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The Journal of Sociology: Bulletin of Yerevan State University, has a rich history of modernization. First published in 1967, it is one of the oldest and most prominent scientific journals in Armenia, firmly grounded in the fundamental traditions of interdisciplinary academic research and conceptualization. Since 2010, the Sociology Series of the Bulletin has been published as special issues.

The Journal of Sociology welcomes papers that focus on sociological and interdisciplinary analysis of current problems in modern society, without limiting its interests to any particular direction. We are interested in both theoretical and applied research studies. The journal covers a wide range of sociological considerations, including social, economic, political, and military issues as reflected in public perceptions and social life. It also places emphasis on sociological studies of social groups, stratification, dynamics, communication, and interaction. The methodology of sociological studies is one of the core topics of the series. Additionally, we welcome research papers that address contemporary issues in social work and social administration.

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Nikolay Miller, Ph.D. (Political Science), Independent Researcher, Pyatigorsk, Russia. E-mail: millernick@yandex.ru

Abdusabur A. Abdusamadov, Ph.D., Visiting Assistant Professor of Sociology and Social Justice, Miami University, Oxford, OH, USA. E-mail: abdu saa@miamioh.edu

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SOCIAL CASE WORK OR CASE MANAGEMENT? UNDERSTANDING TWO COMPLEMENTARY APPROACHES IN ARMENIAN SOCIAL WORK

Artak Khachatryan, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3691-2824>

PhD, Associate Professor, Chair of Social Work and Social Technologies
Yerevan State University, Armenia. Email: khachatryan_artak@ysu.am

Abstract: This article examines the relationship between social case work and social case management within the development of social work practice in Armenia. Although these concepts are frequently used interchangeably in Armenian professional discourse, they represent distinct yet complementary methods of intervention. Drawing upon international social work literature and the historical evolution of social services in Armenia, the article analyzes the origins, theoretical foundations, and practical applications of both approaches. The discussion demonstrates that social case work primarily focuses on direct professional engagement with beneficiaries through assessment, intervention, and psychosocial support, whereas social case management emphasizes coordination of services, resource mobilization, and oversight of interventions delivered by multiple providers. The article traces how confusion between these approaches emerged during the early institutionalization of social work in Armenia and explains how the integration of social services has increased the relevance of case management. It is argued that the future development of Armenia's social protection system requires a clear conceptual distinction between these methods while simultaneously promoting their integration. Such an approach would strengthen professional practice, improve service delivery, and enhance outcomes for beneficiaries facing complex social problems.

Keywords: *social case work, case management, social work, social services, social protection, social service integration, Armenia.*

Introduction

The emergence of social work as a professional field in Armenia is closely associated with the social and humanitarian consequences of the 1988 Spitak earthquake. International organizations, local non-governmental organizations, state institutions,



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and universities played a significant role in introducing social work as a profession and establishing educational programs for future practitioners. However, the development of social work in Armenia encountered several conceptual and institutional challenges, including difficulties in establishing professional terminology in the Armenian language.

One of the most persistent terminological issues concerns the concepts of *social case work* and *social case management*. These terms are often treated as synonymous despite representing different methods of social work intervention. This confusion is not unique to Armenia; however, it became particularly pronounced during the early stages of professional social work development when practitioners and policymakers were primarily concerned with responding to urgent humanitarian needs.

As Armenia continues to reform and integrate its social service system, understanding the distinction between case work and case management becomes increasingly important. Clarifying these concepts is essential for defining professional roles, designing educational curricula, and improving service delivery within the country's evolving social protection system.

Historical Development of Social Work and Case-Based Interventions in Armenia

Social work education in Armenia began to develop systematically during the 1990s. The Social Work program at Yerevan State University included courses on case management, while concepts related to case work were integrated throughout the curriculum. Despite this educational foundation, the distinction between the two approaches remained unclear in professional practice.

A significant milestone occurred in 2003 with the implementation of the “Social Worker 2003” training program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The program focused primarily on social case work and trained social service professionals throughout Armenia. Participants learned a structured intervention process consisting of assessment, intervention planning, implementation, evaluation, termination, and follow-up monitoring. This sequence closely reflected classical case work methodologies described in international social work literature (Hepworth et al., 2022; Shulman, 2019).

The same orientation continued during social worker training initiatives conducted between 2007 and 2009 within regional child protection structures. Social workers were largely prepared to function as direct practitioners responsible for working individually with beneficiaries. However, concerns emerged regarding the feasibility of providing intensive case work to clients residing in geographically distant communities. In such situations, social workers increasingly assumed coordination responsibilities that more closely resembled case management.

The introduction of integrated social service centers in Armenia further highlighted the importance of case management. International consultants involved in social service reforms introduced the concept as a distinct professional methodology aimed at coordinating resources and services across institutions. As a result, professional discussions increasingly focused on differentiating case work from case management.

Social Case Work: Direct Professional Intervention

Social case work represents one of the oldest methods in social work practice. Its theoretical foundations can be traced to the pioneering work of Mary Richmond, whose seminal book *Social Diagnosis* established the principles of individualized assessment and intervention (Richmond, 1917/2017). Case work focuses on understanding the unique circumstances, strengths, and challenges of individual clients and developing helping relationships aimed at promoting positive change.

Contemporary social work scholars describe case work as a direct practice method involving assessment, counseling, support, advocacy, and intervention planning (Gitterman, 2020; Kadushin & Kadushin, 2018). The approach emphasizes the establishment of a professional helping relationship characterized by empathy, trust, and ongoing interaction between the social worker and beneficiary (Shulman, 2019).

In practice, social case work involves:

- Comprehensive assessment of client needs and strengths;
- Development of intervention goals;
- Direct psychosocial support;
- Counseling and therapeutic interventions;
- Monitoring progress toward identified goals;
- Evaluation of outcomes.

Because of its emphasis on interpersonal relationships, case work often involves intensive and long-term engagement with beneficiaries. Such relationships can contribute significantly to positive outcomes but may also increase the risk of professional burnout and dependency relationships between clients and practitioners (Hepworth et al., 2022).

The importance of case work in Armenia is understandable given the country's experience with natural disasters, displacement, poverty, and psychosocial trauma. During the formative years of the profession, direct intervention was often the most appropriate response to beneficiaries' immediate needs.

Social Case Management: Coordination and Resource Integration

Case management emerged later than case work, primarily in response to the growing complexity and fragmentation of social service systems during the second half of the twentieth century (Summers, 2020; Woodside & McClam, 2021). As social services became increasingly specialized, beneficiaries often needed assistance navigating multiple institutions and programs.

The National Association of Social Workers (2013) defines case management as a collaborative process involving assessment, planning, facilitation, coordination, monitoring, and advocacy to meet clients' comprehensive needs. Rather than providing all interventions directly, case managers ensure that beneficiaries gain access to appropriate services and resources.

Case management is particularly important for individuals with complex and multidimensional needs, including persons with disabilities, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, and families facing multiple social challenges (Powell & Tahan, 2023).

Key functions of case management include:

- Identification of available services and resources;
- Coordination among service providers;
- Referral and linkage to specialized services;
- Monitoring service delivery;
- Advocacy on behalf of beneficiaries;
- Evaluation of service effectiveness.

Unlike case work, case management does not necessarily involve intensive therapeutic relationships. Instead, it focuses on ensuring continuity of care and reducing service fragmentation (Ballew & Mink, 2018; Summers, 2020).

The integration of social services in Armenia has significantly increased the relevance of this approach. Beneficiaries frequently require support from multiple institutions, including social protection agencies, healthcare providers, educational institutions, employment services, and community organizations. In such circumstances, effective coordination becomes essential.

Comparing Social Case Work and Social Case Management

Although both approaches seek to improve the well-being of beneficiaries, they differ in their primary objectives, methods, and professional roles.

Social Case Work

- Emphasizes direct work with beneficiaries;
- Focuses on the helping relationship;
- Relies heavily on empathy and interpersonal communication;
- Involves psychosocial assessment and intervention;
- Often entails long-term engagement;
- Reflects therapeutic and counseling traditions.

Social Case Management

- Emphasizes coordination rather than direct intervention;
- Focuses on systems, services, and resources;
- Involves collaboration with multiple service providers;
- Facilitates access to needed services;
- Reduces fragmentation of support systems;
- Reflects administrative and organizational functions.

These distinctions are consistent with broader classifications of social work practice that differentiate micro-level direct interventions from mezzo- and macro-level coordination and service integration activities (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2023; Netting et al., 2021).

Strengths and Limitations of Both Approaches

Neither case work nor case management should be considered superior to the other. Instead, each possesses strengths and limitations that make it appropriate for different situations.

Case work enables social workers to develop a deep understanding of beneficiaries' experiences and to provide individualized support. However, intensive engagement may contribute to emotional exhaustion and professional burnout. Furthermore, beneficiaries may become overly dependent on a particular practitioner.

