, and lack of political will. In the 2023 response to flooding that affected several municipalities, the state administration relied on coordinates from the municipal Civil Defence reports, which were often preliminary estimates and sometimes marked emergency shelters rather than actual disaster sites. Additionally, they used addresses from the Single Registry, but many were incomplete or informal (e.g., "the red house on the corner"), making geolocation difficult. Manually cross-referencing these datasets to determine eligibility for the 2023 PVPC delayed payments by two to three months. In 2024, the process was transformed with the use of high-resolution satellite imagery from a private company (Planet Labs Inc.) contracted by the state government before the flooding events of May 2024. These images, with a resolution of 3 meters, allowed the team to identify flooded areas, landslides, and other damage with far greater precision. The team also partnered with external companies, such as Google, which provided their georeferencing services free of charge for cross-referencing addresses from Single Registry (M. Pessoa, personal communication, 6 February 2025).

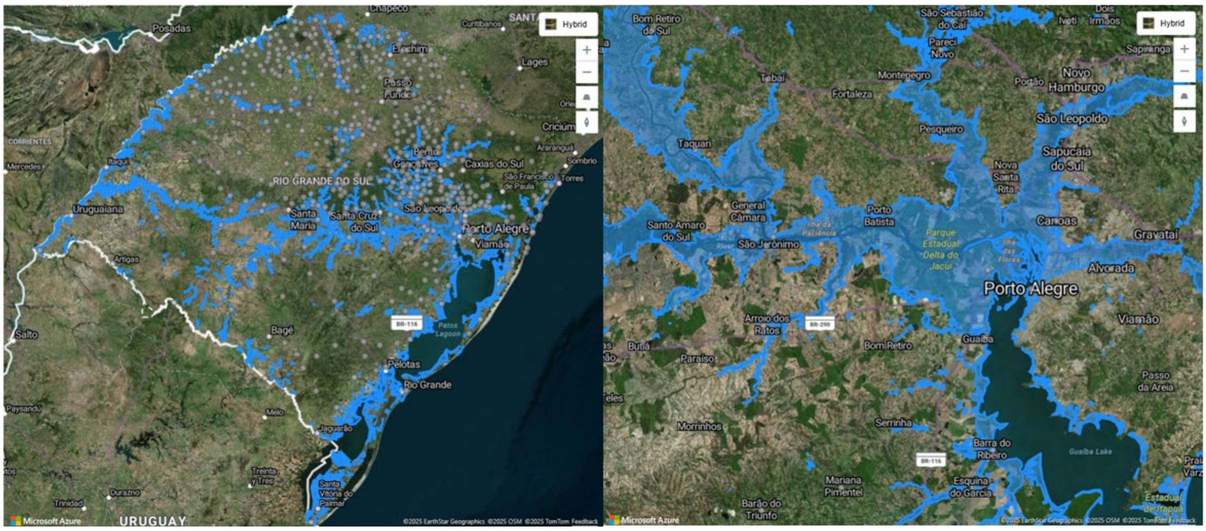
Some limitations were still observed in 2024. These included, for example, restricted download quotas for the satellite images, limiting the government's autonomy in processing data. Cloud cover also presented some challenges which were addressed in collaboration with municipalities, which self-declared affected areas using polygons on Google Earth. Overall, however, this innovative hybrid approach, combining satellite data, municipal input, and automated geolocation, enabled faster and more accurate identification of affected areas compared to the 2023 responses' methods (M. Pessoa, personal communication, 6 February 2025). The resulting mapping of the Directly Affected Areas (*Área Diretamente Atingida*, ADAs) along with socioeconomic data and information about the emergency interventions was made available online[6]. The mapping of ADA's produced is shown in Figure 2.

Coordination between different state actors proved to be challenging in some key respects, such as in the identification of the affected areas. In terms of vertical coordination between federal and state levels, while both initially shared a common methodology for mapping affected areas, their approaches diverged due to logistical and technical differences. The federal government's mapping leaned more on hydrological projections and Sentinel satellite imaging (of lower resolution, 10 meters, but provided for free) (INPE & CEMADEN, 2024), without the extra layer of municipal self-declarations. The federal team instead formed a task force to visit affected areas where there was conflicting information being received from the satellite data and the municipalities to refine the borders, which was the case in around 80 municipalities. This process resulted in several updated versions of the federal map and to some discrepancies between the mapping outputs by state and federal levels. A unified approach would have been ideal for policy coordination, but conflicting timelines and validation standards resulted in separate maps (R. de Morais Balduino Arrais de Oliveira, personal communication, 16 April 2025; M. Pessoa, personal communication, 6 February 2025).

