BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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Multidimensional Poverty: Measurement, Trends and Challenges

28–29 September 2026
Skopje

Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje
Faculty of Philosophy

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Multidimensional Poverty:

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FOREWORD

This volume brings together the abstracts accepted for presentation at the conference "Multidimensional Poverty: Measurement, Trends and Challenges," held at the Faculty of Philosophy, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, on 28–29 September 2026. The conference is organized within the framework of the research project "Determinants of Multidimensional Poverty: Spatial Mapping and New Benchmarks for Social and Development Policies at the National Level," financed by the Ministry of Education and Science.

The collection reflects the breadth of current research on multidimensional poverty, encompassing both conceptual and empirical contributions. The papers address questions of measurement, spatial distribution, sectoral dimensions, and policy responses, with contributions from scholars and doctoral students representing diverse national contexts across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas.

Several contributions in this volume engage with methodological questions central to poverty research. These include the refinement of consensual deprivation measures, the use of mixed-methods designs combining quantitative indicators with qualitative accounts, and the application of spatial mapping techniques to identify territorial inequalities. Other papers examine specific dimensions of deprivation: housing, nutrition, energy poverty, food insecurity, and access to healthcare and education. A number of contributions focus on particular population groups: children, older people, households with disabilities, beneficiaries of social assistance, and migrants, and analyze how poverty manifests differently across these groups. The papers draw on a range of disciplinary perspectives, including social policy, social work, sociology, economics, law, public health, and political science.

The conference programme includes eight thematic sessions, covering measurement frameworks, child poverty, spatial inequalities, social protection systems, and the intersection of poverty with health, education, and housing. Several papers also address the institutional and legal dimensions of poverty, including constitutional limits on social assistance and the intermediary role of civil society organizations.

I am grateful to all authors for their submissions and to the reviewers for their time and expertise. I also extend my thanks to the project team and the Faculty of Philosophy for their support in organizing the conference and preparing this volume. I hope that the contributions collected here will inform ongoing debates, open new avenues for research, and contribute to the development of more effective poverty reduction policies.

Skopje, September 2026

Prof. Dr. Maja Gerovska Mitev
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ABSTRACT 01

MIXED-METHODS APPROACH TO MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY IN NORTH MACEDONIA: SPATIAL MAPPING AND LIVED EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

This paper advances poverty measurement in North Macedonia by combining two complementary strands of evidence generated within the same project: a national-level spatial and statistical mapping of multidimensional poverty across all 80 municipalities, and localized focus groups and a professional survey conducted among social-assistance beneficiaries in eight municipalities. The two components draw on different samples and serve different purposes: the national mapping is this paper's central empirical contribution, identifying where multidimensional deprivation is concentrated across the country as a whole; the focus-group evidence, drawn from the population actually receiving support, adds contextual and qualitative depth on how deprivation is experienced by the most vulnerable, without claiming to represent the national distribution.

At the national level, we construct a municipal and regional-resolution multidimensional poverty index spanning twelve indicators: five geographic-access measures (distance to primary and secondary schools, primary healthcare, hospitals, and green space, computed via road-network analysis across all 1,575 settlements) and seven census-based socio-economic deprivations (education, youth employment, sanitation, housing, heating, and water). Because no dataset links these indicators at the household level, we combine an independence-based point estimate with Fréchet–Hoeffding bounds obtained via linear programming, following Brunckhorst, Nguyen, Yonzan, Dang, and Lakner (2026), giving each municipality both a best estimate and the full range the data can support. The national headcount ratio is 3.06% (bounded 0.37–16.97%), but this conceals sharp sub-national variation: point estimates range from 0.00% in parts of Skopje to 47.12% in Staro Nagoricane, small municipalities are on average nearly five times poorer than large ones, and the Northeast region's poverty rate is more than three-and-a-half times Skopje's. Geographic and socio-economic deprivation are only moderately correlated across municipalities ($r = 0.40$), so identifying the country's most disadvantaged places requires combining both dimensions rather than relying on either alone.

To situate these national patterns within the lived realities of those the social protection system is designed to reach, we draw on 32 focus groups (n = 152) and a survey of social-work profes-

sionals (N = 57) conducted across the same eight municipalities, using a tailored eight-indicator Alkire-Foster index of deprivation among beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance, child allowance, and disability benefits. Within this targeted population, deprivation is deep and near-universal: 86.8% are classified as multidimensionally poor (MDI = 0.487; H = 86.8%, A = 0.561), with the average poor beneficiary deprived on 4.5 of eight indicators. Headcounts reach 100% in Kumanovo and 97.1% in Debar. Roma and Turkish beneficiaries show the highest within-group intensity (MDI = 0.561 and 0.583 respectively), while ethnic Macedonians and Albanians, by virtue of population size, carry the largest absolute share of weighted deprivation (65.4% and 25.5%). Over 94.7% are unemployed or only occasionally employed, 73.7% have at most primary education, and roughly two-thirds have relied on benefits for more than six years. Beneficiaries' own assessment of assistance adequacy (2.58–2.69 for guaranteed minimum assistance and child allowance, 3.30 for disability benefit) closely tracks professionals' assessment (2.64); the sharper divergence emerges instead between these quantitative ratings and beneficiaries' qualitative accounts, which describe assistance as insufficient to meet basic needs far more consistently than the numeric scores alone suggest.

Read together, the two strands are complementary rather than conflicting: the national map shows that severe deprivation is concentrated in a small, largely peripheral set of municipalities that a national average obscures, while the beneficiary-level evidence shows that within exactly this population, deprivation is compounded by structural drivers: labour-market exclusion, spatial barriers to services, ethnic disparities, and intergenerational educational disadvantage, rather than individual circumstance. This paper contributes new evidence on the measurement, geography, and lived experience of multidimensional poverty, and concludes with an interactive municipal dashboard prototype to directly inform targeted social and development policy at national and local levels.

Keywords: multidimensional poverty, spatial mapping, mixed methods, Alkire-Foster, North Macedonia, social protection, ethnic disparities, Fréchet–Hoeffding bounds

ABSTRACT 02

IMPROVING THE MEASUREMENT OF POVERTY: RECENT ADVANCES IN CONSENSUAL METHODS

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE

In May 2026, the European Union (EU) launched its first anti-poverty strategy, with the aim of eradicating poverty by 2050. The EU plans to "improve the timeliness and comprehensiveness of poverty-related data, including by enriching the measurement of material deprivation and standardising it at EU level, and to explore other approaches to measure both affordability and severe poverty, and to have more granular indicators of territorial disparities."

In April 2017, the European Union (EU) adopted a new official measure of Material and Social Deprivation (MSD) and in March 2018, the EU adopted its first ever measure of Child Deprivation. The methodology used to ensure that these new deprivation measures were suitable, valid, reliable and comparable across the EU Member States was first developed by the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey in the UK programme.

METHODOLOGY

This methodological framework for improving the measurement of consensual deprivation was reviewed extensively by the Eurostat Task Force on Material Deprivation (MD) in 2012 who argued that "The work is considered technically as providing a "gold standard" for the list of MD variables and indicator's construction and has unanimous support".

The 2020, UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) report on Poverty Measurement: Guide to Data Disaggregation, was endorsed by the Conference of European Statisticians, and included an important recommendation about deprivation indicator development, consistent with the European Union's approach;

RECOMMENDATION 28:

a) Deprivation measures need to be based upon a clear and explicit theory or normative definition of poverty in order to ensure that each indicator is a valid measure, i.e. that it measures poverty and not some other related (or unrelated) concept such as wellbeing or happiness.

b) The validity of each indicator should be demonstrated, i.e. the amount of systematic error should be formally assessed and indicators should be dropped if they have a low validity.

c) The reliability of each indicator should be determined, i.e. the amount of random error should be formally assessed and indicators should be dropped if they have a low reliability.

d) Normally, a deprivation or poverty index should count each item with an equal weight.

Differential weights should only ever be used when this reduces measurement error (i.e. validity and/or reliability of the index are improved)

This paper will discuss these advances in social and material deprivation measurement for adults and children and the theoretical and statistical methods which can be used to improve the scientific measurement of multidimensional poverty in all countries of the world.

KEY FINDINGS

The aim of this work is to develop a consensual deprivation question module which can be used by UNICEF in its MICS surveys to supplement and compliment the existing child and family poverty indicators. The draft question module will be presented and the theoretical basis for globally comparable measurement of poverty in all countries of the world.

ABSTRACT 03

BEYOND SINGLE METRICS: VISUALIZING THE MANY DIMENSIONS OF POVERTY

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE

Multidimensional poverty is measured by a vast array of indicators, including low income, material and social deprivation, poor health, low education, low or no employment, and insufficient housing. Despite the richness of this data, the sheer volume of indicators often leads to oversimplified portrayals of both absolute and relative poverty in political, media, and academic discourse. Frequently, single indicators are highlighted in isolation, which distorts the understanding of poverty as a multidimensional disadvantage. This fragmented approach can result in policy measures that address only certain aspects of poverty while neglecting others. Even when comprehensive information on poverty is reported, the sheer number of indicators makes it challenging to represent poverty not only comprehensively but also in a manner that is easy to grasp and intuitively understood. Consequently, such reporting may still lead to overlooked or misinterpreted dimensions of poverty.

The difficulty of comprehending multiple layers of poverty data underscores the need for innovative methods that can synthesize and visualize multidimensional poverty information in a way that is both accessible and analytically robust. This paper aims to explore and apply innovative visualization methods that capture the multidimensional nature of absolute and relative poverty, enabling rapid and comprehensive understanding as well as clear, nuanced interpretation of poverty profiles across groups or countries.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve this aim, the study draws on visualization techniques from disciplines that routinely handle complex multidimensional data, such as socioeconomics and ecological economics. A prominent example is the Doughnut Economics framework developed by Kate Raworth, which visually integrates social and ecological boundaries within a circular diagram. This framework offers an intuitive way to grasp multiple dimensions simultaneously, balancing social needs against ecological limits. By adapting such approaches to the many indicators reflecting multidimensional poverty, and by applying actual poverty data from Austria, the paper identifies and demonstrates suitable visualization methods. The options presented are evaluated based on (i) their ability to convey complex information clearly, (ii) their potential to reveal patterns that might otherwise remain hidden, and (iii) their usability for different audiences. The proposed paper discusses the strengths and weaknesses of each visualization option, providing guidance for

researchers and practitioners on selecting appropriate tools for their specific needs.