Case management provides a systematic approach to coordinating services and addressing complex needs. Nevertheless, organizational fragmentation, bureaucratic procedures, and interagency communication challenges may limit its effectiveness. Beneficiaries may also perceive case management as impersonal if coordination activities replace meaningful direct interaction.

Consequently, many contemporary social work scholars advocate integrated approaches that combine elements of both direct practice and case management (Miley et al., 2023; Teater, 2024).

Implications for the Development of Social Work in Armenia

The continuing modernization of Armenia's social protection system is likely to increase specialization within social work. As professional social work expands into healthcare, education, corrections, military services, and community development, the division of labor among practitioners will become more pronounced.

These developments will require educational institutions to prepare future professionals for diverse roles that include both direct intervention and service coordination. Social work curricula must therefore provide students with competencies related to both case work and case management.

Furthermore, policymakers and administrators should recognize that integrated service delivery depends not only on organizational reforms but also on the availability of qualified professionals capable of navigating complex service systems while maintaining client-centered practice.

Conclusion

The experience of social work development in Armenia demonstrates how social case work and social case management became intertwined in professional discourse despite representing distinct methods of intervention. Historically, social case work played a foundational role in responding to the immediate needs of vulnerable populations, particularly during the early stages of professionalization. However, the growing complexity of social service systems has made case management increasingly important.

Rather than viewing these approaches as competing alternatives, they should be understood as complementary methods serving a common purpose: assisting individuals, families, groups, and communities facing difficult life circumstances. Future developments in Armenia's social protection system will likely encourage greater integration of these approaches, combining the relational strengths of case work with the organizational capacities of case management. Such integration promises to enhance professional effectiveness, improve service coordination, and ultimately contribute to better outcomes for beneficiaries.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethics Statement

The author confirms that this study was conducted in accordance with the Journal's Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.

THE ROLE OF PLANNING IN ENSURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GROUP SOCIAL WORK

Anna Voskanyan, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8826-8911>
Lecturer, Department of Social Work and Social Technologies,
Yerevan State University, Armenia. E-mail: voskanyan.anna@ysu.am

Anahit Sahakyan, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0862-4032>
PhD, Vice Dean, Faculty of Sociology, Associate Professor, Department of Social
Work and Social Technologies, Yerevan State University, Armenia.
E-mail: anahit.sahakyan@ysu.am

Abstract: Planning is one of the key components of successful group social work, which ensures its targeted, systematic and effective implementation. This article presents a comprehensive review of the theoretical and professional literature on group social work planning, focusing on the main stages of planning: needs assessment, formulation of SMART goals, selection of participants, group formation, development of meeting structure, risk management, as well as monitoring and evaluation processes. In order to present the domestic experience of group social work planning, the experience of the “Shogh” community-based day care centers for children operating under the Armenian Evangelical Association of America (AMAA) was studied. The presented experience shows how systematic and conscious planning can contribute to the social development, well-being and social inclusion of children and families. The article pays special attention to the interdependence of planning and evaluation as a continuous professional process, which allows not only to organize the work of the group, but also to assess its effectiveness and make necessary improvements. Thus, the analysis of both theoretical sources and practical experience proves that effective planning contributes to increasing the quality of group activities, strengthening professional accountability, and ensuring more sustainable and significant results for beneficiaries.

Keywords: *group social work, group work planning, needs assessment, SMART goals, monitoring and evaluation, social inclusion.*

Introduction

Social work is a practice-based profession and academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversity play a central role in social work. Drawing on theories from social work and other social sciences, as well as local knowledge, social work engages people and institutions to jointly address life's challenges and promote shared well-being (IFCW, 2026).



Group work is particularly suited to fulfilling this mandate because it addresses individual needs through relational and collective processes, rather than through isolated, individual actions. It is best understood as a professional method that uses the group as an agent of change, rather than simply as a convenient format for working with several people at the same time. According to Ronald Toseland, a prominent American expert on group social work, group work is an activity that is carried out in groups and is aimed at meeting the socio-economic needs and solving problems of both individual group members and the group as a whole. As a result, group social work relies on the potential of human-group relationships and intragroup dynamics (Toseland & Rivas, 2021).

The modern standards of the International Association for Social Work with Groups describe group work as a structured and developmental practice that requires the definition of clear goals and actions at each of its different stages: group formation, initial, middle, and final stages (IASWG, 2022). This phased approach is important because, in practice, planning and evaluation are often incomplete or unsystematic. As Roselle Kurland points out, planning is often limited to superficial organizational or logistical decisions, while weak planning is directly related to early withdrawal from the target group, irregular participation, and the implementation of interventions that do not meet real needs (Kurland, 2005). Similarly, evaluation is often postponed until the end of the work, becoming more of an accountability requirement than an integral part of professional judgment, ongoing and effective work. Meanwhile, professional standards for group work clearly require continuous monitoring and evaluation of processes and results. This includes the use of observations, process notes, questionnaires, as well as preliminary (pre) and subsequent (post) surveys and a number of other tools and methods, ensuring the active participation of the target group throughout the process and the effectiveness of the implemented measures

In general, planning group work includes clarifying the purpose of the group, identifying the needs to which the group should respond, translating the needs into realistic goals and priorities, determining the participation formats, membership criteria, and the most appropriate size and composition of the group. Planning also extends to designing the group process, including the anticipated sequence of meetings, the balance between structure and flexibility, the selection of methods and activities most appropriate to the group's goals, and the practical arrangements necessary for implementation. Along with the above, specialists also consider possible risks and obstacles that may arise at any stage of the work and prepare appropriate responses in advance. Finally, planning includes the selection of tools and methods for documenting, evaluating, and monitoring the work, based on which the work will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, as needed, and further improved (IASWG, 2022; Toseland & Rivas, 2021). Thus, planning is not a one-time preparatory event, but an organized framework of interventions through which the group's purpose, process, and accountability are interconnected.

Needs assessment

Planning begins with the identification of a "need". In social work, it is simultaneously normative, empirical, contextual, and relational in nature. On the one hand, a "need" can be understood as a discrepancy between the existing and desired

conditions/situation, and on the other hand, as what beneficiaries consider to be a priority and urgent within their lives and environments. Contemporary social work research that addresses evaluation practice emphasizes that evaluation is not simply a neutral collection of facts but a situational judgment that is shaped by the institutional context, professional judgment, and available resources (Lamponen & Aarnio, 2024). In the context of group work, this means that the needs assessment should go beyond general problem statements and address in detail the questions of who the beneficiaries are, how they feel and perceive the problem, what strengths and barriers exist, and why the group work method is justified in this case, instead of or in combination with individual work, family work, or community work (IASWG, 2022).

In the professional literature widely used in social work, needs assessment is considered a key link between “problem analysis” and “intervention strategy selection”. In the context of group social work, modern needs assessment should include three interrelated levels (SASW, 2018; **Bronfenbrenner, 2009**):

1. The first is the individual level, which refers to the individual experiences of beneficiaries, personal difficulties, and goals for change.
2. The second is the group level, which includes common problems, the forms of relationships and interactions that are most effective for working together.
3. The third is the systemic or contextual level, which includes the capacities of the organization, the mechanisms of guidance and support, the constraints on access to services, as well as the risks and challenges at the community level.

Needs assessments can be conducted using a variety of tools. While the choice of a specific tool should be determined by the characteristics of the target group and the objectives, a well-founded approach typically includes: defining assessment formats, selecting or adapting validated scales, establishing baseline measurements consistent with planned outcomes, and selecting realistic data sources (self-report, observational assessments, interviews, etc.) (McCawley, 2009; Watkins, Meiers, & Visser, 2012; Altschuld & Watkins, Ryan, 2014).

Qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups, direct observation, and similar methods, are particularly useful for understanding beneficiaries’ perspectives, group dynamics, and the context of issues. For example, individual interviews can reveal personal stories, motivations, and expectations for group participation, while focus group discussions with potential members or families can uncover common norms, needs, or concerns in a community. Observations in natural settings (such as children’s interactions on a playground or in a classroom) also provide valuable data, revealing patterns of social behavior that beneficiaries may not always be able to clearly describe. These methods are particularly effective when the subject of the assessment is one of meaning, experience, or relationship that requires open and in-depth exploration. Document review in the form of school records, beneficiary case files, or data from previous programs can provide statistical information about attendance, progress, current status, referrals, and a variety of other data. Such data are particularly useful for answering “how many” or “how much” questions and for ensuring accountability. In contrast, quantitative methods provide greater precision and measurability to the assessment. Short initial surveys or checklists can measure the prevalence of certain problems and establish baseline

indicators against which changes can be compared in the future (Rubin & Babbie, 2016; Kettner et al., 2017; Faulkner, S., & Faulkner, C., 2024).