Other areas of coordination included efforts to meet the new demand for registration in the Single Registry and grievance redressal for the AR programme. MDS coordinated with municipalities in a task force to meet the surge in demand for registration in the Single Registry after the floods (L. Leite de Morais Lima, personal communication, 14 April 2025). In terms of horizontal coordination, MDS also supported MIDR with the implementation of AR's grievance redressal mechanism (MDS, 2024b).

[6] Available at: https://mup.rs.gov.br/

Figure 2 – Snapshot of the ADAs available on the "*Mapa Único do Plano Rio Grande*"



Notes: On the left the whole state is seen. On the right, the detail of a zoomed-in view of the area surrounding the state's capital. Source: DEE & SPGG (2025). Available at: https://mup.rs.gov.br/

5. Design of the Emergency Responses

The emergency support package provided following the floods comprised the use of both existing social protection programmes as well as the creation of new ones, in a multi-layered response. The state put in place several measures including the new edition of its "*Programa Volta Por Cima*" (PVPC). Smaller emergency programmes in terms of coverage were also implemented by municipalities, or in partnership between the state and municipal-level governments, to temporarily support displaced populations with housing costs (Porto Alegre Municipal Government, n.d., 2024; Rio Grande do Sul State Government, 2024f). The total package of responses by the federal government comprised both modifications to regular social protection programmes (see Appendix 2, table A1) and the creation of a new programme, "*Auxílio Reconstrução*" (AR), to support families directly impacted by the floods. The design of the emergency interventions by the state and federal governments is detailed in Table 2.

Table 2 - Summary of the design of the federal and state-level emergency interventions

	Level	Financing	Eligibility criteria	Benefit level	Coverage
AR	Federal	Federal government	Displaced families identified via the federal flooding mapping and municipal registration	BRL 5,100 (USD 987) lump sum	419,000 families
PVPC	State	State government	Displaced families earning a per capita monthly income of up to BRL 218 (USD 42) identified via the state flooding mapping and data from the Single Registry	BRL 2,500 (USD 484) lump sum	100,784 families

Pix Solidário	State	Private donations channelled by the State government	Displaced families earning a total monthly income of 3 minimum wages (BRL 4,236/USD 819) and a per capita income of up to 1 minimum wage (BRL 1,412/USD 273) identified via the state flooding mapping and data from the Single Registry	BRL 2,000 (USD 387) lump sum	36,800 families

Notes: Currency conversion rate from May 2024 of BRL 5.17 per US dollar. Source: author's elaboration based on the documental review.

The benefit level setting process at federal and state levels was not guided by a post-disaster needs assessment. The one-off emergency support provided was generous compared to monthly benefit levels of existing social protection programmes like social pensions (which provide a minimum wage per month); however, we currently lack a comprehensive benefit adequacy evaluation. Given urgency of the situation and the scale of the floods, response efforts prioritised simplicity in their design, offering uniform benefit levels without adjustments for household size or other characteristics.

The PVPC, which already existed, had a simpler benefit structure in 2024 than it did in its 2023 edition, which was not based on an assessment of needs. In 2023, two benefit level tiers were established: BRL 2,500 for displaced families (those who lost their homes) and BRL 700 for those with property damage but no displacement. In 2024, BRL 2,500 (around 96 per cent of the average monthly nominal household income per capita of the state's resident population in 2024 and around 1.8 times the value of the minimum monthly wage in 2024) was paid to all those who were displaced. This time around, the scale of flooding made the identification of those affected but not displaced impractical. Benefit levels were primarily shaped by budget constraints and estimated coverage numbers (T. Fiori, personal communication, 7 February 2025).