KEY FINDINGS

The application of innovative visualization techniques enables the presentation of the diverse poverty indicators in an accessible and insightful way. Visualizing data highlights the relative importance of different dimensions of absolute and relative poverty and reveals complex interrelations that single indicators often fail to capture. This approach fosters a deeper understanding of multidimensional poverty and its varied manifestations across different populations and contexts. Importantly, it has the potential to overcome common narratives of both data overload and single-indicator focus, facilitating a more holistic and accurate representation of poverty—an essential prerequisite for effective poverty policies.

CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper offers a methodological contribution to poverty research by introducing new visualization techniques and a theoretical contribution by advancing the understanding of poverty as a complex, multidimensional phenomenon. It proposes that academics, media professionals, and policymakers adopt these visualization methods to improve communication and comprehension of poverty data. Furthermore, it advocates for the use of such visualizations in the development of policy proposals that effectively target the multiple dimensions of poverty, ensuring that interventions address the full spectrum of deprivation experienced by those living in poverty.

ABSTRACT 04

MEASURING POVERTY WITHOUT CONFUSION: SEPARATING RESOURCES, CAUSES, AND CONSEQUENCES

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE

This article examines the theoretical, conceptual, and normative foundations of poverty measurement, with particular emphasis on child poverty in low- and middle-income countries. Its central objective is to clarify what poverty is, what it is not, and why this distinction matters for developing valid, reliable, and policy-relevant measures of poverty. The article argues that poverty should be understood as a lack of access to economic resources and means, rather than as deprivation in general. While poverty has multidimensional causes and consequences, the concept itself is best understood as unidimensional, rooted in insufficient economic resources. This distinction is especially important for child poverty research, where children's specific needs and vulnerabilities require specific empirical indicators, but not a separate conceptual definition of poverty.

METHODOLOGY

The article adopts a theoretical and conceptual approach, combined with a critical assessment of widely used poverty measurement frameworks. It reviews and discusses major contributions to poverty theory, including the work of Rowntree, Townsend, Sen, Ringen, Mack and Lansley, and others. It also evaluates key international poverty measures and approaches, including the Dollar-a-Day poverty line, the Bristol Method, the Multidimensional Poverty Index, and the Consensual Method. These approaches are assessed against four proposed criteria for sound poverty measurement. First, a measure should separate poverty from its causes and consequences. Second, it should relate to prevailing economic and social realities. Third, it should be parsimonious, transparent, and straightforward to interpret. Fourth, it should be decomposable to the relevant unit of analysis, particularly to individual children within households. The article uses these criteria as an ideal type against which existing measures can be compared.

KEY FINDINGS

The article finds that a persistent problem in poverty research is the tendency to conflate poverty with related but analytically distinct phenomena, such as poor health, lack of education, discrimi-

nation, child abuse, unemployment, social exclusion, and limited capabilities. These conditions may be causes or consequences of poverty, and they may interact with poverty in cumulative and reciprocal ways, but they should not automatically be treated as indicators of poverty. Such conflation weakens both empirical analysis and policy design because it becomes unclear whether a measure identifies poverty itself, the processes that produce poverty, or the outcomes that follow from poverty.

The article further finds that child poverty requires particular methodological attention. Children are more vulnerable than adults to the long-term effects of deprivation, and their needs vary by age, dependency, and developmental stage. However, child poverty is not conceptually distinct from adult poverty. Rather, the challenge is empirical: poverty measures must capture how insufficient economic resources translate into child-specific deprivations, such as lack of adequate nutrition, schooling, healthcare, shelter, sanitation, information, and participation. Household-level measures are often insufficient because they assume equal sharing of resources within households and therefore cannot identify intra-household inequalities between adults and children or among children themselves.

The assessment of existing measures shows that each approach involves trade-offs. The Dollar-a-Day measure has conceptual clarity because it focuses on income and economic resources, but it is weakly connected to actual living conditions and is difficult to interpret in terms of what people can or cannot afford. The Bristol Method has strong relevance for child poverty because it focuses on severe child deprivation and is grounded in basic needs and children's rights, but some indicators are not fully decomposable to individuals. The Multidimensional Poverty Index captures important aspects of living conditions, but it risks mixing causes, consequences, and indicators of poverty into a single index, which limits analytical clarity. The Consensual Method is identified as particularly promising because it explicitly links deprivation to lack of affordability, reflects socially recognized necessities, and can be designed to collect individual-level data, including from children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The article recommends that poverty research and policy adopt a clearer conceptual distinction between poverty and broader deprivation. Poverty measures should focus on lack of access to economic resources and means, while separately analysing the causes and consequences of that lack. Researchers and policymakers should make the normative assumptions behind poverty lines explicit, including choices about indicators, thresholds, and acceptable levels of hardship. Measures of child poverty should use child-specific indicators and should be decomposable to the individual level wherever possible. Finally, poverty measurement should be transparent, socially meaningful, and policy-relevant, so that it can support not only the counting of the poor but also effective action to understand, reduce, and ultimately eliminate poverty, especially among children.

ABSTRACT 05

MULTIDIMENSIONAL CHILD POVERTY AND PERSISTENT DISPARITIES ALONG CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

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Alberto Minujin, Equity for Children
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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this paper is to discuss conceptual and empirical interactions between multidimensional child poverty and disparities, along with children's life trajectories. A complementary objective is to address methodological issues useful for the analysis carried out in the paper.

OUTLINE

The article starts with describing two conceptual frameworks: child poverty and disparities. Regarding the latter, the relationship between inequity and inequality, differences between vertical and horizontal disparities, and the relevance of intersectionality are described. This discussion provides a prelude for the various ways in which the analysis of disparities can be related to multidimensional child poverty. The framework to understand and measure child poverty is also introduced. The methodological discussion, including some data issues, comes next. Then, empirical results are presented. Finally, these results are followed by a set of practical recommendations, for policy and future research, which underline the significance of addressing disparities in the fight again child poverty.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The five main reasons to think of children living in poverty independently of (in addition to) adult poverty are introduced in this section. They are conceptual, experiential, ethical, legal, and practical. Thus, a specific understanding and definition of child poverty is needed before measuring it. Following the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights framework describing constitutive rights pf poverty as those rights that fundamentally and directly require material resources to be realized, means children in poverty are conceptually defined as those children whose constitutive rights of poverty are not realized. In other words, children who lack the material means to access and enjoy clothing, education, health, housing, means of information, nutrition, play and leisure, sanitation, and water.

There are at least three perspectives to think of disparities affecting children. One of them is to create a profile of disparities among children in poverty. These profiles describe the headcount, depth, and severity of child poverty according to socio-economic background characteris-

tics. Secondly, a multi-dimensional perspective to disparities, e.g. by exploring intersectionality. Thirdly, child poverty can be used as an axis of disparity to describe outcomes for children. These disparities can be measured at one or several points in time. In the latter case, analyzing the stability of gender, class, ethnicity, geographical location and other disparities contributes to understand 'durable' inequalities, i.e. long duration disparities that have a highly negative impact on the personal and social life of children, communities and societies.

METHODOLOGY

The operationalization of child poverty measurement is introduced, as well as the construction of child poverty profiles. Child poverty is measured multidimensionally for each child because children's needs are different from those of adults'. In other words, disaggregation of a household's multidimensional poverty by age makes children's poverty invisible. It is important to distinguish multidimensional child poverty from other negative aspects affecting children or violations of other rights, such as neglect, violence, unhappiness, low subjective well-being, time poverty, or early pregnancy. In this section, how to measure deprivation in each dimension is explained.

We use the panel data gathered since 2001 by the Young Lives Project. We look at five rounds of data for three countries (Ethiopia, Peru, and Vietnam) over almost twenty years. Moreover, beyond the analysis of inequalities presented in this paper there is a complementary objective focused on discussing the methodological potential and constraints of using panel data to analyze multidimensional child poverty trends, durable and other types of disparities, and the dynamics of intersectionality.

KEY FINDINGS

Four main findings stand out. First, using panel data allows us to classify children in terms of how long they were in poverty while they were growing up (never, in round, in two rounds, etc.). Second, the relative shares of these groups clearly vary by country. Third, both the magnitude and persistence of disparities over time can be measured. It can be observed, for these counties, the patterns of disparity are stable. Fourth, given that the data panel in the last rounds include adolescents and young adults, it is possible to ascertain the impact growing up in poverty and experiencing disparities on their outcomes as adults. I.e., poverty and disparity patterns in children's life trajectories impact their opportunities to find jobs or continue higher education as young adults.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While there are research and evidence on what works to reduce child poverty, the focus is on the headcount. Additional research and evidence are needed about what works to reduce depth and severity. Similarly, further empirical analysis is needed about the policies that could contribute to addressing durable disparities among children. On the measurement side, more efforts to include Socially Perceived Needs /Consensual Approach questions are required and to use child poverty as an axis of disparities.

ABSTRACT 06

DEVELOPING POVERTY-AWARE PRACTICE IN HIGH-SCHOOLS IN ISRAEL: A RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Scholars widely agree that cultivating a more equitable education system requires specialized educational skills for working with low-income, immigrant, and minoritized students. These skills do not stand alone and are connected to theoretical and emotional stance regarding poverty, what we call "poverty-awareness". In order to become poverty-aware teachers should develop a contextual understanding of poverty, recognize how poverty shapes students' lives and educational opportunities, acknowledge the expertise of people living in poverty regarding their own experiences, and promote equity through professional practice.

This lecture will describe a research-practice partnership (RPP) of academics with an Israeli high school network focused on developing critical, poverty-aware pedagogical practices to promote equity within schools. This initiative followed the development of the poverty-aware paradigm in Israel, that was originally developed for social workers and has been implemented by the welfare ministry on a national scale. The RPP aimed to adapt insights from the poverty-aware paradigm to the practice of high-school teachers.

METHODOLOGY

The research-practice partnership encompassed 10 workshops of academics who are experts in the poverty-aware paradigm with homeroom teachers. The first six sessions focused on presenting the poverty-aware perspective and mutually discussing challenges posed by poverty and social exclusion in school life. In the following sessions, the educational teams presented significant cases and events related to poverty and exclusion, and the whole team attempted to analyze them using poverty-aware terminology and tools. Forty-four teachers wrote vignettes, presenting and critically analyzing a significant poverty-related school event in which they were involved. In addition, 16 semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with teachers.

A validated poverty-awareness questionnaire, that was filled by the teachers involved and a control group pre- and post-intervention, showed a move from individualistic to structural explanations regarding poverty among those who were involved in the RPP.

MAIN FINDINGS

The qualitative findings revealed four central domains in which homeroom teachers have poverty-related challenges: teacher–student relationships; teacher–family and community relationships; developing poverty-aware pedagogy in the classroom; and organizational level challenges.