No single method can provide a complete picture of the needs and situation of beneficiaries, so a mixed methods approach is often preferable. In practice, this might mean, for example, conducting several exploratory interviews or focus groups to understand the nature of the difficulties, then conducting a short survey to measure the prevalence of these difficulties among all potential members. The use of mixed methods increases the validity of the assessment (triangulation) and allows for addressing both the “why” and the “how much” of the need. Therefore, the choice of methods should be driven by the specific assessment questions: qualitative methods to understand the needs and context, quantitative methods to make key indicators measurable (Creswell, 2023).

Applying the “SMART” method of goal setting in group social work

One of the key stages of planning group work is translating identified needs into clear, realistic, and measurable goals. If a need indicates “what is the problem?”, then a goal defines “what change do we want to achieve?” Without clearly formulated goals, the group can become a platform for general discussions without visible results, direction, or the possibility of evaluation. Goals should translate broadly formulated needs into observable progress. For example, if an assessment reveals that adolescents have difficulty managing anger or resolving conflicts with peers, then this need should be translated into a goal that specifies the expected behavioral, emotional, or cognitive change (SASW, 2018).

In this context, the SMART approach to goal setting is widely used. It is particularly useful in the field of social services and group work, where goals are often formulated in a very general, abstract or difficult-to-assess way. At the same time, modern professional literature emphasizes that the SMART approach should not be applied mechanically. In psychosocial, educational or developmental work, not all results can be expressed in numerical indicators alone. In some cases, the process of learning, the growth of self-awareness, the change of attitude, the development of skills or the application of new behavioral experiments are more important. Therefore, the SMART approach should be applied in a flexible but systematic way.

The main criteria for SMART goals:

- **Specific – simple, understandable and unambiguously formulated,**
- **Measurable – have clear indicators for assessing progress,**
- **Achievable – be realistic, yet stimulating and developmental,**
- **Relevant – directly derived from assessed needs,**
- **Time-bound – provide a clear deadline.**

Well-defined objectives describe what the beneficiaries should know, be able to do, apply, or demonstrate by the end of the group work.

Clearly formulated goals perform the following main functions:

- Define the direction and structure of group work – it becomes clear what change or result the group should achieve, and by what logic the meetings should be structured.

- Help choose appropriate methods and interventions – each topic, exercise or discussion is linked to the expected results, which makes the work purposeful and systematic.
- Facilitate progress assessment and process review – it is possible to track how far members are approaching the intended results and, if necessary, change methods or work processes in a timely manner.
- Increase accountability and professional justification – the specialist and the organization can clearly present the goals for which the group was implemented and what results were achieved.
- Strengthen member involvement and motivation – when beneficiaries see their own progress and understand the purpose of the work, their participation becomes more active and meaningful.

One of the important principles of goal setting in group work is that an effective program should include both group and individual goals. The most successful groups are usually those in which the overall group direction is combined with the personal needs and development goals of each participant. Professionals should support beneficiaries in clarifying their personal goals, linking them to the overall group goals, and forming joint starting agreements at the beginning. This approach contributes to both group cohesion and the involvement of each beneficiary (IASWG, 2022).

Determining the type, composition, and size of the group. Selecting participants.

At the planning stage, when the main purpose and expected outcomes of the group have been clarified, it is necessary to proceed to the next organisational and professional decisions, such as determining the type, composition and appropriate size of the group. These three directly affect the structure of the work, the experience of the beneficiaries, and the effectiveness of the intervention (IASWG, 2022).

First of all, it is necessary to clarify the type of group, since the same goal may require different group formats in different situations. The specialist must decide which type of group work is most appropriate for the defined goal, what methods should be used, how structured or flexible the process should be, and what professional role is required of the social worker in a given group. At the same time, it is important to choose assessment approaches that are most appropriate for a given format and will allow for an accurate assessment of the results in the future.

The next important step is to plan the composition of the group. It is necessary to determine who should be included in the group so that the work is safe, effective, and meets the established goals. This process should take into account the age and developmental characteristics of the beneficiaries, the commonality of the problem or need, their preparation and motivation, as well as linguistic, cultural and social characteristics. In addition, it is necessary to assess possible risk factors and understand how realistic it is for these individuals to work together within the same group.

Determining the size of the group is also important not only from an organizational but also from a practical point of view. It affects the level of involvement of each participant, the cohesion of the group and the effectiveness of managing the entire process. Therefore, it is necessary to choose a size that will enable all members to actively participate in the group processes, will ensure sufficient diversity, will not

complicate facilitation, will contribute to the formation of trust and group ties, as well as will ensure the realism of evaluation and monitoring.

In the preparatory phase of group work, recruitment and screening are also of particular importance, as they are interrelated and sequential processes. They ensure the appropriate formation of the group, the relevance of the beneficiaries and the effectiveness of further work. If recruitment is aimed at involving relevant people, then screening provides an opportunity to assess the extent to which a given group format meets the needs and capabilities of each potential participant. During recruitment, it is necessary to clearly present the goal and direction of the group to potential beneficiaries, clarify who the group is intended for, what the main conditions for participation are, in what format, duration and frequency the meetings will be held, what level of involvement is expected from the participants, as well as what possible benefits and limitations there may be. During the screening phase, the professional should assess how well the participant's needs match the group's purpose, whether he or she is ready for the group work format, has sufficient motivation and willingness to cooperate, and whether there are any individual risks or difficulties that may hinder participation. At the same time, it is necessary to understand what kind of support or accommodations are required for full participation and whether the group is the best option at this stage or whether another service or intervention would be more appropriate for the beneficiary (ASGW, 2007). Thus, properly organized planning, recruitment, and screening create a solid foundation for effective, safe, and purposeful teamwork.

Planning the structure of group work

One of the important components of group work planning is the structural design of meetings. Each meeting should be considered not as a separate activity, but as an integral part of a complete process, which stems from the goals of the group, the needs of the members and the current stage of group work. Effective planning implies not only the selection of topics for individual meetings, but also ensuring their phased, time and sequential logic. In other words, each meeting should have a clear goal, internal structure, and connection to the previous and subsequent meetings. Usually, a group meeting begins with an opening part, during which the participants are welcomed, a brief reflection on the previous meeting and an assessment of the current mood are carried out. This makes it possible to restore the continuity of the group and re-involve the participants in the general process. This is followed by the main thematic or goal-oriented work, where the planned questions are discussed, appropriate exercises are carried out, skills are developed or the experiences of the participants are discussed. At the end of the meeting, it is important to summarize, highlight key points, and clarify next steps so that participants end the meeting with a clear understanding and a sense of continuity. The content and purpose of meetings at different stages of group work are different. In the initial stage, meetings are mainly aimed at forming the foundations of the group. In this stage, the primary focus is on getting to know the participants, clarifying the group's purpose, defining rules and norms, as well as creating an atmosphere of trust and security. At the same time, it is important to discuss the expectations of participation so that each member understands his or her role, responsibility, and the results expected from the group. When the group has already

been formed and a certain level of trust has been established between the members, it moves on to the main working stage. At this stage, meetings focus on discussing problems, developing skills, mutual assistance, exchanging experiences, and providing feedback. Here, the change for which the group was formed is most actively implemented, and participants get the opportunity to apply new knowledge, develop behavioral or social skills, and receive support from the group. In the final stage of group work, meetings should contribute to closing the process and consolidating achievements. During this period, it is important to reflect on the progress of the participants, summarize the group experience, discuss feelings related to separation, and assess the meaning of the group for each participant. In addition, it is necessary to present possible resources for further support and clarify future steps so that the results achieved in the group are maintained even after the end of the group work (Steinberg, 2014).

Although meetings should be planned in advance, the professional must also maintain flexibility. The group process can always bring new needs, unexpected topics, or changing dynamics, so the professional must be ready to adapt the initial plan to the actual course of the group. It is the combination of structure and flexibility that ensures the effectiveness of group work and the real involvement of participants (Corey, Corey, & Corey, 2018).

Risk management

Risk management is a key component of planning and implementing group social work. A group is a living environment of interactions, where, on the one hand, opportunities for support, development and change are created, and on the other hand, various types of dangers and difficulties may arise. If these risks are not assessed in advance and not managed systematically, the well-being of beneficiaries may be damaged, the normal course of the group may be disrupted and the effectiveness of the intervention may decrease. Risk management involves the timely identification of potential dangers, planning steps to prevent them and preparing the necessary response mechanisms. It applies not only to emergency or crisis situations, but also to those factors that can gradually weaken the work of the group (NASW, 2021).