Though no documented evidence detailing the rationale behind the benefit level setting process of AR was identified, in interviews it was highlighted that the level of BRL 5,100 (almost twice the average monthly nominal household income per capita of the state's resident population in 2024[7] and around 3.6 times the national minimum monthly wage in 2024) was set following an estimated calculation of the cost of replacing white goods damaged or lost in the floods (R. de Morais Balduino Arrais de Oliveira, personal communication, 16 April 2025). The objective of helping families replace lost goods is also expressed in the programme's FAQ page (MIDR, 2024a).

The AR and PVPC programmes used different selection criteria for providing benefits. Firstly, the specific mapping of the affected areas differed slightly between the federal and state governments to identify those households that were to be considered directly affected by the floods, as detailed in the previous section. Secondly, while the federal AR was provided to all families classified as being displaced due to the flooding, the state-level PVPC had additional poverty criteria assessed based on data from the Single Registry, as seen in Table 2. Families just above the poverty threshold set by PVPC were eligible for the *Pix Solidário* which relied on private donations. Families in receipt of state level benefits were only eligible to receive one of these benefits (either

[7] See: https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/agencia-sala-de-imprensa/2013-agencia-de-noticias/releases/42761-ibge-divulga-rendimento-domiciliar-per-capita-2024-para-brasil-e-unidades-da-federacao

the PVPC or the *Pix Solidário*). Receipt of the AR was independent from other programmes. In all cases, each programme paid one benefit per household.

Regular social protection programmes were also adapted via design tweaks and horizontal expansion. Table A1 in the Appendix 2 details the modifications made to regular social assistance and social insurance programmes, such as the anticipation of payments from *Bolsa Família* and the Social Pensions. As a result of the floods, 67,598 additional families were also included in *Bolsa Família*. Labour market interventions also encompassed the federal government's "*Auxílio Trabalhador e Trabalhadora*" which provided a minimum wage for two months in exchange for companies' commitment to maintaining the jobs of 102,200 workers for 4 months at a cost of BRL 285 million (Brazilian Government, 2024).