In the domain of teacher–student relationships, several challenges emerged that stemmed from students' prior experiences of poverty, class disparities between teachers and students, and students' diminished expectations of the adult world. Additional challenges related to teachers' interpretations of the realities of living in poverty and the ways these interpretations shaped their professional practice. These included tensions between teachers' and students' understandings of concepts such as personal choice and personal responsibility; the recognition of restricted opportunities and structural barriers in students' lives; and the ethical and professional dilemmas that arose in this context. At the same time, teachers also acknowledged students' agency and their resistance to the conditions of poverty. Another significant challenge concerned the intense emotional experiences and emotional overload reported by educators.

In the field of teacher–family and community relationships, the findings revealed a complex picture regarding the ways educators perceived families, as well as the difficulties involved in overcoming prejudicial and judgmental attitudes toward parents. Here too, emotional challenges emerged, particularly during home visits and exposure to the living conditions of students and their families.

With regard to poverty-aware pedagogy, teachers struggled to determine the appropriate level of expectations to hold for their students, fearing that excessively high expectations might lead to frustration, while expectations that were too low might constrain students' developmental horizons. In addition, teachers faced challenges related to the relevance of curricular content and the enrichment of students' general knowledge, the creation of a sense of worth and dignity within assessment processes, and the material deprivation that hindered learning.

At the organizational level, the findings indicated that enabling teachers to effectively address students' experiences of poverty requires an organizational framework characterized by teamwork, school-wide collaboration, professional support, and guidance. Two central challenges emerged for educators as members of school staff: the challenge of burnout and coping with daily crises, and the challenge of navigating competing needs alongside existing school policies.

The workshops helped teachers develop practices centered on on-going close relationships, critical dialogue, recognition of students and parents as active agents, alternative forms of assessment, and stronger school-based collaboration. Teachers also emphasized the importance of collective reflection, shared professional language, and institutional legitimacy for sustaining this work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings highlight that poverty-aware education must be promoted as a school-wide and policy-level approach rather than as an individual effort of committed teachers.

We recommend: (1) systematic teacher training based on a critical understanding of poverty; (2) the development of school-based organizational mechanisms that enable emotional processing, shared professional language, and institutional support; and (3) allocation of resources and policy changes that allow the implementation of poverty-aware educational practices.

Educational equity requires not only pedagogical change, but also a transformation in how schools understand poverty, professional responsibility, and institutional justice.

ABSTRACT 07

NUTRITIONAL INEQUALITIES AMONG OLDER PEOPLE IN ITALY: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Healthy nutrition is fundamental for human life. In Italy, the Mediterranean diet is a predominant, cultural, model characterized by a nutrient-balanced composition that includes vegetables and fruits as essential components. The consumption of these components is widely recognized as strategic for reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and specific types of cancer (OECD 2025).

However, some studies show the existence of problematic nutritional habits among older people, including an insufficient intake of fruits and vegetables, as well as differences across regions (Istituto Superiore di Sanità 2024). Yet, this research field has not been extensively investigated so far.

METHODOLOGY

Against this background, this paper addresses the issue of nutritional inequalities among older people (aged 65 years and over) in Italy. These inequalities are investigated through regression analyses using microdata from the European Health Interview Survey (EHIS) as the empirical source.

Data pooling from the two most recent available EHIS waves (2015; 2019) was applied to increase the sample size (N = 20,232) and to assess nutritional deficiencies across different sub-groups of older individuals.

The quantitative analysis considers "nutritional deficiency" – defined as an insufficient daily intake of fruits and vegetables - as the dependent variable. This condition is operationalized using the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendation of five or more daily portions as the reference standard.

Two domains of nutritional deficiency are identified: "absolute" nutritional deficiency, which indicates older individuals who do not consume fruits or vegetable daily; "relative" nutritional deficiency, for those who despite consuming fruits or vegetable daily, remain below the reference standard.

The operationalization of inequalities considers the following axes of socio-economic stratification as independent variables: gender (ref. female vs male), income (ref. I-II quintiles vs III-IV-V quintiles), and macro area of residence (ref. South vs Centre-North).

In order to detect potential nuances within these broad categories of inequalities, and considering the simultaneous relevance of the selected axes of stratification, the analysis also

incorporate an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw 1989; Hill Collins 2015). By adopting this perspective, the following intersectional combinations were considered: female/I-II quintiles/South; female/I-II quintiles/Centre-North; female/ III-IV-V quintiles/South; female/ III-IV-V quintiles/Centre-North; ref. male/I-II quintiles/South; male/I-II quintiles/Centre-North; male/ III-IV-V quintiles/South; male/ III-IV-V quintiles/Centre-North.

All regression analyses include control variables representing additional conditions that may shape nutritional deficiencies: reference year; age class; living alone; educational level; degree of urbanization; subjective health status; chronic diseases, number of functional limitations (ADL/IADL); mastication problems.

MAIN FINDINGS

Preliminary analysis shows a consistent and clear pattern across both domains of nutritional deficiency. A higher risk of absolute and relative "nutritional deficiency" characterizes older people who are male, have low income, or reside in the Southern regions.

The intersectional perspective indicates how all the specific profiles of older people living in Centre/North exhibit a consistently lower risk of "nutritional deficiency", across both domains, though to varying degrees: specifically, high-income (III-IV-V quintiles) shows the lowest risk.

Conversely, the remaining intersectional categories of older people living in the Southern regions do not show statistically significant differences, with only the specific exception of female, high income, who exhibit lower risk in both nutritional domains.

In light of these results, the paper concludes with a discussion of major social policy implications, focusing on strategic and targeted intervention aimed at tackling the production and reproduction of these nutritional inequalities.

ABSTRACT 08

HOW TO TRULY UNDERSTAND CHILD POVERTY AND INEQUALITY? THE CASE OF SLOVENIA

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ABSTRACT

This contribution addresses the issue of understanding child poverty and inequality from a methodological and conceptual perspective, starting from the assumption that aggregate indicators of social inequality often fail to provide sufficient insight into children's actual living conditions. The analysis focuses on the relationship between macro-level data on income inequality and poverty and micro-level data reflecting children's everyday lives in the domains of health, education, social participation, and life opportunities. The paper raises the question of the extent to which indicators such as the Gini coefficient meaningfully contribute to understanding inequalities among children or, conversely, whether they obscure important disparities manifested in everyday lived experiences.

The central research question guiding the paper is: To what extent do Gini coefficient values help us genuinely understand inequalities among children as experienced in their everyday lives? This question is particularly relevant in the Slovenian context, as Slovenia frequently performs favourably in international comparisons concerning income equality, social protection, and children at risk of poverty According to several international indicators, Slovenia ranks among countries characterised by comparatively low income inequality and relatively high levels of social cohesion. Nevertheless, various datasets suggest that favourable macro-level indicators are not consistently reflected in children's everyday life experiences.

At the micro level, significant disparities become visible in areas such as health outcomes, dietary habits, educational achievement, subjective well-being, opportunities for participation in extracurricular activities, and access to developmental opportunities. Examples include differences in educational attainment associated with socio-economic status, data on childhood obesity, disparities in psychosocial well-being, and unequal access to certain forms of support and child participation. These findings raise the question of whether low levels of income inequality at the national level may conceal important social disparities that are reproduced through children's everyday lives and ultimately shape their long-term life chances.

Methodologically, the paper is based on a secondary analysis of available international and national datasets enabling comparisons across different dimensions of child well-being and inequality. The analysis draws on data from Eurostat, OECD, PISA, and HBSC, with particular emphasis on linking economic indicators to measures of health, education, and social inclusion among children. Special attention is devoted to identifying the factors contributing to the apparent discrepancy between Slovenia's favourable

macro-level profile and the inequalities observed in children's everyday experiences.

As the research is still ongoing, the paper presents preliminary findings, methodological challenges, and proposals for a more comprehensive understanding of child poverty and inequality. More broadly, it seeks to contribute to debates on how child poverty and inequality should be measured and interpreted, highlighting the importance of combining socio-economic indicators with measures capturing the quality of children's everyday lives.

ABSTRACT 09

POVERTY AS A COMPLEX AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL DETERMINANT OF HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND

Poverty is widely recognized as a major social determinant of health, affecting individuals and communities through complex and interconnected social, economic, and cultural mechanisms. Health extends beyond the absence of disease and encompasses psychological and emotional well-being. The relationship between poverty and health is characterized by multiple direct and indirect pathways, frequently mediated by educational attainment and shaped by broader social, cultural, and community contexts. Health and poverty are interrelated phenomena that influence one another and therefore require examination within a comprehensive socio-cultural framework.

METHODS

This paper presents the findings of a study investigating the relationship between poverty and health. A qualitative research design was employed, combining a review of the relevant literature with in-depth interviews conducted with experts in the field. The study also incorporates evidence from empirical research published over the past three decades. The empirical component involved 18 participants holding managerial and expert positions within the social welfare and healthcare systems and was conducted using the in-depth interview method.

RESULTS

The findings highlight the complex mechanisms through which poverty affects health outcomes. The analysis identifies both direct and indirect associations between poverty and health, demonstrating the mediating influence of education, gender, and cultural context. Unequal access to healthcare emerged as one of the key issues requiring particular policy and professional attention.

A comprehensive understanding of these interrelated factors and the multifaceted nature of poverty has significant potential to inform the development and implementation of effective public policies and community-based interventions aimed at improving health outcomes and reducing social inequalities. The integration of individual patient- and client-centred approaches with community-based strategies strengthens both personal and collective responsibility in addressing poverty-related challenges.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the study recommends the adoption of systemic and integrated approaches that emphasize preventive action, intersectoral collaboration, and coordinated service delivery. Furthermore, both social protection and healthcare systems require continuous monitoring and adaptation to ensure responsiveness to evolving societal needs and demographic changes.

Keywords: poverty, health, health outcomes; social determinants of health; healthcare inequities

ABSTRACT 10

THE IMPACT OF ENERGY POVERTY ON THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS: A CALL FOR ACTION IN SOCIAL WORK

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is, based on a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with 17 social workers working with the most vulnerable groups and 30 individuals from vulnerable groups, to highlight the limitations of the individual counselling they provide in addressing energy poverty and, in this context, to reflect on the impacts of current social and housing policies in the Czech Republic.

Based on the data obtained, it can be argued that individual counselling, as the dominant tool of social work intervention, often fails because it is unable to respond adequately to the structural nature of the problem. It appears that households face a range of external constraints – notably poor-quality and energy-inefficient housing, opaque market practices, and the unavailability of stable housing – which they cannot influence on their own. Systemic recommendations aimed at changing household behaviour thus come up against limits imposed by material conditions and the institutional framework.