Planning and evaluation as a unified process

Evaluation should not be perceived as a final report drawn up after the group work is completed or a separate stage that begins only at the end of the process. In group social work, it is a continuous process carried out throughout the intervention, the purpose of which is to collect, analyze and interpret data in order to understand how the group is developing, what results are recorded and what changes are needed for further work. In this sense, evaluation is not a final act, but a constant companion of practice, which supports the specialist in making informed decisions, adjusting the process and improving the quality of work. In group social work, planning and evaluation are more appropriate to consider as an interconnected and iterative cycle, where each stage feeds the next. This approach makes it possible to build the work not on the basis of a fixed plan drawn up once, but to continuously adapt to real conditions, beneficiaries' responses and newly emerging needs (Chianca, 2008; Toseland & Rivas, 2017).

In addition, it is important to clearly distinguish between two main areas of evaluation: process evaluation and outcome evaluation, as they complement each other and together provide a complete understanding of group work. Process evaluation focuses on how the group is implemented, that is, the extent to which the plan is implemented as intended and how the group work is progressing. Within this framework, attention is paid to the number of meetings held, the level of presence and participation of beneficiaries, their active involvement, as well as their commitment to the plan. At the same time, the group atmosphere is assessed to see whether it provides trust, security and open communication. In addition, the obstacles and supporting factors that may affect the process are also analyzed. On the other hand, outcome evaluation refers to the changes that have occurred as a result of group work. It allows social workers to understand what impact the group has had on the participants: whether there has been an increase in knowledge, development of skills, a change in attitudes or behavioral changes. It is also important to assess deeper changes, such as increased self-confidence, strengthened social ties or improved relationships, which are often important outcomes of group work. These two areas should be considered together, as only a combination of process and outcome makes it possible to get a complete picture of the effectiveness of group work and draw informed conclusions for further planning and improvement (Rossi, Lipsey, & Henry, 2019).

The effectiveness of evaluation largely depends on correctly selected indicators, since they are the ones that make it possible to measure the process and results of group work. Indicators should directly derive from the goals of the group and reflect the changes that the intervention is aimed at achieving. If the evaluation criteria are not related to the previously defined goals, it is difficult to understand how effective the group has actually been and what results it has provided. Effective indicators should be clear and understandable so that all parties involved have a uniform understanding of their significance. At the same time, they should be realistic for measurement, that is, it should be possible to collect the necessary data and assess the changes under the given conditions. It is also important that the indicators correspond to the goals of the group, be applicable in the given environment and useful in terms of making further decisions. Thus, correctly selected indicators not only record the results, but also contribute to the further improvement of the program (OECD, 2019).

Another important component of evaluation planning is beneficiary involvement, which is carried out through a participatory approach. This means that the views and experiences of group members should also be taken into account in the evaluation process. Beneficiaries have an important role in defining what changes are important to them, which indicators are most meaningful, how they perceive their own progress, and what improvements they suggest regarding the organization or content of the group work. This approach increases the relevance and credibility of the evaluation, as it is based not only on the observations of the specialist, but also on the real experiences of the participants. In addition, beneficiary involvement creates a greater sense of responsibility and participation, which in turn contributes to both the quality of the evaluation and the overall effectiveness of the group work (IASWG, 2022).

The role of documentation

Documentation is an important component at all stages of planning and implementing group social work, but it is especially important at the stage of organization and process management. Well-organized documentation contributes to the coordination of work, professional accountability, continuity of services and the possibility of further evaluation. It ensures that the process is carried out in a consistent, transparent and professional manner. It also plays an important role in the processes of control, supervision, program evaluation, research, risk management and quality assurance, and, if necessary, can also serve legal or administrative purposes. According to the professional guidelines of social work, records should be clear, accurate, timely and purposeful. They should not only record the actions taken, but also reflect the specialist's analysis, professional judgment and justifications for decisions. Effective documentation should contain only necessary and relevant information, present the interventions carried out, reflect assessments and the basis for decisions, as well as ensure the sequence and continuity of work, and is an important guarantee of its effectiveness, responsibility and professional quality (IASWG, 2022).

Case Study of Group Work Planning in “Shogh” Day Centers

To complement the theoretical analysis of group work planning, a qualitative study was conducted from July to December 2025 based on the experience of the “Shogh” community-based day care centers, which operate under the initiative of the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) and are one of the community-based programs aimed at the social protection and development of children in Armenia. The centers’ activities aim to support children from socially vulnerable families by creating a safe, stable and developing environment after school. The program combines educational, social, psychological and pedagogical components, contributing to the full development of children and their effective integration. “Shogh” Day Centers operate in a number of cities in Armenia: Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor, Stepanavan and Berdyan. Up to 300 children and their families benefit from the services of the centers (AMAA, 2026). The centers' activities are based on an after-school support model, where an important place is given to individual and especially group social work.

The study explored the implementation of planning and evaluation in the centres and their contribution to the effectiveness of group work. A qualitative method was selected because it allowed for an in-depth examination of professional experiences, planning procedures, and evaluation practices within the centers. Data collection relied on three complementary sources: document review, semi-structured interviews with key informants, and observations of group work practice.

The research was implemented in several stages. During the first month, preparatory activities were carried out, including the development of interview guides and data collection instruments, as well as the review and collection of relevant organizational documents. In the following months, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, while subsequent stages focused on the observation of practical group work processes and the analysis of collected materials.

The document review included group work plans, session curricula, pre- and post-assessment questionnaires, observation forms, progress reports, and other planning and

evaluation documents used within the “Shogh” centers. The review focused on how needs assessments, objectives, participant selection procedures, monitoring mechanisms, and evaluation practices were incorporated into group work planning and implementation. Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants directly involved in the processes: 8 social workers and 5 centre coordinators from all centres. The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts and documentary materials were reviewed and coded according to the main stages of group work planning. The use of multiple data sources allowed for methodological triangulation, providing a comprehensive understanding of planning as an ongoing process that contributes to the quality, accountability, and effectiveness of group social work.

The analysis of the case of “Shogh” centers revealed a structured planning framework consisting of several interconnected dimensions that guide the organization, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of group interventions. To ensure a systematic approach to intervention design, these dimensions are explored through a series of guiding questions

Planning Dimensions of Group Social Work in Shogh Centers

1. Group objectives and intervention design

The planning of group work in “Shogh” centers begins with the assessment of the intervention context, conducted through home visits, observations, interviews, and questionnaires; defining the overall purpose of the group and the expected outcomes, as well as identifying the specific needs, challenges, or risk factors that the intervention seeks to address. Particular attention is given to the characteristics of the target population: age, social status, and other relevant demographic or psychosocial factors, as these influence both the content and methodology of the intervention. As a result of the initial assessment, groups are formed according to age, needs, behavioral characteristics, or common problems, thus reflecting the principles of evidence-informed social work practice. Then, based on the identified needs, an appropriate module for group work, be it educational, developmental, a combination thereof, etc., is selected. Planning also requires determining the structural parameters of the intervention, including group size, duration and frequency of meetings, and the overall implementation period. In addition, the planning process considers the multidisciplinary expertise required for effective implementation, defining the roles of social workers and other specialists involved in the group.

Guiding questions

1. What is the main goal of the group and what results do you want to achieve by the end of the project?
2. What needs or problems are planned to be addressed through the group?
3. Who is the main target group of the group (age, status, social characteristics, etc.)?
4. What type of group work is planned to be carried out (educational, supportive, developmental, therapeutic, etc.).
5. What will be the duration, frequency and total duration of the meetings?
6. How many participants are planned to be involved in the group?

7. What specialists will be involved in the process of organizing and conducting the group?

2. Expected results and directions of change

Following the design of the intervention, attention is directed toward defining the expected outcomes and anticipated directions of change. This involves identifying the knowledge, attitudes, and practical skills that participants are expected to develop. Depending on the objectives, desired outcomes may include positive behavioral changes, improved coping and communication skills, enhanced self-confidence, or greater awareness of specific social and personal issues. In addition, group work may seek to strengthen family relationships, improve peer interactions, and promote social inclusion. To assess the effectiveness of the intervention, expected outcomes are translated into measurable indicators and evaluation criteria, which provide a framework for monitoring participant progress and determining the extent to which the intended changes have been achieved. The evaluation methods are selected according to the specific objectives of the intervention. For example, in time-management groups, participant diaries are used to assess changes in planning and organizational skills, whereas parenting groups evaluate outcomes such as improvements in parent–child relationships or reductions in violent disciplinary practices through a combination of home visits, observations, and questionnaires.

Guiding questions

1. What knowledge is expected to be developed among participants?
2. What practical skills are expected to be formed or strengthened?
3. What behavioral changes do you expect during or after the program?
4. What changes are expected in family or social relationships?
5. How will you understand that the program has been successfully implemented?
6. What are the main criteria or indicators of success?

3. Preparatory phase

The preparatory phase in “Shogh” centers focuses on creating conditions necessary for the successful launch of the group work. This includes gathering background information about potential participants to better understand factors that may influence their attendance and engagement. Particular attention is paid to identifying obstacles that could limit participation: transportation challenges, scheduling conflicts, or family-related constraints, and to developing appropriate responses to mitigate the impact. Preparatory activities also involve arranging the physical setting, securing the necessary materials and establishing a schedule that is accessible to all participants. In addition, efforts are made to introduce the group, communicate its purpose and potential benefits, and encourage active involvement from participants and, where relevant, their families.