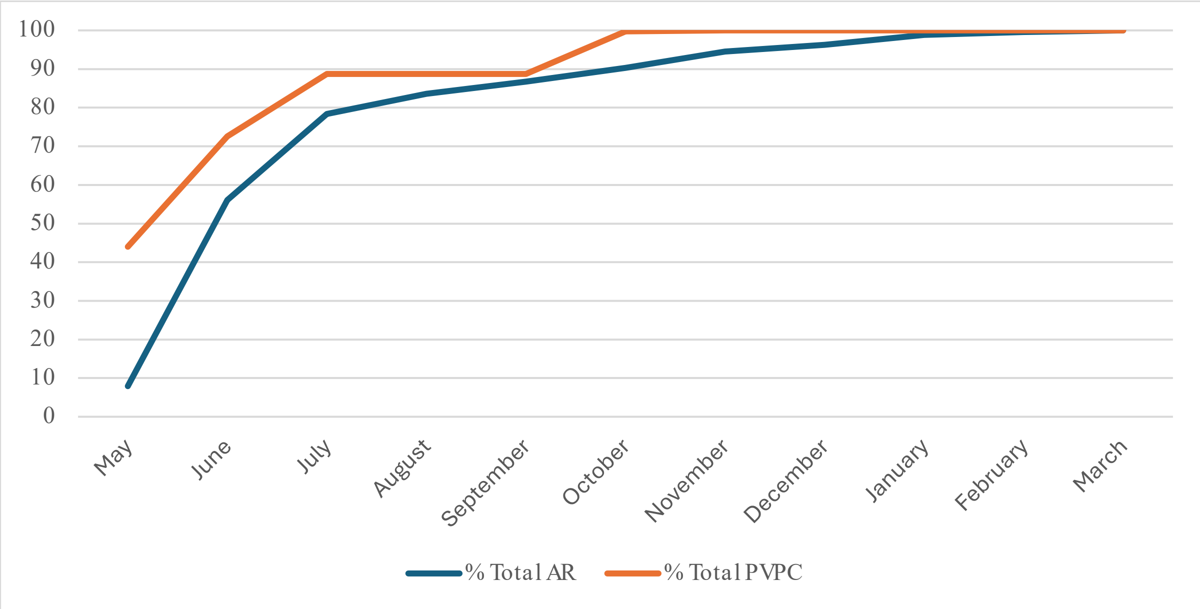
6. Enrolment and Delivery Processes

PVPC was available to families registered in the Single Registry who were identified to be living in the mapped affected areas at the time of the floods, even if registration occurred after the disaster. Families that were automatically identified to be living in affected areas and meeting eligibility criteria did not require additional registration in the programme. Those that met the criteria but were not automatically identified could register via their municipal social assistance services. Payments were made via the cards used for social programmes in the state ("*Cartão Cidadão*"), which were issued automatically by the state bank (*Banrisul*) for those that did not have one yet (Rio Grande do Sul State Government, 2024b). A fast initial response was enabled by the technology used to map affected areas in 2024 combined with the availability of data on recipients addresses and bank accounts from the Single Registry (T. Fiori, personal communication, 7 February 2025; Rio Grande do Sul State Government, 2024b). PVPC paid the first families on 17 May and reached over 40,000 families, almost half of the total disbursement, by the end of that month. The last residual batch of the programme was paid in November 2024 (Rio Grande do Sul State Government, 2024e).

AR enrolment required municipalities to send the data of the families living within the affected areas to the federal government. Data sent by municipalities was cross-referenced with existing federal government databases to validate the families' addresses. The bank *Caixa Econômica Federal* was in charge of the payments, which would be made directly to the recipients accounts in the bank or to an automatically opened savings account for those without an account at *Caixa* (MIDR, n.d., 2024a). AR started to receive information from municipalities on 22 May and confirming information received on 27 May; from then on, this procedure was conducted twice per week (MIDR, 2024a). Most of the payments were completed in 2024, with remaining payments in 2025 being addressed to people who have sought the existing grievance redressal mechanism or judicial means for obtaining the benefit and have their claims analysed on a case-by-case basis (R. de Morais Balduino Arrais de Oliveira, personal communication, 16 April 2025).

Consistent with the literature on shock-responsive social protection (O'Brien et al., 2018), we see that the prior existence of PVPC and the fact that it piggybacked on existing data systems enabled a quicker response when compared to AR's steeper disbursement curve displayed in Figure 3, as it was designed from scratch and required new data collection efforts. Still, it is important to note that the AR programme was around 4 times larger than PVPC in terms of coverage and 8.5 times larger in terms of total budget. By June, both programmes had disbursed more than half of their budgets.

Figure 3 – Timeline of the federal and state-level responses: percentage of total emergency support disbursement by month (May 2024 to March 2025)



Notes: AR stands for the federal "*Auxílio Reconstrução*" and PVPC for the state's "*Programa Volta por Cima*". Source: author's elaboration based on monthly disbursement data for AR (Portal da Transparência, 2025) and PVPC (Rio Grande do Sul State Government, 2024b, 2024e).

A critical issue was managing the needs of displaced and homeless populations, which presented significant challenges to frontline workers at the shelters. MDS issued specific brief guidance notes on specific measures in assisting indigenous peoples, such as specific organisations and social movements that could be sought for collaboration and technical support (MDS, 2024e). Specific guidelines were also issued for assisting displaced children, such as setting up of special shelters, procedures to be followed on family reunification, and coordination with legal and judicial services (MDS, 2024h). Displaced individuals arrived at improvised shelters, mainly in the Porto Alegre metropolitan region, without a centralised tracking system. A Google Forms database was developed to collect their data and later a unified digital registry with the support of volunteers to log affected families and streamline aid distribution. Challenges included fragmented leadership, unclear roles among municipal agencies, and resistance from some shelters in using the proposed system. Privacy and reunification issues arose, particularly for vulnerable groups like domestic violence survivors whose shelter locations could be compromised. Attempts to create a secure reunification system via the city's citizen service channel faced hesitancy from leadership. The need for standardised, privacy-focused tools in future emergency responses to protect marginalised groups while addressing urgency was therefore emphasised in interviews (E. Lazzari, personal communication, 7 February 2025).