The paper further highlights the problematic assumptions on which individual social work counselling is often based, particularly the notion of clients' lack of information or passivity. Empirical findings, however, show that households in energy poverty already employ a range of coping strategies, often at the limits of what is medically and socially sustainable. Furthermore, the effectiveness of counselling is undermined by psychosocial barriers such as shame, stigma or distrust of institutions, as well as households' limited control over their own energy consumption.

Last but not least, the paper draws attention to a reductionist conception of social work, which emphasises individual behavioural change without sufficiently reflecting broader socio-economic contexts. Individual counselling thus remains an isolated tool whose impact is limited in an environment of insufficient systemic support, complex bureaucracy and a lack of affordable social housing.

In conclusion, the paper emphasises the need for a shift towards more integrated and participatory approaches that link individual support with measures at the level of housing policy, market regulation and social services.

Note: This paper presents the qualitative component of a broader study carried out as part of the project `The Social Dimension of New Technologies in the Energy Sector in the Ostrava Metropolitan Area` (STENEO), CZ.02.01.01/00/23_021/0008591

ABSTRACT 11

UNDERSTANDING POVERTY THROUGH FUTURE SOCIAL WORKERS: A MIXED-METHODS ANALYSIS OF CAUSAL ATTRIBUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Social work is a profession fundamentally engaged with poverty, social exclusion, and inequality. How poverty is understood by future social workers has direct implications for professional practice, intervention strategies, and social policy orientations. Causal attributions of poverty shape how social problems are defined and how responsibility is assigned, influencing attitudes toward social assistance and policy development (1,2). In this context, and beyond conventional economic indicators of poverty, this study aims to examine the causal attributions of poverty among social work students and to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these perspectives are constructed through both quantitative patterns and qualitative narratives.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a convergent design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently and integrated during interpretation. The quantitative component included 103 undergraduate social work students enrolled in a "Poverty and Social Work" course. Data were collected using a Sociodemographic Information Form (including gender, year of study, and field placement experience) and the Causal Attributions of Poverty Scale, a 57-item, five-point Likert-type instrument consisting of three subdimensions: structural, individual, and fatalistic/familial attributions. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS. The qualitative component consisted of a focus group discussion with 10 students from the same population, conducted using semi-structured questions to explore in-depth perspectives on poverty. The discussion was transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis supported by MAXQDA. Findings from both components were brought together during interpretation to identify convergences and divergences across data sources.

MAIN FINDINGS

The findings indicate that social work students predominantly attribute poverty to structural factors. The total scale mean was 210.46 (SD=14.45), with higher scores observed for structural attributions (M=134.30, SD=26.39) compared to individual (M=56.00, SD=11.46) and fatalistic/familial attributions (M=20.15, SD=12.51). The highest-rated causes included unequal income

distribution, unemployment, inequality of opportunity, and economic instability, whereas the lowest-rated causes included individual deficiencies, immorality, and fate. Qualitative findings not only supported but also elaborated these patterns by revealing how students articulated these explanations in practice. Structural explanations were dominant and were framed through three interconnected dimensions: economic constraints (e.g., unemployment and precarious work), unequal access to opportunities (particularly in education and employment), and the role of social policies and state responsibility. Students frequently emphasized that poverty is reproduced through systemic inequalities rather than individual shortcomings. Individual-level interpretations appeared in more conditional and context-sensitive ways. Rather than directly blaming individuals, students referred to limited access to education, lack of resources for self-development, and situational factors affecting motivation and decision-making. Fatalistic and familial explanations were least emphasized, yet reflected culturally embedded understandings of poverty, including intergenerational disadvantage and, to a lesser extent, beliefs related to fate. When integrated, the findings reveal a largely coherent pattern: structural explanations are strongly supported across both data sources, while individual and fatalistic interpretations remain secondary, context-dependent, and often intertwined with broader structural conditions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings highlight the importance of moving beyond purely economic indicators in poverty analysis by incorporating perception-based dimensions such as causal attributions. In this sense, understanding how poverty is interpreted by different social groups may contribute to more comprehensive and multidimensional approaches to poverty measurement. From a social policy perspective, the dominance of structural explanations suggests support for rights-based and redistributive interventions addressing labor market inequalities and unequal access to opportunities. At the same time, the presence of individual-level interpretations indicates that public understandings of poverty may be shaped by mixed explanatory frameworks, which can influence both the design and public acceptance of social protection policies. Accordingly, poverty reduction strategies should consider not only material deprivation but also how poverty is socially constructed and framed. Addressing stigmatizing narratives and strengthening structural awareness may enhance the effectiveness, legitimacy, and sustainability of policy interventions. Finally, the findings demonstrate the value of integrating qualitative insights into poverty research, particularly in capturing how poverty is experienced and interpreted. Future studies may extend this approach to diverse populations and comparative contexts to better inform inclusive, evidence-based, and context-sensitive policy development.

Keywords: Poverty, causal attributions of poverty, social work students, mixed-methods research, social policy

ABSTRACT 12

BEYOND INCOME: MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY AND THE LIMITS OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN KOSOVO

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the multidimensional nature of poverty among beneficiaries of the Social Assistance Scheme (SAS) in Kosovo, arguing that although the scheme plays an important structural role, it remains primarily anchored in monetary eligibility criteria and therefore fails to address overlapping non-monetary deprivations experienced by vulnerable households. The central research question explores the extent to which Kosovo's social protection system reduces multidimensional poverty and identifies which dimensions remain structurally unaddressed. Despite notable economic progress reflected in a significant decline in consumption-based poverty rates over the past decade poverty in Kosovo persists in complex and layered forms. While monetary poverty indicators show improvement, they obscure disparities in housing conditions, access to education, healthcare, and basic infrastructure.

This study adopts a multidimensional poverty framework to capture these intersecting deprivations more accurately and to challenge the limitations of income-based assessments. The research employs a mixed-methods approach. Quantitatively, it draws on secondary data from national and international sources, including household surveys, labour force data, and social welfare statistics. Poverty is analysed across four key dimensions: income/consumption, housing, education, and health/infrastructure access, using an adapted Alkire-Foster methodology. Qualitatively, the study incorporates semi-structured interviews with social workers and focus group discussions with SAS beneficiary families across both urban and rural municipalities. This approach enables a deeper understanding of institutional barriers and lived experiences that quantitative data alone cannot capture.

Findings reveal a significant structural mismatch between Kosovo's social protection system and the multidimensional reality of poverty. Coverage remains limited, with only a small proportion of those living below the poverty line receiving social assistance. Additionally, the declining share of social protection spending allocated to SAS further weakens its impact. Non-monetary deprivation is particularly pronounced in housing, with a majority of households reporting high financial burdens, especially among low-income groups. Rural areas are disproportionately affected, reflecting persistent spatial inequalities in access to services and economic opportunities. The study also highlights critical data gaps, including outdated household poverty statistics, which hinder effective policy design and targeting. Child poverty emerges as a particularly urgent concern, with a substantial proportion of children living in poverty while receiving a disproportionately low share of social protection resources. This imbalance underscores systemic

prioritisation issues within current spending structures. The paper concludes with several policy recommendations: updating national poverty data through comprehensive, multidimensional surveys; redesigning SAS eligibility criteria to incorporate non-monetary dimensions; increasing investment in rural social infrastructure; rebalancing social protection spending toward poverty-targeted transfers, especially for children; and strengthening inter-sectoral coordination through integrated case management in social work institutions. By moving beyond income-based measures, this study contributes to a more holistic understanding of poverty in Kosovo and offers a framework for more inclusive and effective social policy design.

Keywords: Multidimensional poverty, social assistance, Kosovo, social protection.

ABSTRACT 13

COMBATING POVERTY BY TRANSLATING MICRO-LEVEL EXPERIENCES OF LONG-RUNNING SOCIAL WELFARE PROGRAMS INTO POLICY LEARNING FOR NEWLY INTRODUCED PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE

South Africa is the most unequal country in the world (Gini = 0.63) and is faced with persistent unemployment and poverty. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government introduced the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) Grant, a temporary cash transfer to unemployed working-age adults previously excluded from the social assistance system. Although initially framed as an emergency intervention, the SRD has been repeatedly extended, suggesting that it now plays a structural role in South Africa's welfare architecture.

This paper asks: what lessons can be drawn from South Africa's long-running Child Support Grant (CSG), another cash transfer program, to inform the design and effectiveness of the SRD grant? The analysis treats the CSG as a policy benchmark and examines micro-level beneficiary experiences of 174 CSG recipients to generate insights relevant for improving the SRD as a poverty-alleviation instrument.

CONTRIBUTION

The paper contributes to the economics of social protection in three ways. First, it provides micro-level evidence on beneficiary experiences with a mature unconditional cash transfer program in a highly unequal middle-income country. Second, it links these experiences to questions of program design, adequacy, and administrative capacity that are central to current debates on making the SRD permanent. Third, by situating South Africa's grants within a comparative international context, the paper highlights trade-offs between unconditional and conditional transfers, as well as between emergency relief and long-term income support.

The paper examines real-world factors such as size of benefits, consistency of disbursement, administrative processes, and complementary social services that influence the effectiveness of cash transfer programs.

INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

The Child Support Grant (CSG), introduced in 1998, provides a monthly unconditional cash transfer to caregivers of children under 18 in low-income households. It currently reaches approximately 60% of children and has been associated in prior research with reductions in child

poverty, improved nutrition, schooling outcomes, and lower income inequality. The SRD grant, introduced in 2020, provides a monthly transfer of R370 (22 USD) to unemployed adults with no other grant income. Unlike the CSG, it was rolled out rapidly under crisis conditions and relies heavily on digital application and payment systems. While evidence suggests that the SRD reduced extreme poverty during the pandemic, concerns remain regarding benefit adequacy, targeting, and administrative reliability.

DATA AND METHODS

The empirical analysis draws on an original survey of 174 Child Support Grant caregivers in Mamelodi, a low-income township in South Africa. Data was collected in 2021 using snowball sampling due to COVID-19 restrictions. The survey includes both closed and open-ended questions on grant usage, payment reliability, administrative challenges, and perceived adequacy.

Responses are analyzed thematically to identify recurring constraints and mechanisms that affect household welfare. These mechanisms are then mapped onto design challenges currently faced by the SRD grant.

KEY FINDINGS

Five policy-relevant findings emerge:

Benefit adequacy: Caregivers consistently report that the CSG is insufficient to meet basic child-related expenditures, particularly food, schooling costs, and healthcare. This suggests that real benefit levels matter for welfare impacts, especially under high inflation.

Payment reliability: Delays and unpredictability in payment dates reduce the grant's effectiveness by undermining household planning and consumption smoothing.

Administrative frictions: Lost cards, long queues, and difficulties accessing payment points impose unnecessary costs on beneficiaries, reducing net welfare gains.