Guiding questions

1. What information do you need to collect about the participants before the group starts?
2. How will you select or recruit participants?
3. What risks or barriers might there be to participation?

4. What organizational arrangements are needed (space, materials, schedule, transportation, etc.)?
5. How will you inform and motivate participants?

4. Curriculum Design and Session Structure

The content of the intervention is organized around thematic areas addressing the identified needs and objectives of the group. Depending on participants' needs, these themes may include time management, safe internet use, communication skills, conflict resolution, self-esteem development, prevention of behavioral problems, healthy lifestyles, and positive parenting, etc. For each thematic area, specific topics are developed for each session in a logical sequence, allowing participants to gradually build knowledge, develop skills, and reflect on their experiences. Every group meeting is designed with its own objective that contributes to the overall goals of the group work. A variety of methods: discussions, role plays, case studies, etc. are used to facilitate learning and skill development. Where appropriate, reflective assignments are given to support the application of new knowledge and competencies outside the group setting. Interactive activities further encourage active participation, strengthen group cohesion, and enhance participant engagement throughout the intervention process.

Guiding questions

1. What main topics will be covered during the meetings?
2. In what order will the topics be presented?
3. What objectives will be set for each meeting?
4. What methods will you use (discussion, role play, exercises, case studies, etc.)?.
5. What homework or practical assignments will be provided?
6. How will you encourage active participation and engagement?

5. Monitoring, Supervision, and Adaptive Management

The implementation of group work in “Shogh” centers is accompanied by continuous monitoring and supervision. Throughout the intervention, social workers document attendance, participation levels, behavioral changes, and progress toward group objectives through observation records, process notes, and other monitoring tools. Regular supervision provides an opportunity to review implementation of the modules, discuss challenges, and ensure adherence to established standards and objectives. Collaboration among social workers and other specialists, such as social pedagogues and psychologists, further supports the exchange of professional perspectives and facilitates an understanding of participants' needs and progress. The information collected through monitoring is used to assess the ongoing intervention, make timely adjustments to session content, methods, or activities in response to emerging needs, changing group dynamics, or implementation challenges. It's also used in design for the following group work, both for new participants and for this particular group.

Guiding questions

1. How will you track the frequency of participation?
2. How will you respond to absences or decreased engagement?
3. How will you record the results and progress of the meetings?
4. In what format will team collaboration between professionals be implemented?

5. What role will the supervisor or coordinator play in monitoring the process?
6. How will you change topics or approaches if necessary?

6. Reflection and Consolidation of Results

The next stage of planning focuses on organizing the synthesis and review of the group experience upon completion of the intervention. Opportunities are created for participants to reflect on their involvement, share their experiences, and recognize individual and collective achievements. Such reflection helps consolidate the knowledge and skills developed throughout the group process and identify the most significant outcomes from the perspectives of both beneficiaries and professionals. Key lessons learned are summarized and incorporated into reports and other organizational documentation. Social workers, supervisors, and other relevant specialists contribute to reviewing the overall experience and discussing its implications for future practice. The process also includes identifying participants and families who may benefit from continued support and informing subsequent follow-up activities.

Guiding questions

1. How will the overall experience and outcomes of the group be reviewed upon completion?
2. What feedback and reflections will be collected from participants?
3. How will participants present their achievements, experiences, and perceived changes?
4. What records, summaries, or reports will be prepared at the conclusion of the intervention?
5. Who will participate in reviewing the experience, identifying lessons learned, and discussing future follow-up needs?

7. Follow-up and sustainability

The follow-up stage focuses on sustaining the positive changes achieved through group work beyond its formal completion. Planning at this stage includes identifying strategies that support beneficiaries in the continued application of newly acquired knowledge and skills, while also determining whether they or their families may require additional assistance. The timing and methods of follow-up contact are established in advance and include home visits, consultations, observations, or other forms of communication, depending on the nature of participants' needs. Information gathered during this period contributes to understanding of the longer-term influence of the intervention and provides a basis for future projects, highlighting emerging needs and opportunities for the development of new groups, complementary services, or community-based initiatives.

Guiding questions

1. How will you maintain the positive results of the project after its completion?
2. What further support can be provided to participants?
3. When and how will follow-up contact or monitoring be carried out?
4. How will the results be used to plan future projects?
5. What new groups or initiatives can be formed based on this experience?

Conclusion

In this article, the role of planning in ensuring the effectiveness, quality and accountability of group social work was explored. A review of contemporary literature has shown that planning is not only a preparatory activity but also an ongoing process that guides all stages of group work. Effective planning allows social workers to respond to identified needs, select appropriate interventions, manage potential risks and create conditions for meaningful participation and positive change among group members.

The presented analysis highlights the following key conclusions:

- Professional standards and contemporary literature consistently indicate that effective group work requires systematic planning that includes needs assessment, formulation of SMART goals, participant selection, program design, risk management, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation.
- The case study of the “Shogh” community-based day care centers demonstrated that planning is implemented through a structured and multidimensional framework encompassing intervention design, preparation, curriculum development, monitoring, supervision, reflection, and follow-up. This approach supports the organization of targeted and responsive group interventions.
- The findings further suggest that the use of comprehensive assessment methods, multidisciplinary collaboration, regular supervision, and ongoing monitoring allows practitioners to adapt interventions to the evolving needs of children and families, thereby strengthening participant engagement and the relevance of group activities.
- The study also demonstrates that planning and evaluation function most effectively when viewed as interrelated components of a continuous cycle. The integration of monitoring, participant feedback, reflection, and follow-up enables practitioners not only to assess outcomes but also to use the collected evidence to improve future interventions and promote the sustainability of achieved results.

Overall, this article shows that effective planning serves as a foundation for high-quality group social work. Strengthening planning capacity among social workers and organizations can enhance the impact, sustainability and integrity of group interventions, thus contributing to better outcomes for individuals, families, and communities in general.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethics Statement

The author confirms that this study was conducted in accordance with the Journal's Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.

DEATH ROW INMATE SURGE: THE OVERLOOKED THREAT TO CORRECTIONAL CENTRES' LIVING CONDITIONS

Eyitayo J. Oyeyipo <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1408-7405>

Ph.D., Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria.

Email: eyitayo.oyeyipo@uniosun.edu.ng

Olawale James Gbadeyan, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3566-1450>

Ph.D., Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria.

Email: Olawale.gbadeyan@Uniosun.edu.ng

Ademolu O. Adenuga <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3482-1248>

PhD, Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria.

Email: ademolu.adenuga@uniosun.edu.ng

Olubukola M. Aratunde <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6355-9211>

PhD, Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria.

Email: olubukola.aratunde@uniosun.edu.ng

Abstract: The increasing number of death row prisoners is placing a growing burden on custodial management and inmate welfare in Nigeria. This paper examines the effects of the surge in death row inmates on the quality of life of condemned prisoners in Kwara State, Nigeria, using a qualitative research design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with fifteen death row inmates and analysed using thematic analysis to capture both lived experiences and institutional realities. Respondents were selected from the population of death row inmates using inclusion criteria requiring a minimum of five (5) years on death row. This criterion was considered necessary to obtain rich and reflective accounts of lived experiences. The results show that prolonged overcrowding has severely compromised individual space, sanitation, food and water supply, medical care, and freedom of movement. In addition to material deprivation, the surge has intensified psychological suffering, heightened tension among inmates, and strengthened feelings of neglect and institutional abandonment. The study further reveals that current correctional facilities in Kwara State are not adequately equipped to accommodate the growing death row population. The article recommends population management and sentencing review mechanisms, increased resource allocation, and enhanced budgetary support to improve living conditions and ensure humane treatment in line with international correctional standards. This study contributes to criminological and policy debates on prison overcrowding and capital punishment in Nigeria by foregrounding the voices of death row inmates.

Keywords: *death row inmates, prison overcrowding, congestion, decongestion, living conditions.*



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Introduction

The death penalty remains one of the most debated forms of criminal punishment worldwide. While some countries still apply capital punishment for the most serious offences, others have abolished it on the grounds that it violates human rights, risks wrongful convictions, and subjects inmates to prolonged psychological suffering prior to execution (Noor & Ajmal, 2022).

A disturbing trend in retentionist countries is that death row prisoners often spend years, or even decades, awaiting execution - or are never executed at all (ACLU, 2013). This condition is commonly referred to as the *death row phenomenon* or *death row syndrome*, and it raises serious legal, ethical, and humanitarian concerns (Bennett, 2017). However, some scholars argue that abolishing the death penalty may increase miscarriages of justice if legal scrutiny and defence diligence decline (Merriam, 2021).