7. Implementation Capacities

Prior experience with responding to large-scale emergencies and existing guidelines provided a basis to draw from when it came to responding to the 2024 floods. The public administration's experience in addressing the impacts of covariate shocks through social assistance and modifying service delivery during emergencies, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2023 floods, were highlighted as significant starting points for how the 2024 responses were conceived at federal and state levels (R. de Morais Balduino Arrais de Oliveira, personal communication, 16 April 2025; T. Fiori, personal communication, 7 February 2025). For instance, the Ministry of Social Development's (MDS) guidelines on social assistance during calamities provided a useful framework for roles and services for frontline social assistance workers (E. Lazzari, personal communication, 7 February 2025). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the state administration also developed expertise in handling large datasets, such as the Single Registry, which became crucial for targeting assistance when it came to the 2023 and 2024 editions of the PVPC (T. Fiori, personal communication, 7 February 2025). MDS also issued specific guidelines for safeguarding SUAS workers' physical and mental health during the emergency responses, including on workplace safety, access to training and recommendations for coordination between teams (MDS, 2024g).

Nonetheless, the responses were severely challenged by several factors, including infra-structural ones, as several of the public administration's offices were themselves flooded, requiring government officers to work from home with sub-optimal equipment. In terms of human resources, burnout was also felt by teams which had been handling repeated crises since the pandemic, often working overtime in high-pressure conditions without appropriate compensation, or mental health support. More permanent response protocols, proper training on these, workload limits, overtime compensation and recognition as well as psychological support for staff would contribute to more sustainable work conditions in future crises (T. Fiori, personal communication, 7 February 2025; E. Lazzari, personal communication, 7 February 2025; M. Pessoa, personal communication, 6 February 2025).

Significant stresses were placed on data systems, from the lack of a standardised data collection form for people in shelters to the surge in demand for registration in the Single Registry (required for the assistance provided through the PVPC). Around 200 volunteers were involved in developing a digital platform to manage shelter registrations (*Abrigos RS*). However, volunteer engagement was not sustained over time and their request for funding to continue the platform development did not fit with existing municipal government procurement rules (E. Lazzari, personal communication, 7 February 2025). A task force of Single Registry interviewers, including personnel, from other states, was organised by the MDS to support municipalities in updating the Single Registry, as many struggled to cope with the demand. MDS also provided resources such as training, allowances, internet kits, and laptops to ensure effective registration and data collection. Interviewees emphasized the importance of institutionalising such rapid-response task forces for future emergencies (L. Leite de Morais Lima, personal communication, 14 April 2025).

8. Monitoring, evaluation and learning

At the state level, institutional learning clearly played a role in faster response by the PVPC when comparing the 2023 and 2024 editions. The use of technology, the satellite imaging and georeferencing, were key to improved results between these rounds of the programme. An audit of the 2024 edition of the PVPC revealed minor inclusion errors (only around 300 cases, or 0.3%), largely due to enrolment being based on existing datasets (T. Fiori, personal communication, 7 February 2025).

The AR was a new programme and MIDR had no prior experience of implementing emergency support at this scale. Because the AR required new data collection for registration, the federal government cross-referenced the data across existing datasets before authorising payments. Reportedly almost half of the requests submitted were suspected of irregularities due to being outside the affected zone, or due to duplication, so they did not have the benefit approved until further checks were conducted (Jornal Nacional, 2024). The primary issue appears to have been mistakes in the enrolment process, driven by the sheer scale and urgency of the demands. By April 2025, a residual portion of people who believe they were wrongly excluded from the programme are still pursuing the benefit in courts (R. de Morais Balduino Arrais de Oliveira, personal communication, 16 April 2025).

The 2024 floods also led to some internal reflection by MDS, which has commissioned a consultancy to better understand which types of information can be integrated into the Single Registry to assess climate risk vulnerability. The high demand for registration via the Single Registry brought on by the PVPC programme has also led to MDS considering the potential use of simplified registration forms in cases of sudden-onset disasters like this (L. Leite de Morais Lima, personal communication, 14 April 2025).