Limited scope: The CSG does not cover several essential child-related expenses, implying that cash transfers are most effective when complemented by in-kind services or fee exemptions.

Psychological and social effects: Financial stress and uncertainty associated with grant insufficiency and delays affect caregiver wellbeing, highlighting that welfare impacts extend beyond income alone.

CONCLUSION

This paper argues that South Africa's experience with the Child Support Grant offers valuable lessons for strengthening the Social Relief of Distress Grant as it transitions from crisis relief to a potential permanent safety net. Micro-level evidence highlights how administrative design and benefit adequacy shape the welfare impacts of cash transfers. More broadly, the analysis contributes to debates on cash transfers in unequal, high-unemployment economies and underscores the importance of learning from existing programs when scaling new social policies.

ABSTRACT 14

ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY AND SOCIAL POLICY SUPPORT IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES: EVIDENCE FROM POLAND

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ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Households raising children with disabilities constitute a group particularly exposed to economic vulnerability, poverty and social exclusion. This situation results from the combined effects of a heightened burden of both direct and indirect costs, including those related to informal care. Importantly, these costs are not typically incurred by other households. At the same time, structural constraints limit caregivers' participation in the labour market. In practice, caregiving responsibilities often substantially reduce engagement in paid employment, particularly among mothers, leading to a weakening of household income. This has long-term consequences, as reduced income not only limits the ability to meet current needs but also affects the accumulation of pension entitlements and future financial security.

In Poland, these challenges are further compounded by systemic limitations of the social policy framework, including institutional fragmentation and insufficient coordination of support instruments. These constraints are reflected in reported experiences, as 77% of respondents indicate that public support is neither easily accessible nor adequate.

This paper aims to assess the scale and determinants of poverty among households with children with disabilities in Poland, measured in relation to the officially defined social minimum threshold. It places particular emphasis on the accessibility and adequacy of social policy support. The paper examines the relationship between the use of social benefits and the likelihood of falling below the social minimum threshold in this group.

METHODOLOGY

The analysis is based on original empirical data collected in 2024 through a CAWI survey conducted on a representative sample of 500 households raising children with disabilities. The study forms part of an ongoing PhD dissertation and applies a multidimensional approach to economic vulnerability, combining income-based measures with an assessment of unmet needs and potential future risks, and offering the author's own definition of economic security. Additionally, the analysis adopts a multisectoral perspective, considering the roles of public institutions, market actors, and informal support networks in supporting households raising children with disabilities.

Financial deprivation is evaluated using the social minimum threshold, an official benchmark applied in Poland, which is treated in this study as the boundary of financial deprivation.

Additional indicators capture the degree of satisfaction of basic and disability-related needs, as well as economic risks as subjective economic security. The research also examines the sources of support utilized by households, distinguishing between formal and informal forms of assistance within a multisectoral framework that accounts for the roles of public, market, and informal actors.

MAIN FINDINGS

The results indicate that nearly one-third of households fall below the social minimum threshold, demonstrating a significant scale of income poverty. At the same time, an even smaller proportion of respondents describe their households as economically secure. The analysis of needs further reveals persistent deficits across multiple domains, including housing, healthcare, education, and disability-specific expenditures, suggesting that standard income measures underestimate the actual level of deprivation.

The findings also show that the majority of households rely primarily on family support, while institutional and market-based forms of assistance play a secondary role. This imbalance highlights structural weaknesses in the social protection system and indicates that support is often secured through private rather than systemic mechanisms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper argues that reducing economic vulnerability in this group requires a more coherent and coordinated approach to social policy. Key recommendations include strengthening the integration of financial transfers and social services, improving access to care and support services, simplifying administrative procedures, and enhancing coordination between institutions.

By providing empirical evidence based on original survey data, the study contributes to the understanding of the limitations of existing social policy frameworks and highlights the need for more inclusive and responsive solutions addressing the multidimensional nature of poverty among households with children with disabilities in Poland.

ABSTRACT 15

THE ROLE OF NGOS IN ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY IN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY OF TICHELI VILLAGE IN NORTHERN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

Food insecurity, understood as limited, unstable, or insufficient access to safe, nutritious, and regular food, remains one of the key barriers to local development in rural communities of the Global South. In northern Ghana, this problem is closely connected not only with poverty and food availability, but also with limited access to clean water, inadequate school infrastructure, insufficient hygiene education, and weak institutional support systems. In children, food insecurity has particularly serious consequences, affecting health, concentration, school attendance, learning outcomes, and overall well-being. Schools may therefore become important spaces where educational support is combined with nutritional, infrastructural, and social interventions.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this article is to examine the role of non-governmental organizations in addressing food insecurity in the school community of Ticheli village in northern Ghana. Particular attention is given to the activities of the Akra Foundation, a Polish-initiated NGO established to support educational, infrastructural, and social development initiatives in northern Ghana. The study aims to identify the main nutritional, infrastructural, and educational needs of children attending the School of Talent and Creative Arts in Ticheli and to assess how NGO-led activities can improve food security and strengthen local support systems.

METHODOLOGY

The study has a quantitative and diagnostic character. The empirical material was collected through a CAWI survey conducted among 180 children attending the School of Talent and Creative Arts in Ticheli, northern Ghana. The sample was purposive, as the research focused on a school community directly supported by the Akra Foundation through educational, infrastructural, and social initiatives. The questionnaire included questions concerning food availability, meal regularity, access to drinking water, conditions of food preparation, school infrastructure, hygiene and health education, and expected forms of support. The survey enabled the identification of key areas in which children experience difficulties related to food security and everyday school functioning.

KEY FINDINGS

The findings indicate that food insecurity in the Ticheli school community is a multidimensional issue. It is not limited to a lack of food but also includes irregular access to meals, inadequate conditions for food preparation, limited access to clean water, and insufficient hygiene-related infrastructure. The study shows that NGOs play an important role in identifying local needs, mobilizing resources, supporting schools, and connecting nutritional assistance with infrastructural, educational, and community-based activities. The case of the Akra Foundation demonstrates that NGO support can strengthen local capacity and respond to children's needs in a more integrated and context -sensitive way.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The article recommends that NGO interventions aimed at reducing food insecurity should be locally embedded, long-term, and based on systematic needs assessment. Support should not be limited to the direct provision of food, but should also include investments in water access, school kitchens, hygiene education, and cooperation with teachers, parents, and local leaders. It is also important to strengthen the capacity of schools to become stable points of support for children's nutrition, health, and development. Future NGO activities should therefore combine humanitarian assistance with sustainable development approaches, ensuring that interventions are practical, culturally sensitive, and adapted to local conditions.

Keywords: food insecurity, NGOs, child nutrition, school-based food support, rural communities, Ghana, local development.

ABSTRACT 16

POVERTY, ECONOMIC FREEDOM, AND THE LIMITS OF REDISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF POST-SOCIALIST ECONOMIC THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT

This conference paper examines poverty not merely as an economic category, but as a profoundly philosophical one, contingent upon how the relationship between freedom, justice, and institutional order is understood. The central thesis is that dominant interpretations of poverty in contemporary public discourse reduce it to a problem of distribution, thereby overlooking its genesis within the institutional structure of economic freedom. In this sense, the concept of neoliberalism is problematized as an ideologically condensed label that often replaces analytical precision with moral disqualification. Furthermore, the paper engages with the tension between John Rawls's redistributive conception of justice and Robert Nozick's entitlement theory as a non-distributive framework of justice, raising the question of whether justice primarily concerns the correction of outcomes or the legitimacy of processes of acquisition and exchange. Within this dichotomy, poverty emerges either as a moral defect of distribution or as a consequence of constrained economic autonomy.

In the second part, through a historical perspective, the paper argues that the most significant transformations in poverty reduction in modern history are associated with the expansion of market relations, private property, and the institutional predictability of exchange. Accordingly, it further argues that the free market should not be understood merely as an economic mechanism, but as an institutionalized form of practical freedom, in which morality is expressed through voluntary coordination rather than coercive redistribution, and that the free market constitutes a key condition for poverty reduction and the enabling of vertical social mobility. Finally, the paper proposes a conceptual shift from understanding poverty as a problem of distribution to understanding it as a problem of conditions for value creation, whereby economic freedom is conceived as a constitutive rather than merely instrumental condition of contemporary social justice.

Keywords: poverty; economic freedom; free market; redistributive justice; non-distributive justice; neoliberalism; classical liberalism; institutional economics; cronyism; post-socialist transitions; political economy; social justice; property rights.

ABSTRACT 17

CONSTITUTIONAL LIMITS OF POVERTY RELIEF IN THE CZECH SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines whether selected poverty-related cash benefits in the Czech social security system are designed in a manner compatible with constitutional guarantees of equality, human dignity, social rights, and the protection of family life. It argues that certain legislative solutions, although formally justified by the goals of efficiency, targeting, or abuse prevention, may in substance operate as exclusionary mechanisms that disproportionately burden already vulnerable groups.

The paper addresses three interrelated research questions. First, which features of Czech poverty relief legislation raise the most serious constitutional concerns? Second, under what conditions does a measure that is formally neutral become constitutionally suspect because of its discriminatory or disproportionate social impact? Third, how should these Czech developments be assessed in light of broader European standards concerning equality, social inclusion, and the protection of vulnerable persons?

The analysis focuses on at least three illustrative examples. The first is the former system of so-called "no-housing-benefit zones" (bezdoplatkové zóny), under which municipalities could designate areas in which newly arriving residents were excluded from entitlement to a housing-related social assistance benefit. Since this mechanism was already found unconstitutional, it serves as an important doctrinal starting point and a benchmark for identifying constitutionally impermissible forms of exclusion. The second example is the denial of childbirth grant entitlement for a third and subsequent child. Although framed as a neutral limitation of public support, this rule raises difficult questions concerning indirect discrimination, especially where it disproportionately affects larger families concentrated among socially disadvantaged groups. The third example concerns reductions in social assistance linked to the fact that children remain unsupervised after school hours. This legal construction is particularly problematic because it may effectively penalize poverty-related family circumstances while disregarding the actual availability, affordability, and accessibility of after-school care services.

Methodologically, the paper combines doctrinal constitutional analysis with comparative European legal reflection. It draws on Czech constitutional principles, statutory regulation of social assistance, and relevant constitutional case law, while also situating the Czech discussion within the wider framework of European human-rights and anti-discrimination standards. The paper employs a qualitative and normative approach: rather than measuring poverty empirically, it investigates how the legal architecture of anti-poverty benefits may itself generate exclusion, unequal treatment, and constitutionally questionable burdens. The comparative dimension is

intended not as a full cross-country survey, but as a contextual framework for evaluating whether the Czech approach corresponds to, or departs from, broader European tendencies in the regulation of social assistance.

