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Brazil's Single Registry: A preparatory phase and a new era[1]

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In our 2024 assessment[2] of Brazil's Single Registry (*Cadastro Único*), we concluded by emphasizing the need to balance two guiding principles: that "the perfect is the enemy of the good" and that "haste makes waste".

This policy brief begins by invoking another common expression, the wisdom of which must be considered in public policy, and which aptly reflects the efforts undertaken in managing the Single Registry throughout 2024. We refer to this as **"kitchen time"**—the essential preparatory phase required to deliver a high-quality public policy outcome. For Brazil's Single Registry, 2024 was undeniably a year defined by this preparation, specifically the development of its new system.

The system for including and updating the data of over 28 million registered low-income families—operated daily by more than 40,000 professionals across all Brazilian municipalities—had been technologically stagnant since 2010. This once-pioneering system had become obsolete. The legacy version offered only two modes of data entry: online via a desktop computer or manually on paper forms. It was not responsive and could not adapt to modern devices like tablets or mobile phones.

Significant integration challenges also persisted. To incorporate data from other government databases, a process initiated only in 2023, the entire system had to be taken offline in the municipalities for two to four days at a time. This constraint limited such crucial updates to being carried out every two to three months only. Consequently, these integrations, while essential and innovative, remained artisanal and insufficient—the best achievable within the available technological framework. Furthermore, the system's operation by a state-owned bank (*Caixa Econômica Federal*) imposed restrictions on its ability to access other federal databases. Its address formatting was incompatible with the national postal code (CEP) database, its taxpayer ID (CPF) verification was limited to confirming ownership, and its risk management platform was virtually non-existent.

This design had tangible security weaknesses. For instance, if a family or a local operator of the system submitted fraudulent information, the issue was flagged only at the specific service point where the error was identified. This loophole allowed a family to re-register at a different location without difficulty, or a fraudulent operator to be hired by another municipality unaware of the prior misconduct. The training for the 40,000 operators and interviewers mirrored this obsolescence, with an in-person format that prevented continuous, system-wide knowledge updates.

A structural overhaul was therefore imperative. The New Single Registry's development timeline was established as follows: system homologation was completed in December 2024 ; system and training pilots, along with a migration test from Caixa to the government's technology company (DATAPREV), occurred in January 2025 ; comprehensive training for all 40,000 professionals was launched in February 2025; and the new system became fully operational in March 2025.

This development period was not one of inactivity. In public policy, it is often necessary to upgrade the engine while the car is in motion; to do otherwise risks losing the legitimacy to implement structural changes, which can be misperceived as stagnation. Throughout 2024, ongoing efforts to verify inconsistent registrations and review outdated records continued, affecting approximately 9 million families. Innovation contests were conducted, engaging data scientists to address data security and fraud prevention, while also involving Registry workers and users to improve public understanding and mechanisms for social oversight.

Processes for automated data purging were implemented, targeting records of deceased individuals, entries inactive for over 48 months, and profiles of those who did not respond to update requests; these measures resulted in approximately 4 million exclusions. The Registry was enhanced to include gender identity markers for transgender and *travesti* individuals and to formally recognize the use of social names. A sample-based evaluation of the Registry's data quality was commissioned, and a dedicated task force of

over 60 volunteers was deployed to support flood-affected municipalities in Rio Grande do Sul. In the state of Roraima, bimonthly visits continued to monitor and assess services for migrant populations.

The data integration initiatives from 2023 were expanded to incorporate new data sets, including CPF status, food insecurity indicators from the national health system (SUS), and records of rights violations from the social assistance system (SUAS). These ongoing efforts yielded significant results:

- Formal income data was updated for over 35 million people.
- School enrolment data was updated for over 9 million students in the Bolsa Família program.
- The number of individuals registered without a CPF was reduced from 4 million to 2 million.
- Approximately 400,000 individuals were identified as being at risk of food insecurity.
- Around 60,000 people were identified as having experienced rights violations, providing crucial data for prioritizing their access to public services.

Furthermore, the Single Registry Observatory—a finalist in two public sector innovation awards—was updated to include a specific data panel on homelessness. This tool provides granular data, even at sub-municipal levels, on the homeless population, including reasons for their situation, where they sleep, and how they access resources. The Observatory also integrated a key multidimensional poverty measurement tool: the Family Vulnerability Index of the Single Registry (IVCAD), based on the Family Development Index developed by researchers Paes de Barros and Mirela Carvalho. The IVCAD utilizes 40 indicators across six dimensions—early childhood, childhood and adolescence, access to monetary resources, adult employment and skills, housing, and caregiving needs—to enhance targeting for over 40 federal programs and numerous local initiatives. To maintain communication and disseminate updates, monthly livestreams and podcasts were produced for the decentralized network of professionals across Brazil's 5,570 municipalities.

The New Single Registry is more than a system; it represents a paradigm shift centered on four pillars:

- **Integration:** The system is now interconnected with other federal databases. Data that was previously updated bimonthly or quarterly is refreshed daily or monthly. New data sets, such as births, deaths, marriages, and divorces, are incorporated. Address standardization aligns with the national postal code (CEP) database, and the CPF serves as the unique identifier, with verification extending to its validity status. The system is also linked to national biometric databases.
- **Agility:** Pre-existing government data is auto-populated, saving time for operators and citizens and reducing queues at service points. Paper-based forms are virtually eliminated, replaced by electronic forms that can be completed on tablets or phones—even offline—and later synchronized with the central system.
- **Security:** A dedicated portal for operator and risk management uses federal and municipal data to detect errors preemptively. Artificial intelligence algorithms are deployed to identify potential fraud.
- **Training:** A comprehensive distance-learning platform offers training modules from basic to advanced levels, ensuring that 100% of operators remain current with best practices. This platform, built on citizen-centered communication principles, is arguably the most advanced remote training system currently available within the Federal Government.

For these reasons, the new system is an innovation.
In March 2025, the Single Registry was finally brought into the contemporary era, and the "kitchen time" of preparation gave way to a time of harvest. This new platform enables continuous improvement: further database integrations, refined data collection tools without the need for reprinting paper forms, and the potential for a self-service application for digitally included families to update their information remotely.

Above all, the New Single Registry is a gateway to continuous development and improved targeting for its more than 40 federal user programs and thousands of state and municipal initiatives. It facilitates more dynamic entry into and exit from public policies, tailored to individuals' evolving life stages and needs. While a change of this magnitude entails implementation risks, innovation inherently requires the measurement and management of such risks.

1. This is a shortened and updated version of the article published in Nexo Jornal on 20 December 2024 <https://www.nexojornal.com.br/cadastro-unico-o-tempo-da-cozinha-e-um-novo-tempo>.

2. Bartholo, L. (2024) The Single Registry: two popular sayings and the names of things. IPCid Policy Brief No. 1. IPEA. https://ipcid.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/PRB001_Single_Registry_two_sayings_and_the_name_of_things.pdf

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