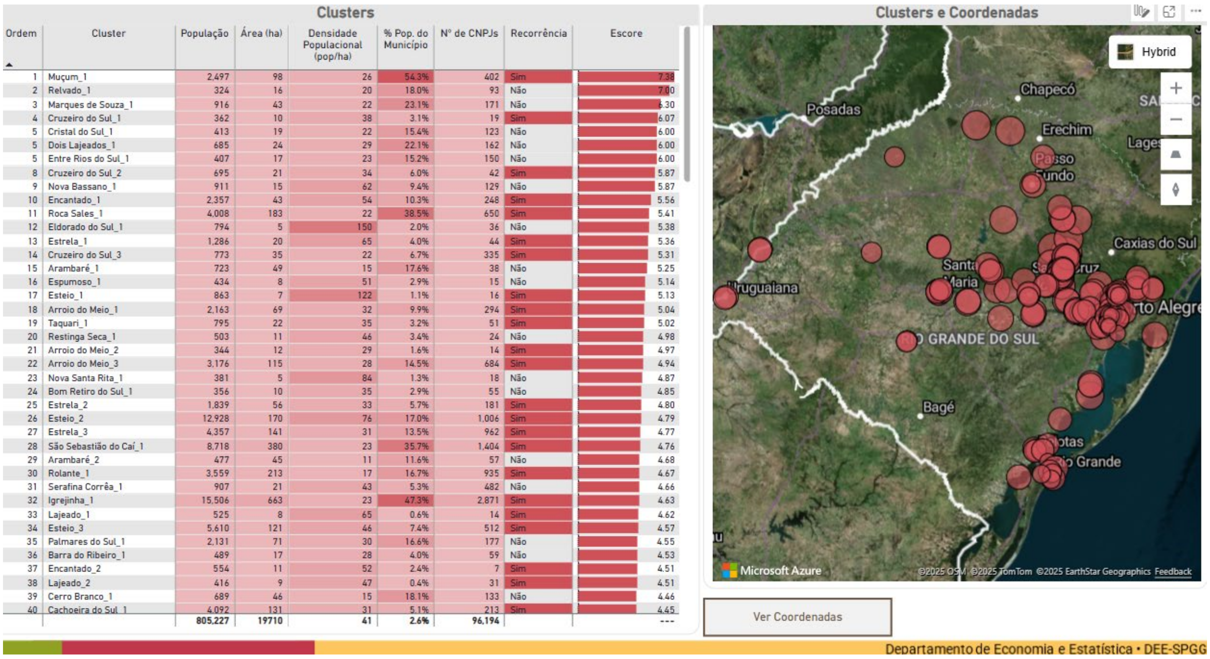
In terms of the impact of the interventions, to date, no study has been identified on the effectiveness or adequacy of the responses. This is a key gap that should be further explored in future research, as the interventions implemented in Rio Grande do Sul set a substantial precedent in terms of disaster response in the country. Nonetheless, in terms of operational learnings, many guidelines and tutorial classes were produced by MDS during the crisis and made available online[8]. The challenges faced during the response also prompted the creation of FORSUAS, *Força de Proteção do SUAS*, a national rapid-response team within the social assistance system (SUAS) to provide immediate aid in emergencies and disasters across the country, prioritizing vulnerable populations (MDS, 2025a).

There is also some evidence of better disaster coordination structures emerging partly because of this experience. A *Permanent Committee for Responses through Social Protection in Calamities and Emergencies* was also launched by the MDS in 2025 which brings together MDS with the Minister's Office, the Executive Secretariat, the national secretariats of Social Assistance, Food and Nutritional Security, Income and Citizenship, Socioeconomic Inclusion, Care and Family Policies, as well as sub-secretariats and advisory services such as Social Communication (ASCOM) and the General Ombudsman's Office. The goal is to ensure coordination between public policies during emergencies as well as to provide continuous technical support to local public administrators. The Committee will also be in charge of monitoring MDS's specific goals related to the national climate plan (*Plano Clima*) and to the national civil defence plan (MDS, 2025b).

When it comes to improving the way climate disaster exposure data is integrated with policymaking at the state level, the recurrence of flooding events has prompted the state government to map recurrent disaster zones to identify high-risk areas, such as those experiencing multiple extreme weather events between 2023 and 2024. This type of mapping should support longer-term and more climate adaptive public policies (more preventive rather than reactive), as the recurrence intervals between extreme events are being shortened due to climate change (M. Pessoa, personal communication, 6 February 2025). Figure 4 provides an overview of the current 152 clusters that have been mapped.