The central claim of the paper is that constitutional review of poverty benefits must not be limited to their declared purpose or formal neutrality. Measures aimed at regulating the behaviour of poor households, discouraging migration into certain localities, or limiting support for specific family configurations may reproduce structural disadvantage under the guise of rational welfare governance. In this respect, the paper suggests that the Czech legal debate should move beyond narrow questions of legislative discretion and examine more carefully the combined effects of social assistance law on vulnerable groups, especially where children, ethnicity, housing precarity, and spatial exclusion intersect. The unconstitutionality of the no-benefit zones illustrates that anti-poverty policy cannot lawfully be transformed into a territorially selective instrument of deterrence; the other examples raise the broader question whether Czech poverty relief sometimes shifts from support to sanction.

The paper concludes that constitutionally legitimate social assistance must respect not only fiscal rationality, but also substantive equality and the social state principle. It recommends closer scrutiny of categorical exclusions, stronger attention to indirect discrimination, and greater use of comparative European standards when assessing the legality and legitimacy of anti-poverty measures. More broadly, the paper contributes to current debates on multidimensional poverty by showing that poverty is shaped not only by socio-economic conditions, but also by the normative choices embedded in welfare legislation itself.

ABSTRACT 18

WOMEN'S POVERTY AND UNPAID CARE WORK IN GREECE DURING SUCCESSIVE CRISES: A CRITICAL SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Poverty constitutes a multidimensional social phenomenon that cannot be reduced solely to income deprivation but is also associated with unequal access to resources, rights, social protection services, and opportunities for social participation. The gendered dimension of poverty is of particular significance in relation to unpaid care work, which continues to fall disproportionately on women.

The present study draws theoretically upon critical and radical social work approaches, examining women's poverty and care work not as individual problems or matters of personal responsibility, but as socially produced phenomena shaped by power relations, austerity policies, social embeddedness, and the gendered structures of the welfare state. From this perspective, unpaid care work is understood as a fundamental mechanism of social reproduction that is transferred privately to the household level, particularly during periods of crisis and the retrenchment of social protection.

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between unpaid care work and women's poverty in Greece during the period of successive crises over the last fifteen years: the economic crisis (2010–2018), the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2023), and the recent energy and inflation crisis (2022–present). These crises constitute the broader social and economic context within which women's everyday care practices and experiences of economic precarity emerge and evolve. The study adopts an intersectional perspective on women's poverty, acknowledging that factors such as migration and refugee experiences may intensify forms of social exclusion and insecurity.

Methodologically, the study is based on the secondary analysis of statistical data from the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), Eurostat, and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), as well as on a literature review of Greek and international scholarship concerning women's poverty, the care economy, social reproduction, and gender-based social inequalities.

The study is expected to demonstrate that unpaid care work functions as an invisible mechanism for the reproduction of social and economic inequalities, one that is reinforced during periods of socioeconomic crisis when the shortcomings of social protection systems are transferred to the family sphere and, more specifically, to women. Finally, the study seeks

to contribute to the ongoing debate regarding the need to strengthen social protection policies through a gender-sensitive lens, while also promoting the reconceptualization of care as a collective social responsibility rather than a private obligation imposed upon women.

Keywords: women's poverty, unpaid care work, critical and radical social work, gender inequalities

ABSTRACT 19

REGIONAL-BASED INEQUALITIES IN THE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND RISK OF POVERTY - A PORTUGUESE CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Social work is grounded in the person-in-environment paradigm and often focuses on ecological systems theory, as environmental and spatial factors influence inequalities and the risk of poverty, particularly with regard to access to resources and services. Significant rates of persistent poverty, deprivation, educational disadvantage, low wages and unemployment are evident in the inequalities observed in Europe. These inequalities are also evident in territorial disparities, which distinguish between northern and southern Europe, eastern and western Europe, skilled and unskilled workers, young and old people, men and women, and migrants and non-migrants.

Aware of this reality, the European Union has made the promotion of children's and young people's rights a central tenet of political agendas, particularly in the context of reducing social disparities and poverty risk. Despite the advances made in Portugal in terms of both norms and programmes, regional asymmetries persist, resulting in restrictions on equitable access to fundamental rights, particularly for children and young people in depopulated areas.

The present study aims to understand the influence of territorial asymmetries on the guarantee of children's rights, using the district of Portalegre, subregion of Alto Alentejo, Portugal as a case study. This territory faces several challenges, including depopulation, ageing population, and structural economic weaknesses, as well as poor accessibility, limited access to employment and public services, a lack of innovation and economic competitiveness, and precarious governance. The methodological approach is exploratory in nature and is based on secondary sources, including the analysis of documents drawing on scientific literature, statistical reports, and national and international public policy instruments.

The main findings indicate that structural vulnerabilities associated with the designated "low-density territories" —namely depopulation, demographic ageing, lower educational attainment, economic precariousness, and insufficient social responses—negatively impact the quality of life and opportunities of children and young people. The paucity of adequate educational, social and judicial infrastructures, as well as the limited coverage within the child protection system, are particularly emphasised.

It is recommended that the establishment of a specialised court for family, child and young people be given priority within the judicial field. Moreover, it is proposed that the significant shortcomings in the assistance offered by the Social Security system, particularly to children and young people at risk in the district of Portalegre, be addressed through the following measures:

i) the implementation of funded formal socio-educational activities; ii) the establishment of residential care units specialised in facilitating the transition from care to independent living; iii) the establishment of outreach teams that provide support to children and young people. Finally, the proposal encompasses the establishment of additional and specialised residential care homes and the reinforcement of Family Support and Parental Counselling services. It is noteworthy that each of these services is offered in a single location, encompassing an area of 6,084.3 km^2.

It is concluded that in order to overcome spatial asymmetries and inequalities towards the guarantee of the rights of children, there is a necessity for integrated territorial policies in Europe that are focused on the principles of inclusion, social cohesion, and sustainability.

ABSTRACT 20

ACCESS TO RIGHTS AND SOCIAL SECURITY FOR NON-CITIZENS RAISING CHILDREN OF SLOVENIAN CITIZENS ON THEIR OWN: THE OVERLOOKED STORY OF SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES IN THE SLOVENIAN SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

In analyses of social exclusion and poverty, single parents are often an overlooked demographic group. Single-parent families represent a diverse phenomenon in the landscape of family realities, but what they all have in common is that they are families in which one parent is primarily or entirely responsible for the children's care. Research shows that single-parent households are at greater risk of social exclusion, experience higher rates of poverty, have more limited access to various resources, and receive less social support compared to two-parent households. Single-parent families thus face multiple dimensions of social exclusion, including poverty and economic vulnerability; limitations in employment and opportunities for upward career mobility; housing issues; challenges in children's education; limited access to supportive social networks; health challenges; and issues of exclusion from a gender perspective. At the same time, research shows that the proportion of single-parent families in the European Union is increasing and that it is most commonly women who live alone with a child or children.

There are significant differences in circumstances among single parents, thus their exclusion and deprivation are influenced by various factors. One of these is citizenship status and the associated access to social rights in any given country. This contribution will present the results of two studies: a study on the situation of single-parent families in Slovenia in general ("Single-Parent Families in Slovenia: Risks and Opportunities at the Intersection of Social Policies, Social Norms, and Professional Practices"), which was conducted between 2023 and 2025 in collaboration between the Faculty of Social Work and the Faculty of Law at the University of Ljubljana; and a qualitative study from 2025 on the legal status of non-citizens from so-called third countries who hold temporary or permanent residence permits in Slovenia and, following the dissolution of their marriage, form single-parent families with children of Slovenian citizens. These women represent a specific group of residents in Slovenia who, despite their vulnerability, remain completely overlooked in public statistics.

Research findings show that citizenship status is a key factor in access to social rights. Individuals with temporary residence permits have limited access to state assistance, as they are often excluded from cash social assistance and health insurance, thus can only claim a limited set of rights (e.g., child allowance). Consequently, they are heavily dependent on their (former) partner and social networks (when they exist). Upon obtaining a permanent residence permit,

however, non-citizens gain direct access to basic social transfers, which significantly reduces their social insecurity. Despite a significant difference in the levels of social inclusion, the transition between the two statuses is not always unimpeded for these individuals. The two studies revealed that, in addition to the generally poorer social status they share with other families in similar situation, these single-parent families face additional, multifaceted barriers when acquiring citizenship status: a lack of clear information, language and administrative barriers, dependence on a partner to handle procedures, and institutional practices that often fail to recognize their vulnerability. Of note are housing exclusion—as non-citizens in practice have difficulty accessing nonprofit housing—and the link between domestic violence, dependence on a partner, and limited access to rights.

ABSTRACT 21

"WHO DESERVES SUPPORT?": PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN MIGRATION CONTEXTS IN TÜRKIYE

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ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Türkiye has become one of the countries hosting the largest number of migrants, particularly following the Syrian conflict that began in 2011. Over time, the prolonged presence of asylum-seekers and refugees, combined with ongoing economic challenges, has reshaped public debates on social assistance, resource allocation, and social cohesion (1). Recent policy discussions in 2026, including voluntary return initiatives, have further intensified these dynamics (2). In this context, this study aims to explores how poverty is perceived and interpreted in the migration setting in Türkiye, based on the experiences of professionals working in migration-focused non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed as a qualitative research based on a focus group discussion conducted with professionals working in migration-focused NGOs in Türkiye. A total of 12 participants took part, representing NGOs across all seven geographical regions. Data were collected through an online semi-structured focus group facilitated by an experienced moderator team. The session lasted approximately 120 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. The data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, supported by MAXQDA software, through which codes, categories, and themes were systematically developed.