The debate on the death penalty is dynamic and multifaceted in Africa. While countries such as Rwanda and Burundi have abolished it, others continue to retain capital punishment within their legal systems (Amnesty International, 2023). Even in retentionist states, executions have become increasingly rare, resulting in a growing death row population (International Federation for Human Rights, 2017). Resource limitations, overcrowding, and systemic inefficiencies in African prisons further complicate the management of this population (Baggio et al., 2020). Consequently, inmates often endure prolonged uncertainty, inadequate medical care, and conditions falling far below international human rights standards (Oyeyipo et al., 2021).

Nigeria presents a particularly significant case. As Africa's most populous country, it retains the death penalty for a wide range of offences (Olutola, 2020). However, delays in execution and systemic inefficiencies have contributed to a steady accumulation of death row inmates. Bureaucratic bottlenecks and political reluctance have further exacerbated this situation. According to the Nigerian Correctional Service (2025), more than 3,600 inmates are currently on death row in Nigeria.

This study therefore investigates how the increasing death row population affects inmates' lived experiences and living conditions. It also examines how delayed execution processes contribute to overcrowding, suffering, and systemic strain within correctional institutions.

Statement of the Problem

Although capital punishment remains legally recognised in Nigeria, conditions in death row facilities are poorly documented and understudied. The population of death row inmates continues to rise due not only to new sentencing but also to delays in execution, commutation, or legal review. This has created chronic overcrowding, resource shortages, and deteriorating living conditions in correctional centres.

Prolonged uncertainty exposes inmates to severe psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, hopelessness, and other adverse health outcomes. In many cases, scholars refer to this condition as *death row syndrome* or the *death row phenomenon*. Despite occasional public debate, there is limited empirical research focusing on the lived experiences of death row inmates in Nigerian correctional facilities and how delayed execution affects their daily lives and well-being.

Therefore, it is urgent to examine how the increasing death row population contributes to overcrowding, human rights concerns, and declining living conditions within correctional centres.

Research Question: what is the impact of the death row inmate surge on the living conditions of inmates?

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Stress Process Theory developed by Pearlin (1981). The theory explains how chronic stressors - such as prolonged imprisonment, legal uncertainty, and lack of closure - negatively affect individuals' psychological and physical health. In the context of death row incarceration, persistent uncertainty and isolation function as continuous stressors that exacerbate mental and physical deterioration.

Methodology

This study adopted a phenomenological qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of death row inmates. Fifteen inmates were selected for in-depth interviews (IDI). The sample size was considered appropriate given the homogeneity of the population.

Nigeria was purposively selected due to its relevance to the study. The country is divided into six geopolitical zones, with the North Central zone selected due to accessibility and proximity to the researchers. Within this zone, Kwara State was selected purposively for similar reasons.

Correctional facilities were mapped within the state, and a maximum-security prison housing death row inmates was selected. Data were analysed using content analysis, where recurring themes were identified and interpreted in relation to the research question.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Nigerian Correctional Service. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained. Findings were disseminated through academic conferences and peer-reviewed publications.

Findings

Table 1: Interview Profile

A _n	Age Grade	Category	Sex	Location	Religion
A ₁	31-40	Inmate	M	Mandala Facility	Islam
A ₂	41-50	Inmate	M	Oke Kura Facility	Islam
A ₃	21-30	Inmate	M	Oke Kura Facility	Christianity
A ₄	31-40	Inmate	M	Oke Kra Facility	Christianity
A ₅	41-50	Inmate	M	Mandala Facility	Islam
A ₆	41-50	Inmate	M	Oke Kura Facility	Islam
A ₇	31-40	Inmate	M	Oke Kura Facility	Islam
A ₈	31-40	Inmate	M	Mandala Facility	Christianity

A ₉	41-50	Inmate	M	Oke Kura Facility	Islam
A ₁₀	41-50	Inmate	M	Mandala Facility	Islam
A ₁₁	31-40	Inmate	M	Oke Kura Facility	Islam
A ₁₂	31-40	Inmate	M	Oke Kurai Facility	Christianity
A ₁₃	31-40	Inmate	M	Mandala Facility	Islam
A ₁₄	21-30	Inmate	M	Oke Kura Facility	Islam
A ₁₅	41-50	Inmate	M	Mandala Facility	Christianity

Source: Survey, 2025. **Note:** All respondents were male due to the absence of female death row inmates at the time of data collection.

The analysis of fifteen death row inmate interviews revealed several interconnected themes illustrating the impact of the death row inmate surge on living conditions within the custodial environment. Direct excerpts from respondents are provided to substantiate each finding. All respondents were male due to the unavailability of female death row inmates at the time of data collection.

Table 2: Theme 1 – Coded Description of the Impact of the Death Row Inmate Surge on Living Conditions

Theme	Code Description
Environmental Impact	Overcrowding and loss of personal space; deterioration of sanitation and hygiene facilities; reduced access to medical care and institutional services
Social Impact	Inadequate food, water, and basic supplies; restricted movement and reduced activity time
Psychological Impact	Increased stress and tension; heightened feelings of neglect and isolation

Source: Survey, 2025

The coded descriptions of participants' responses regarding the impact of the death row inmate surge on living conditions within the custodial environment are presented in Table 2. The table identifies three major themes that dominate participants' accounts.

Table 3: Theme 2 – Environmental Impact

Participant	Comment
A3	The surge means we now share cells that were meant for one person. There is barely space to move or sleep comfortably.
A4	Overcrowding has made the place hotter and stuffier. Ventilation is poor, and the heat makes it difficult to sleep.
A5	Sanitation has worsened; the bathrooms are always occupied and dirty.
A9	The toilets fill up faster, water runs out, and cleaning does not keep up.

Participant	Comment
A14	It now takes longer to get medical attention. Minor illnesses turn into more serious conditions due to delays.
A15	It used to be easy to report complaints. Now the queue is long, and many of us feel ignored.

Source: Survey, 2025

Table 4: Theme 3 – Social Impact

Participant	Comment
A1	Food rations have reduced. Although the quantity is said to be the same, it does not go round due to the increased population.
A2	Hygiene items finish faster. Soap, detergents, and even water are shared among too many people.
A7	Sanitation has worsened; the bathrooms are always occupied and dirty.
A12	Space for exercise and outdoor activity has reduced. We spend more time locked up because officers cannot manage the larger population.

Source: Survey, 2025

Table 5: Theme 4 – Psychological Impact

Participant	Comment
A6	The surge makes us feel forgotten. There is no adjustment to the facilities—just more people squeezed in.
A8	The environment feels more depressing. You see despair around you every day.
A10	When more death row inmates were added, tension increased. Everyone is stressed, and arguments break out more often.
A11	New inmates bring anxiety and conflict. This increases the general sense of fear.
A13	Every day feels like the last. Even when loved ones visit, the moment your name is called, you feel like the end has come.

Source: Survey, 2025

Discussion of Findings

The findings indicate that the influx of death row inmates has significantly disrupted living conditions within correctional facilities. Overcrowding has intensified psychological distress and placed additional strain on institutional infrastructure. Participants' accounts of insufficient personal space align with global research linking prison overcrowding to deteriorating living conditions, increased health risks, and human rights violations.

Inadequate access to food, water, and hygiene materials reflects systemic resource constraints and poor institutional planning. The inability to proportionally adjust

resources to population growth highlights chronic underfunding within Nigerian correctional services.

Psychological distress is also evident, with inmates reporting heightened anxiety, despair, and emotional exhaustion. Given that death row incarceration already involves extreme psychological pressure, overcrowding further aggravates mental health risks.

Health-related concerns are also prominent. Delayed medical attention and poor sanitation increase vulnerability to disease outbreaks, consistent with findings in existing prison health literature. Restricted movement and prolonged confinement further contribute to physical and psychological deterioration.

Finally, feelings of neglect and institutional abandonment reflect a breakdown in custodial care. Such perceptions may undermine inmate compliance and further complicate correctional management.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study demonstrates that the increasing population of death row inmates has significantly worsened living conditions in Nigerian correctional facilities. Overcrowding remains the central issue, producing a cascade of negative effects, including poor sanitation, inadequate nutrition, delayed healthcare, restricted movement, and increased psychological distress.

The findings also indicate that existing correctional infrastructure is insufficient to manage the growing death row population. Beyond physical deprivation, inmates experience profound psychological suffering characterised by despair and institutional neglect, raising serious human rights concerns.

Recommendations

- **Population management and sentencing review:** Expedite appeals, commutations, and sentence reviews to reduce death row congestion.
- **Resource scaling and budgetary support:** Adjust correctional funding to reflect population realities and ensure adequate provision of food, sanitation, and healthcare services.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethics Statement

The author confirms that this study was conducted in accordance with the Journal's Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.

THE MARGINALIZED VOICE: HOW DOES NEOLIBERAL GOVERNANCE RESHAPE THE PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN ARMENIA?