[8] See: https://www.gov.br/mds/pt-br/acoes-e-programas/calamidades-publicas-e-emergencias/operacao-rio-grande-do-sul

Figure 4 – Snapshot of the Clusters Special Study



Clusters

Ordem	Cluster	População	Área (ha)	Densidade Populacional (pop/ha)	% Pop. do Município	Nº de CNPJs	Recorrência	Escore
1	Muçum_1	2,497	98	26	54.3%	402	Sim	7.38
2	Relvado_1	324	16	20	18.0%	93	Não	7.00
3	Marques de Souza_1	916	43	22	23.1%	171	Não	6.30
4	Cruzeiro do Sul_1	362	10	38	3.1%	19	Sim	6.07
5	Cristal do Sul_1	413	19	22	15.4%	123	Não	6.00
5	Dois Lajeados_1	685	24	29	22.1%	162	Não	6.00
5	Entre Rios do Sul_1	407	17	23	15.2%	150	Não	6.00
8	Cruzeiro do Sul_2	695	21	34	6.0%	42	Sim	5.87
9	Nova Bassano_1	911	15	62	9.4%	129	Não	5.87
10	Encantado_1	2,357	43	54	10.3%	248	Sim	5.56
11	Roca Sales_1	4,008	183	22	38.5%	650	Sim	5.41
12	Eldorado do Sul_1	794	5	150	2.0%	36	Não	5.38
13	Estrela_1	1,286	20	65	4.0%	44	Sim	5.36
14	Cruzeiro do Sul_3	773	35	22	6.7%	335	Sim	5.31
15	Arambaré_1	723	49	15	17.6%	38	Não	5.25
16	Espumoso_1	434	8	51	2.9%	15	Não	5.14
17	Esteio_1	863	7	122	1.1%	16	Sim	5.13
18	Arroio do Meio_1	2,163	69	32	9.9%	294	Sim	5.04
19	Taquari_1	795	22	35	3.2%	51	Sim	5.02
20	Restinga Seca_1	503	11	46	3.4%	24	Não	4.98
21	Arroio do Meio_2	344	12	29	1.6%	14	Sim	4.97
22	Arroio do Meio_3	3,176	115	28	14.5%	684	Sim	4.94
23	Nova Santa Rita_1	381	5	84	1.3%	18	Não	4.87
24	Bom Retiro do Sul_1	356	10	35	2.9%	55	Não	4.85
25	Estrela_2	1,839	56	33	5.7%	181	Sim	4.80
26	Esteio_2	12,928	170	76	17.0%	1,006	Sim	4.79
27	Estrela_3	4,357	141	31	13.5%	962	Sim	4.77
28	São Sebastião do Caí_1	8,718	380	23	35.7%	1,404	Sim	4.76
29	Arambaré_2	477	45	11	11.6%	57	Não	4.68
30	Rolante_1	3,559	213	17	16.7%	935	Sim	4.67
31	Serafina Corrêa_1	907	21	43	5.3%	482	Não	4.66
32	Igrejinha_1	15,506	663	23	47.3%	2,871	Sim	4.63
33	Lajeado_1	525	8	65	0.6%	14	Sim	4.62
34	Esteio_3	5,610	121	46	7.4%	512	Sim	4.57
35	Palmares do Sul_1	2,131	71	30	16.6%	177	Não	4.55
36	Barra do Ribeiro_1	489	17	28	4.0%	59	Não	4.53
37	Encantado_2	554	11	52	2.4%	7	Sim	4.51
38	Lajeado_2	416	9	47	0.4%	31	Sim	4.51
39	Cerro Branco_1	689	46	15	18.1%	133	Não	4.46
40	Cachoeira do Sul_1	4,092	131	31	5.1%	213	Sim	4.45
		805,227	19710	41	2.6%	96,194		---

Source: DEE & SPGG (2025). Available at: https://mup.rs.gov.br/

9. Conclusions

The case of the responses to the Rio Grande do Sul floods of 2024 demonstrated the capacity of federal and state governments in mobilizing quick support to populations affected by a sudden-onset covariate shock. It has set an important precedent in terms of coverage, benefit levels and quick operationalisation, which should be further analysed for improved future responses to large-scale extreme weather events, which are to be expected as the country is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

This study fills a gap in the existing documentation on this case by providing an overview of the federal- and state-level responses and an assessment of the process of emergency response based on the international evidence on shock-responsive and climate-adaptive social protection. The multi-layered emergency assistance that was delivered highlights important lessons and points for further reflection.