MAIN FINDINGS

The findings indicate that economic tensions between migrants and host communities in Türkiye are shaped not only by material hardship, but also by how poverty, entitlement, and fairness are socially perceived. Three interrelated themes emerged. The first theme points to a perceived competition among the poor, encompassing relative poverty, exclusion from support, and constructions of deservingness. Participants described how economically vulnerable groups evaluate their situation comparatively, often expressed in sentiments such as "we are also poor, but we are not seen." Poverty is thus experienced as a relational condition shaped by visibility and recognition, producing a sense of exclusion and intensifying tensions around fairness in resource

distribution. The second theme highlights social assistance as a site of perceived inequality and symbolic tension, involving perceived discrimination in aid distribution, limited knowledge about funding sources, and the visibility of assistance practices. Aid funded by international actors is often perceived as state-funded, reinforcing the belief that resources are unfairly allocated. In addition, visible delivery mechanisms—such as cards, logos, and distribution practices—strengthen the perception that migrants are prioritized. These findings suggest that the presentation of assistance can be as influential as its content. The third theme shows that labour market and housing pressures function as key drivers translating economic hardship into anti-migrant narratives. Migrants are frequently associated with low wages, job loss, and rising rents, leading to the personalization of broader structural economic problems. As a result, migrants become visible targets of frustrations rooted in wider economic instability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings highlight the need for policy approaches that address not only the material dimensions of poverty, but also how poverty is socially perceived in migration contexts. Greater transparency and effective communication of social assistance programs are essential, as misconceptions about funding sources and distribution contribute to perceived inequality. More inclusive frameworks that consider both migrants and vulnerable host populations may help reduce perceptions of unfair competition. In addition, the design and visibility of aid delivery should be reconsidered, as highly visible practices can reinforce symbolic inequalities. Finally, labour market and housing policies should address structural inequalities—such as informal employment and limited access to affordable housing—to prevent the attribution of economic problems to migrants. Overall, poverty reduction strategies should integrate perception-based dimensions such as fairness, recognition, and deservingness to support more inclusive and sustainable policy responses.

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ABSTRACT 22

CHOOSING WORK UNDER CONSTRAINTS: EMPLOYMENT DECISION-MAKING AMONG PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Poverty is not merely a lack of income, but a situation where limited resources, unstable work, weak protection, and social obligations narrow the choices people can realistically make. In this context, work is often promoted as a pathway out of poverty, yet many people remain poor despite working because their income is irregular, insufficient, or insecure. This creates a tension for social policy: employment may be necessary for survival, but not all work provides protection, dignity, or mobility.

This paper is part of an ongoing PhD research project which examines how people living in poverty in Indonesia navigate structural, institutional, and sociocultural constraints when making employment decisions and how these choices relate to aspirations for better economic and social well-being. It challenges the view that employment decisions are mainly the result of individual agency or rational evaluation of options, especially in developing-country contexts where welfare support is limited, labour markets are informal, and institutional barriers are strong.

Methodologically, the study combines Constructivist Grounded Theory and Situational Analysis. Constructivist Grounded Theory is used to explore how participants construct meanings around work, poverty, responsibility, risk, and future aspirations. Situational Analysis is used to map the wider conditions that shape these choices, including labour market structures, family expectations, social assistance, informal networks, local values, and institutional arrangements. The novelty of the study lies in connecting employment decision-making and poverty, and in combining these methodologies within a social policy study.

The research was conducted in urban areas in Indonesia, where poverty remains a major social issue. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. 53 interviews have been completed across 10 cities, including 44 individual participants, 3 couples, and 1 family interview. Participants include 27 women, 21 men, and 5 transgender participants; 13 participants reported disabilities. Based on self-assessment, 40 participants identified themselves as poor, 5 as borderline, and 8 as not poor. The sample also includes 2 homeless participants. Most participants work in casual, informal, or self-employed jobs, including street vending, gig work, service work, domestic work, manual labour, and small-scale entrepreneurship. A smaller comparison group includes participants with more stable or professional work backgrounds.

Analysis is still ongoing, with transcription, coding, and memo-writing in progress. However, early analytical reflections suggest that employment decisions are rarely based only on income. Participants weigh work opportunities against immediate survival needs, family responsibilities,

housing costs, transport costs, health conditions, uncertainty of payment, stigma, dignity, moral values, and hopes for future mobility. Many participants expressed a preference for halal or socially acceptable work, although moral boundaries differed across participants depending on their situation and lived experience. The poorest participants often had to accept whatever work was available, while those with some support from family, community, or institutions could delay job search, take temporary work, resign, or continue searching for better opportunities. Individual traits, motivation, and aspirations also mattered, but they were not enough on their own. Decisions to pursue better work appeared more feasible when motivation was supported by education, training, social networks, and institutional or family support.

Participants' accounts point to several recurring barriers, including weak law enforcement against scams, discrimination, nepotism, age restrictions, low wages, education requirements, limited transport access, and narrow local job opportunities. Many participants reported receiving some form of support, but this was often through broader schemes, especially public health insurance, scholarships, or training. Direct poverty-related social assistance appeared much more limited, suggesting that many severely poor participants remain only partially included in the social assistance system.

The study recommends that social policy should not treat employment decisions as purely individual choices. Poverty measurement should also move beyond income alone and recognise unstable work, informality, housing insecurity, weak labour protection, limited transport, care responsibilities, exclusion from social assistance, and access to health and education. Policies should combine social assistance, labour market support, transport and childcare support, skills training, job placement, stronger protection for informal workers, and better targeting mechanisms. A multidimensional understanding of poverty is needed to design policies that support not only income generation, but also dignity, agency, and realistic pathways to decent work.

Keywords: Poverty, employment decision-making, social policy, developing countries

ABSTRACT 23

POVERTY AND LIVING CONDITIONS OF FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN RECEIVING GUARANTEED MINIMUM BENEFITS IN CROATIA: CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL POLICY

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ABSTRACT

Child poverty and poverty among families with children represent one of the most significant social issues in contemporary European societies. Despite the development of social protection systems and various measures aimed at reducing material deprivation, children growing up in low-income households continue to face an increased risk of poverty, social exclusion, limited access to health care and educational opportunities, and reduced life chances. Child poverty is considered one of the most complex forms of social inequality because, unlike adults, children are unable to secure their own means of subsistence and are entirely dependent on the material and social resources available within their families. In Croatia, families with children receiving the Guaranteed Minimum Benefit (GMB) constitute a particularly vulnerable group. The Guaranteed Minimum Benefit is the primary means-tested cash assistance benefit within the social welfare system, intended for households that lack sufficient resources to meet their basic living needs.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the characteristics of poverty and living conditions among families with children receiving the Guaranteed Minimum Benefit and to assess the contribution of existing social policy measures to reducing poverty and social exclusion within this population. Particular emphasis is placed on a comparative overview of poverty indicators in Croatia and European Union Member States, an analysis of available statistical data on Guaranteed Minimum Benefit recipients, an assessment of the effectiveness of current policies, and the formulation of recommendations for the development of new measures targeting children and families living in poverty.

This paper draws on available data from national and European statistical sources, including indicators of the at-risk-of-poverty and social exclusion rate, as well as statistical data from the social welfare system. The analysis of these data provides insight into Croatia's position compared to the European Union average, with particular attention given to families with children. Furthermore, the analysis of statistical data on Guaranteed Minimum Benefit recipients will provide information on the number of beneficiaries, household composition, the representation of children among beneficiaries, and other characteristics of families receiving this benefit.

Previous research has shown that households with a larger number of children, single-parent families, unemployed parents, and households dependent on social transfers are among the groups most exposed to the risk of poverty. At the same time, international evidence points to considerable differences among European countries regarding the effectiveness of policies aimed at protecting children from poverty and preventing the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

In assessing the effectiveness of current policies, the paper examines cash benefits and other forms of support. Particular attention is devoted to the availability of early childhood education and care services, extended school-day programmes, school meal programmes, community-based social services, and employment measures. Existing evidence suggests that the success of policies aimed at reducing child poverty depends on an integrated approach that combines financial support with accessible and high-quality public services.

Based on the findings, the paper proposes measures aimed at improving the position of children and families receiving the Guaranteed Minimum Benefit in Croatia. The recommendations include increasing the adequacy of cash benefits for families with children, developing targeted parenting support programmes, improving access to free educational and extracurricular activities, strengthening housing policies, and enhancing coordination between social welfare, education, and employment systems. Particular emphasis is placed on preventive measures designed to reduce the risk of long-term poverty and prevent the transmission of adverse life circumstances to future generations.

To conclude, the paper argues that an effective response to poverty cannot rely solely on cash benefits, but requires the development of comprehensive and cross-sectoral policies that simultaneously address the material, educational, health, and social dimensions of falmily well-being. The findings may contribute to a better understanding of the situation of families receiving the Guaranteed Minimum Benefit in Croatia and provide a foundation for designing social policies aimed at reducing poverty and strengthening the social inclusion of children and their families.

Keywords: child poverty, families with children, Guaranteed Minimum Benefit, social policy, social exclusion.

ABSTRACT 24

UNIVERSAL CHILD BENEFITS AND CHILD POVERTY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Despite economic advancement and intensified process of European integration in many Western Balkans countries, the problem of poverty remains widely present. This is especially visible in some of the poorer regions, where citizens face multidimensional poverty manifested not only by the inadequate income, but the deprivation from other core services as well. All of the countries have different programmes, mostly financial ones, which aim to address the problem of poverty. Since children and youth are particularly vulnerable, there are different national programmes aiming to address child poverty in particular. In recent years, most of the Western Balkan countries have introduced certain reforms into their child benefits systems in the attempt to improve children`s wellbeing.

Recently, Montenegro re-introduced a universal child care allowance, which makes all children and youth under 18 years of age eligible for monthly benefit. This policy decision marked a departure from growing attempts to improve targeting of different social transfers in the aim for the funds to reach those most in need. The paper will try to assess the relation between child allowance and the child poverty, comparing available statistical data from the countries of the Western Balkans. Special focus will be dedicated to the case of Montenegro aiming to determine results from universal child benefits. The paper will focus on key characteristics of child benefit schemes, including eligibility criteria, coverage, benefit levels, and public expenditure, and will explore how these features relate to indicators of child poverty and social exclusion. Detailed analysis of the case of Montenegro will try to contribute to the existing knowledge on relative advantages of universal and means-tested forms of support.

The paper will use data from international and national sources, including UNICEF, the World Bank, Eurostat, and national statistical offices. Particular attention will be paid to indicators of child poverty, material deprivation, and the risk of poverty or social exclusion, as well as broader dimensions of child well-being that are increasingly emphasized within multidimensional approaches to poverty measurement.

The existing literature emphasise that universal schemes offer advantages in terms of inclusiveness and administrative simplicity, while targeted schemes allow concentration of resources on the most vulnerable households. The paper will try to assess these agreed and widely accepted benefits through analysis of the implemented programmes and their results in practice. By comparing policy approaches across the Western Balkans, the paper will contribute to ongoing debates on social assistance and poverty reduction and will provide insights relevant for policy-makers seeking to strengthen child-centered social protection systems.

ABSTRACT 25

EARLY MARRIAGE AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY: A CHILD RIGHTS-BASED QUALITATIVE STUDY IN VAN

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ABSTRACT

In today's world, despite all the efforts and legislation measures taken by both the national and international community, early marriages remain one of the major problems of today, as well as a grave human rights violation and social problem.