Marine Yarmaloyan, <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1158-7246>

PhD in Sociology, Assistant Professor of the Department of Social Work and Social Technologies, Yerevan State University. Email: marine.yarmaloyan@ysu.am

Nune Geghamyan, <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-0775-4071>

PhD in Economics, Associate Professor of the Department of Social Work and Social Technologies, Yerevan State University. Email: ngeghamyan@ysu.am

Abstract: This article examines the marginalization of social workers' voices within the context of Armenia's recent social protection reforms. Utilizing the theoretical lens of political social work, the study explores how the introduction of integrated case management and new family vulnerability assessment systems impacts professional practice. Drawing on critical, structural, and radical traditions, the analysis suggests that while reforms aim for administrative efficiency and activation through employment, they often rely on neoliberal logic that prioritizes algorithmic indicators over nuanced professional judgment. The article identifies significant systemic risks, including the individualization of poverty, the reduction of professional autonomy, and the rise of a "silent compliance" culture. Ultimately, the paper argues that for social work to remain an instrument of social justice, it must reclaim its political dimension, ensuring that the lived realities of vulnerable populations are not lost to bureaucratic digitalization.

Keywords: *political social work, professional autonomy, neoliberal governance, case management, vulnerability assessment, individualization of poverty, social justice.*

Theoretical Framework and Definitions

In professional literature, various definitions of political social work exist. According to Reisch, political social work emerges as a response to trends that restrict social work to micro-level interventions, distancing it from the social change agenda (Reisch, 2013). From this perspective, social work is interpreted not merely as the provision of aid or services, but as a political practice operating constantly within the field of social contradictions and inequalities.

Among Armenian authors, N. Geghamyan and M. Yarmaloyan consider the political social work as a branch of social work focused on protecting social justice,



equality, and human rights through social and political processes (Geghamyan, Yarmaloyan, 2025).

Authors Gal and Weiss-Gal define political social work as the purposeful involvement of social workers in the processes of formulation, modification, evaluation, and public discussion of social policy. This involvement presupposes not only knowledge of social policy but also a value-based and moral stance rooted in the principle of social justice (Gal, Weiss-Gal, 2015).

A review of professional literature shows that political social work developed in response to criticisms that social work had been narrowed down to individual interventions, losing its structural and political vision (Mullaly, 2007).

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, theoretically grounded policy analysis to examine the transformation of social work practice within the context of recent social protection reforms in Armenia. Drawing on the framework of political social work, the research integrates critical, structural, and radical theoretical perspectives to interpret policy developments and their implications for professional autonomy. The analysis is based on a review of legislative documents, policy reports, and international comparative literature, combined with a conceptual examination of key reform components, including vulnerability assessment system and case management methodology. Rather than relying on primary empirical data, the study adopts an interpretive approach aimed at identifying underlying governance logics, institutional dynamics, and potential systemic risks. This methodology enables a critical exploration of how neoliberal policy frameworks and digitalization processes reshape both the practice and the epistemological foundations of social work.

The Critique of “Political Neutrality”

A core issue in political social work is the critique of "political neutrality." In many countries, including Armenia, social workers are expected to be "non-political," which is presented as a prerequisite for professionalism and objectivity. However, some theorists argue that neutrality in social work is not only impossible but dangerous, as it legitimizes the existing social order (Ferguson, 2008).

Banks notes that a social worker's silence on political issues is often driven not by value-based agreement, but by institutional pressure and fear of professional risks. This silence becomes structural, reproduced through organizational regulations, accountability mechanisms, and managerial culture (Banks, 2012).

In the Armenian context, this discourse manifests in specific ways. Social workers often operate within state systems where criticism of policy may be perceived as "unreliability" or "disloyalty" toward the system. Consequently, a culture of self-censorship develops, where professionals consciously avoid political speech even when their practical experience testifies to the harmful consequences of political decisions. From this viewpoint, the social worker's voice acts as a "mediated voice," linking the lived reality of vulnerable groups with political discourse. When that voice is absent, policy loses its social sensitivity.

The depoliticization of social work is often justified by ideas of professionalism and objectivity. However, several authors argue that neutrality itself is a political stance that facilitates the reproduction of existing power relations (Reisch, 2013; Ferguson, 2008). This position is based on the idea that social work can never be value-neutral, as the social worker operates within the framework of resource distribution, social control, and power dynamics (Gal, Weiss-Gal, 2015). It follows that the social worker is not just a supportive professional, but a practical implementer of policy who, through daily decisions, participates in the reproduction of either social justice or inequality.

Neoliberalism and Case Management in Comparative and Armenian Contexts

The development of political social work theory since the 1990s has been closely linked to the rise of neoliberal transformations in welfare governance. As noted by Michael Reisch, these transformations have reoriented social policy toward activation, conditionality, and the individualization of responsibility (Reisch, 2013). Within this framework, social assistance is no longer conceived as a social right but as a temporary, behaviorally conditioned support mechanism aimed at labor market integration. Case management methodologies have expanded precisely within this paradigm, functioning simultaneously as tools of coordination and instruments of supervision.

International experience demonstrates that such reforms, while often increasing administrative efficiency, also tend to intensify bureaucratic control over both beneficiaries and professionals. In the United States, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act institutionalized workfare principles by linking benefits to employability. In the United Kingdom, integrated service models such as the “Sure Start” initiative embedded case management within coordinated child welfare systems (United Kingdom Government, 2003–2012).

Similarly, in Georgia, the introduction of a score-based vulnerability assessment system aimed to improve targeting but was later criticized for insufficiently capturing real social deprivation (Government of Georgia, 2006–2014).

Reforms in the Baltic States further revealed a tendency toward increased managerialism and the exclusion of vulnerable groups through rigid administrative criteria (Aidukaite, 2011).

In this broader context of neoliberal restructuring, Armenia has initiated a systemic transformation of its social protection system. Launched on March 17, 2025, in the Kotayk and Syunik regions, the pilot reform represents a decisive departure from the long-standing Proxy Means Test (PMT) system—commonly known as the “Paros” system—toward a hybrid model combining multidimensional poverty indicators with direct income accounting. For more than three decades, the PMT system relied on indirect proxies such as utility consumption or asset ownership, often producing “poverty traps,” whereby households avoided formal employment or improvements in living conditions to maintain eligibility (MLSA RA, 2026).

The new model seeks to address these distortions through a multidimensional framework structured around five key domains: basic needs, housing, education, labor, and health. A central innovation is the introduction of the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI), calculated in relation to a minimum food basket (calculated at approximately 34,581 AMD per adult in 2025).

This shift reflects core principles of neoliberal governance, particularly the emphasis on activation, conditionality, and self-sufficiency, while redefining social assistance as a mechanism for labor market participation rather than long-term support. A defining feature of the reform is its reliance on algorithmic decision-making embedded within a unified digital platform. Through automated data integration from multiple state databases, the system significantly reduces administrative burden and limits discretionary manipulation. However, vulnerability is increasingly constructed through standardized quantitative indicators, whereby algorithmic outputs determine a household's eligibility profile. In this sense, social reality is translated into data categories, potentially narrowing the interpretive space for professional judgment and reinforcing what can be described as algorithmic governance.

Despite these technological advancements, the reform formally maintains the centrality of case management as a professional methodology. Rooted in the ecological systems theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), case management presupposes a holistic understanding of the individual within their social environment, emphasizing multidimensional assessment, resource mobilization, and coordinated intervention. From this perspective, employment constitutes only one component of social integration rather than a sufficient condition for overcoming vulnerability.

However, a structural tension emerges between the epistemological foundations of case management and the operational logic of the new assessment system. While professional practice requires contextualized, qualitative judgment, the system privileges standardized, quantifiable indicators—most notably employment status—as decisive criteria. This contradiction illustrates a broader dynamic identified in political social work: the dominance of administrative rationality over professional autonomy.

The reform further reflects an implicit narrowing of the concept of poverty. Although it formally incorporates multidimensional criteria, its operational logic risks privileging income-based and labor-related indicators. This stands in partial contradiction to the capability approach developed by Amartya Sen, which conceptualizes poverty as deprivation of capabilities rather than solely a lack of income (Sen, 1981). Consequently, critical dimensions such as care responsibilities, mental health conditions, and social exclusion may remain insufficiently visible within the system.

Within this evolving institutional framework, the role of the social worker undergoes significant transformation. No longer limited to administrative data collection, professionals are expected to perform complex functions of coordination, activation, and resilience-building. At the same time, they operate within a highly regulated digital environment that structures decision-making processes and constrains discretionary space. This places social workers at the intersection of bureaucratic accountability and ethical responsibility, intensifying the tension between compliance with system requirements and the defense of beneficiaries' rights.