Firstly, it is noteworthy how rapidly the state government was able to learn from the initial edition of the PVPC and then subsequently managed to mobilise the emergency support at a greater scale and faster in 2024. The use of satellite imaging technology was crucial for the targeting process in the case of the 2024 floods, and having had the prior contract already established between the state and the private company providing the images enabled a faster response. Where new data collection or validation was required from municipalities, errors are to be expected due to capacity constraints. Continuous municipal capacity strengthening with trainings focused on emergency response efforts are thus needed, with support from the state and federal governments.

Though PVPC's scope was more limited than the federal support (as it is to be expected), it has proven to be a resilient emergency support measure deployed in multiple flooding events between 2023 and 2024, which has also built significant institutional knowledge on more effective disaster responses. As the programme is based on a state law, it can be expected to be also resilient to future administrative changes. Therefore, the case of Rio Grande do Sul provides a useful blueprint for reflection on what is needed in terms of institutional capacity, funding and normative frameworks and can support evaluations of other states' preparedness. The case of the 2024 floods should also be further reflected on in terms of addressing existing vertical coordination gaps and between states and the federal government.

Institutionalising specific emergency protocols, structures and human resource teams for rapid-response task forces for future emergencies is still needed. Specific training on emergency protocols, safeguarding issues in data management and clear guidance on roles and responsibilities is particularly crucial for frontline workers dealing with displaced population. One key gap highlighted in interviews was the issue of ensuring appropriate and safe data collection efforts on displaced populations and aimed at family reunification. Another point that could improve future emergency responses would be the creation of official reserve lists of public servants or contractors that can be deployed as surge capacity to respond quickly to disasters as well as pre-designed emergency programmes and institutional coordination arrangements. For instance, it is still unclear whether MIDR would be the institution to lead the next large-scale emergency response, though that can be expected considering the experience with AR. It would be beneficial to clarify roles and institutionalise inter-ministerial emergency coordination structures.

Ensuring a sustainable implementation capacity during emergencies also requires specific attention to workers' physical and mental health, appropriate compensation and limits to overtime as well as recognition from leadership on the efforts made by all those involved. As different administrative structures are involved in the design and implementation, each requires their own rules to be made effective.

Finally, the main gap in learning identified from this case is the lack of evaluations of the interventions that were implemented in Rio Grande do Sul. More pressing areas for further analysis include gaining a clearer understanding of the cost-efficiency of different flooding mapping methodologies that were used, and how scalable they are, as well as on how to operationalise a better integration of climate vulnerability data into the existing data infrastructure. Studying the effectiveness of the different interventions would also help to better inform the design of future responses.

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Appendix 1

List of interviewees and institutional affiliation in alphabetical order of first name:

- Evelise Lazzari, Porto Alegre Municipal Government, *Fundação de Assistência Social e Cidadania* (FASC-POA)
- Liomar Leite de Morais Lima, MDS
- Mariana Pessoa, Department of Economics and Statistics (*Departamento de Economia e Estatística*, DEE-RS)
- Rodrigo de Morais Balduino Arrais de Oliveira, Ministry of Integration and Regional Development (*Ministério da Integração e do Desenvolvimento Regional*, MIDR)
- Tomás Fiori, DEE RS

Appendix 2

Table A1 – Modifications to regular social protection programmes

Area	Programmes	Emergency measures
Social Assistance	*Bolsa Família*	• Anticipating monthly payments from 17 May and first payment day in June in all municipalities of the state (619,741 families, BRL 417 million). • Suspending conditionality monitoring and enrolment review processes. • Allowing exceptions to documentation requirements for enrolment and payment to address situations of lost documentation.
	Social pensions	• Anticipating May and June payments of the social pensions - *Benefício de Prestação Continuada* (BPC) and *Renda Mensal Vitalícia* (RMV) - to first payment date in municipalities where public calamity was declared (95,109 recipients in May, BRL 134 million).
Social Insurance	FGTS	• "*Saque Calamidade*" (special withdrawal due to the calamity): 1,05 million workers in 446 municipalities – BRL 3,45 billion.
	Unemployment insurance	• Payment of two additional instalments: 139.633 recipients - BRL 497,8 million.

Notes: FGTS stands for "*Fundo de Garantia do Tempo de Serviço*", the Severance Indemnity Fund for Employees. Source: author's elaboration based on Brazilian Government (2024) and MDS (2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d).

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