Indeed, one of the most important structural aspects of child marriages includes the economic condition of the family. Child marriages are sometimes seen as a form of adaptation, as something that helps people to adapt to adverse economic conditions in which they find themselves. There have been several research studies carried out in different countries showing that the condition of household welfare, poverty, and economic inequality can strongly affect the issue of child marriage. The fact that the effects of these aspects remain evident even after controlling for other factors, such as education and religion, suggests that economic circumstances play a critical role here.

Factors relating to the economy do not necessarily imply poverty; they can include the economic aspects of marriage through dowry and bride price, both of which form part of marriage itself. These practices have the ability to turn marriage among girls into an avenue by which the family can benefit economically in places like Indonesia, and South Asia, and the Middle East regions of the world. This practice, which becomes more prevalent in areas where there are few opportunities for education and employment, is one of the causes of child marriages. Nevertheless, despite the belief that these traditions help ease the economic pressure on the family temporarily, they tend to create a self-perpetuating system of poverty and inequality among children through dropout from education, lack of opportunities to become economically independent, and being condemned to live under poor economic conditions.

It is clear from the literature that the observations mentioned above confirm the occurrence of child marriage under similar structural factors across different geographic settings. A consideration of the regional spread of early marriages in Turkey shows that this practice is more common in regions that are economically disadvantaged and where there are gender inequalities and strong traditions.

The data shows that the province of Van belongs to the group of provinces with the most widespread practice of early marriages in Türkiye between 2002 and 2024. Thus, the practice of early marriages is not only associated with culture, but it is also determined by more complex socio-economic factors. Patriarchal and traditional social structure in the province of Van, which still exists at a considerable level, affects family decisions, societal norms, gender roles and creates favorable conditions for early marriages to occur. In addition, despite the prevalence of research focused on early marriages of girls, it should be noted that the number of scientific

articles dedicated to the issue of early marriage of boys is insufficiently large. This research gap prompted the authors to conduct an analysis of early marriages from the perspective of children's rights and multidimensional poverty.

The main purpose of the current study was to understand the development of early marriage among Van province communities, examine their experiences with respect to this practice, and explore how it is related to multidimensional poverty. Early marriage in the present paper is not perceived as simply being a tradition; on the contrary, it is considered both as a result and a cause of economic, educational, and geographical poverty. For the realization of this objective, a qualitative research methodology was used in the form of a phenomenology design. Face-to-face interviews involving 30 participants (15 females and 15 males) who have had experience with early marriages in Van province were carried out. In order to collect data, a semi-structured interviewing technique was used. In order to promote transparency, rigor, and consistent reporting in the research, the SRQR (Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research) and COREQ (Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research) standards were used.

The findings reveal that early marriages in Van province take shape particularly in the context of economic deprivation, income insecurity, and household-level material vulnerabilities. It was determined that economic difficulties, combined with intra-family vulnerabilities, cause early marriage to be seen as an 'economic coping strategy' and, in some cases, as 'a way out.' In this context, the perception of girls at times as an economic burden and the directing of boys toward taking on economic responsibility through early marriage strengthens the gender dimension of the process.

Furthermore, the study findings show that the deprivation of both girls and boys, particularly girls, of their right to education deepens poverty and becomes a mechanism that reproduces the intergenerational cycle of poverty. In conclusion, the study reveals the intertwined structure of early marriages with multidimensional poverty and child rights violations. At the policy level, it is recommended that social support mechanisms aimed at reducing economic vulnerability be strengthened, access to education be increased, and child protection systems be restructured in a preventive manner against the risk of early marriage. Additionally, increasing studies that make the experiences of boys visible will contribute to a more holistic understanding of the gender dimension of early marriage.

Keywords: Early marriage, children's rights, multidimensional poverty, gender inequality, Van, qualitative research

Note: This study was supported by the Scientific Research Projects Coordination Unit at Van Yuzuncu Yil University under project code SYD-2024-11316

ABSTRACT 26

INSTITUTIONS AND GAPS: THE INTERMEDIARY ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN CONDITIONS OF POVERTY

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ABSTRACT

Poverty is a complex and multidimensional social phenomenon that cannot be reduced solely to a lack of income. It also includes limited access to education, healthcare, employment, housing, social services, and meaningful participation in community life. Contemporary approaches increasingly emphasize the multidimensional nature of poverty, focusing on structural inequalities, institutional limitations, and various forms of social exclusion. Under such conditions, formal institutions are not always able to respond fully, efficiently, and in a timely manner to the concrete needs of citizens, particularly those belonging to vulnerable population groups. It is precisely within this space between institutional capacity and real social needs that civil society organizations acquire a significant role.

The subject of this paper is the analysis of the intermediary role of civil society organizations in conditions of poverty in North Macedonia. The main thesis argues that civil society organizations represent an important social actor that connects citizens with institutions, articulates the needs of vulnerable groups, and contributes to mitigating the consequences of poverty through service provision, support mechanisms, advocacy, and local initiatives. Their role becomes particularly important in environments where institutional accessibility is limited, administrative procedures are complex, and available resources are insufficient.

The paper is based on an analysis of relevant scientific literature in the fields of social policy, sociology, and civil society studies, as well as an examination of normative and strategic documents related to social protection, poverty reduction, and the development of community-based services. In addition, the paper draws upon findings from previous research concerning the role of civil society organizations in the provision of social services, support for at-risk groups, and participation in public policy-making processes.

The findings indicate that civil society organizations perform an important intermediary function through identifying citizens' needs, providing information and referral to competent institutions, offering psychosocial support and counselling, developing community-based services, and advocating for social rights. Their comparative advantage often derives from flexibility, closer contact with beneficiaries, local embeddedness, and the ability to react more quickly than formal systems. At the same time, several limitations remain evident, including financial instability, project dependence, lack of human resources, regional disparities, and insufficient institutional integration.

In conclusion, the paper argues that poverty reduction requires more developed models of cooperation between state institutions and the civil sector. Recognizing civil society organizations as partners of public interest, strengthening their capacities, and creating sustainable support mechanisms represent important preconditions for a more inclusive and effective social policy system.

Keywords: poverty, civil society organizations, social policy, social protection, intermediary role.

ABSTRACT 27

BETWEEN RIGHTS AND REALITY: STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO MATERNAL HEALTHCARE FOR PREGNANT WOMEN WHO USE DRUGS AND EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS

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ABSTRACT

Multidimensional poverty extends beyond insufficient income and involves interconnected deprivations affecting health, housing, safety, autonomy, and the effective exercise of rights. Among pregnant women experiencing homelessness with active psychoactive substance use, multidimensional poverty is further deepened through the intersection of gender, motherhood, violence, and severe social exclusion. This article analyses how multidimensional poverty shapes access to maternal healthcare and social protection mechanisms, as well as the role of harm reduction services as accessible structures oriented toward complex needs, functioning as spaces of continuous care, relational safety, and institutional mediation.

The study adopts an action-research approach grounded in interdisciplinary reflective analysis and a multiple case study design informed by professional practice. It draws on longitudinal participant observation and psychosocial intervention carried out by an interdisciplinary intervention team within a supervised consumption room located in Porto, Portugal, during 2024–2025. Ten cases of pregnant women experiencing homelessness and active substance use during pregnancy were analysed. Data collection was based on technical records, daily case follow-up, and coordination with healthcare services, child protection systems, courts, and social support structures.

The findings reveal a significant gap between formally guaranteed rights and the real capacity to exercise them. Although access to the National Health Service, prenatal care, and social protection is legally guaranteed, these women faced material, institutional, and relational barriers that compromised effective access to care. Rigid schedules for high-risk pregnancy appointments, bureaucratic requirements related to documentation and proof of address, transportation costs, previous experiences of stigma, survival-oriented priorities shaped by homelessness, and trauma-related emotional instability all operated as mechanisms of institutional exclusion.

The analysed cases reveal the systematic presence of gender-based violence during pregnancy, both within intimate relationships and at the institutional level, further aggravating women's vulnerability. Trauma- _and harm-reduction-informed approaches were largely absent from hospital practices, which frequently included humiliation, lack of emotional support, limited communication, immediate mother–infant separation, early hospital abandonment, and intensified substance use in the postpartum period. The analysis demonstrates that the intersection

of gender, pregnancy, and substance use produces specific forms of stigma, surveillance, and institutional violence.

The study highlights the central role of the supervised consumption room as a low-threshold space of care, relational safety, and institutional mediation for pregnant women experiencing severe social exclusion. Beyond its conventional harm-reduction functions, the intervention involved pregnancy testing, facilitation of clinical analyses, treatment support for conditions such as syphilis, assistance with documentation and address registration, nutritional support, hygiene care, access to rest, and support for adherence to prescribed supplementation and medication. The interdisciplinary team also provided accompaniment to medical appointments, support during hospital admissions, childbirth and the postpartum period, family mediation, emotional crisis management, and coordination with healthcare, child protection, judicial, and social welfare systems. The supervised consumption room functioned as a stable point of access to healthcare and institutional support throughout pregnancy.

At the same time, the cases analysed exposed significant gaps in public policy responses. Despite intensive psychosocial accompaniment throughout pregnancy, women were repeatedly discharged back into conditions of homelessness, unsafe environments, and ongoing exposure to violence, without access to stable housing or specialized mother–infant support structures adapted to women with active substance use. Access to therapeutic communities or residential treatment responses for pregnant women and mothers with children was extremely limited and frequently conditioned on abstinence or prior stabilisation, creating exclusionary thresholds for women living in highly unstable circumstances. In several cases, pregnancy was associated with aspirations of maintaining custody and reorganising life circumstances. However, these aspirations were rarely supported by the structural conditions necessary to make them achievable — including stable housing, accessible treatment, income security, and specialised mother–infant support — contributing to repeated patterns of institutional intervention, mother–infant separation, and long-term disengagement from support systems.

The study concludes that harm reduction services play a crucial role in mitigating the effects of multidimensional poverty among pregnant women with active substance use experiencing severe social exclusion. In several cases, the supervised consumption room functioned not only as an entry point into healthcare and social protection systems, but also as the only continuous space of care, relational safety, and institutional support throughout pregnancy and the postpartum period. At the same time, the findings expose significant systemic gaps across healthcare, housing, and social protection systems, revealing a persistent disconnection between formally guaranteed rights and the material, relational, and institutional conditions required to exercise them.

The paper recommends the development of integrated public policies that are gender-sensitive, trauma-informed, and grounded in low-threshold approaches, including flexible maternal healthcare practices, immediate access to substitution treatment during hospitalisation, stable housing solutions that do not condition access on abstinence, and specialised mother–infant support responses before and after childbirth. The findings further suggest the need to shift from predominantly surveillance-oriented institutional approaches towards long-term supportive interventions capable of sustaining maternal bonding, continuity of care, and substantive social inclusion.

THANK YOU FOR READING

MULTIDIMENSIONAL
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