Thus, the Armenian reform exemplifies a broader shift in welfare governance, where digitalization and neoliberal policy logics reshape not only service delivery mechanisms but also the professional identity and autonomy of social workers. The coexistence of algorithmic assessment and case management creates a hybrid model in which the promise of efficiency is accompanied by new forms of structural constraint.

Systemic Risks in the Armenian Context

The institutional consolidation of case management and the introduction of the new assessment system (RA, 2024) present several critical risks:

- **Restriction of Professional Discretion:** When assessment is based on algorithmized indicators, the social worker's role diminishes to a data collector. Lipsky's theory shows that strictly regulated systems reduce the "street-level" autonomy necessary for effective intervention (Lipsky, 1980).

- **Deepening of Managerialism:** Systems prioritize efficiency and accountability metrics over value-based social outcomes.
- **Individualization of Risk:** Poverty is treated as a behavioral failure, leaving structural factors like labor market limitations in the shadows.
- **Culture of Silent Compliance:** Professionals may abandon critical stances to adapt to procedural requirements.
- **Digital Control:** Data collection raises risks of privacy breaches and algorithmic discrimination against vulnerable groups.
- **Retreat of Community Work:** Focus shifts to reporting, reducing community activation and advocacy.
- **Deformation of Professional Identity:** Social workers transform into administrative agents of the system rather than defenders of rights.

To mitigate these risks, several steps are necessary: legal anchoring of professional discretion, development of independent supervision, participation of the professional community in policy-making, strict data protection mechanisms, and strengthening the critical components of political social work in educational curricula.

Conclusion and Recommendations

- The transformation of the social protection system in Armenia illustrates that contemporary welfare reforms cannot be understood solely as technical or administrative adjustments. Rather, they constitute deeply political processes that redefine the boundaries of professional autonomy, reshape institutional power relations, and influence how social problems themselves are constructed and addressed. The introduction of hybrid vulnerability assessment system and case management methodologies reflects a broader global shift toward neoliberal governance, where activation, conditionality, and digitalization become central organizing principles of social policy.
- While the Armenian reform seeks to overcome the inefficiencies and distortions of the previous system, it simultaneously introduces new forms of structural constraint. The increasing reliance on algorithmic decision-making reconfigures the epistemological foundations of social work by privileging standardized, quantifiable indicators over contextual, relational knowledge. In this environment, vulnerability risks being reduced to measurable data points, potentially obscuring the complex, multidimensional realities of poverty and social exclusion.
- At the same time, the institutionalization of case management formally reaffirms the importance of individualized, holistic intervention. However, as this article has demonstrated, the coexistence of algorithmic governance and professional

practice produces a fundamental tension. Social workers are positioned between competing logics: on the one hand, the demands of bureaucratic accountability and procedural compliance; on the other, the ethical imperative to advocate for social justice and respond to the lived experiences of vulnerable populations. This tension not only affects every day professional practice but also contributes to the emergence of a “silent compliance” culture, where critical voices are subdued within increasingly regulated systems.

- These developments raise broader questions about the future of social work as a profession. If professional discretion is progressively constrained and decision-making is externalized to digital systems, the role of the social worker risks being reduced to that of an administrative intermediary. Such a transformation would undermine the foundational principles of social work, including its commitment to human dignity, social justice, and structural change. In this sense, the marginalization of the social worker’s voice is not merely a professional issue but a societal concern, as it weakens the capacity of social policy to remain responsive to real human needs.
- However, the findings of this study also point to potential pathways for rebalancing the system. Strengthening the legal and institutional guarantees of professional autonomy, ensuring meaningful participation of social workers in policy design and evaluation, and embedding critical perspectives within professional education are essential steps toward preserving the integrity of social work. Equally important is the development of governance models that recognize the complementary roles of technology and human judgment, rather than positioning them in opposition.
- Ultimately, the Armenian case reflects a broader global challenge: how to reconcile efficiency-driven, data-oriented governance with the inherently relational and value-based nature of social work. Addressing this challenge requires a renewed commitment to the principles of political social work, where professional practice is understood not as neutral service delivery but as an active engagement with issues of power, inequality, and social transformation. Reclaiming this political dimension is essential to ensure that social work remains not only an instrument of policy implementation but also a critical voice advocating for a more just and inclusive society.

In light of these findings, several key recommendations can be proposed:

Legal and Institutional Safeguards for Professional Autonomy. It is essential to formally recognize and protect the discretionary role of social workers within the legal framework governing social assistance. Clear provisions should ensure that algorithmic assessments serve as supportive tools rather than binding decisions, allowing professionals to override or contextualize system-generated outcomes when necessary.

Integration of Professional Judgment into Digital Systems. Digital platforms should be designed to incorporate qualitative inputs and narrative assessments, enabling social workers to document complex social realities that cannot be captured through quantitative indicators alone. This would support a more balanced model of decision-making that combines technological efficiency with professional expertise.

Strengthening Participatory Policy-Making Mechanisms. Social workers should be actively involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of social protection

reforms. Institutionalized feedback mechanisms can help ensure that policy development remains grounded in frontline experience and reflects the needs of vulnerable populations.

Development of Independent Supervision and Ethical Oversight. The establishment of independent supervision structures is crucial for supporting reflective practice, safeguarding professional ethics, and mitigating the pressures of managerialism. Such mechanisms can also provide a safe space for critical discussion and reduce the prevalence of self-censorship among practitioners.

Enhancement of Data Protection and Algorithmic Transparency. Given the increasing reliance on integrated databases and automated decision-making, robust data protection frameworks must be ensured. Transparency in algorithmic criteria and decision-making processes is necessary to prevent discrimination, protect privacy, and maintain public trust in the system.

Reinforcement of Critical and Political Dimensions in Social Work Education. Educational programs in social work should place greater emphasis on critical theory, policy analysis, and advocacy skills. Strengthening the political dimension of professional training will better equip future social workers to navigate complex governance environments and to engage actively in social change processes.

Rebalancing Activation Policies with Social Justice Principles. While employment-oriented activation remains an important policy goal, it should not become the sole criterion for assessing vulnerability. Policies must account for structural barriers, unpaid care work, health conditions, and other factors that influence individuals' capacity for social participation.

In conclusion, the Armenian reform reflects a broader global challenge: how to reconcile efficiency-driven, data-oriented governance with the inherently relational and value-based nature of social work. Addressing this challenge requires not only technical adjustments but a reassertion of the principles of political social work, as articulated by scholars such as Michael Reisch and Ilan Weiss-Gal. Reclaiming the political dimension of social work is essential to ensure that the profession remains not merely an instrument of policy implementation, but a critical actor in advancing social justice, amplifying marginalized voices, and shaping more inclusive and humane social policies.

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Conflict of Interests

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Ethics Statement

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INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF SOCIAL CASE MANAGEMENT IN ARMENIA

Yevgine Vardanyan, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7975-0768>

PhD in Sociology, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work and Social Technologies, Yerevan State University, Armenia. Email: yevginevardanyan@ysu.am

Abstract: Social case management is widely applied in organizations providing social services in Armenia. However, the extent to which it has been institutionalized within the national social service system remains unclear. This article addresses this gap by combining theoretical perspectives on institutionalization with findings from qualitative research conducted among social service providers in Armenia. The results indicate that, although social case management has undergone significant institutional development, it has not yet been fully institutionalized. In particular, regulative and normative components—such as legal frameworks, policies, and professional standards—are largely established, while the cultural-cognitive dimension, including mutual recognition, legitimization, and consistent application of standardized approaches, remains underdeveloped across governmental, community-based, and non-governmental organizations. The article contributes to the field by conceptualizing social case management as a methodology, clarifying its relationship with social work, and providing a structured analysis of its institutionalization process in the Armenian context.

Keywords: *social case management, social work, integrated social services, methodology, institutionalization.*

Conceptualization of Social Case Management and Its Institutionalization in Social Services' System

The concept of *social case management*, although widely studied and interpreted, still lacks an exhaustive definition and a universally agreed interpretation. In 2016 a group of authors studying interpretations of social case management concluded that, approximately 80 studies published between 1988 and 2013, more than 22 definitions of the concept and over 5 models had been formulated, and around 70 functions attributed to social case managers had been identified (Lukersmith, et al., 2016). This statistic demonstrates the considerable difficulty of presenting a clear and unambiguous definition of social case management.

Differences in approaches become obvious already at the level of defining the concept of social case management. Some definitions emphasize its role in ensuring the



coordinated provision of diverse services across multiple sectors (social, healthcare, educational, and others) to beneficiaries.

For example, according to Sue Lukersmith's , social case management is the coordination of social, healthcare, and other services and their systematic provision to the beneficiary, through which the individual gains opportunities for recovery and social inclusion (Lukersmith, 2017).

Social case management is also of central importance in the process of service integration (Vardanyan, 2024). This implies that in all situations where there is a need to integrate services and provide them in a coordinated manner, social case management becomes the mechanism that can be used with that purpose.

Authors such as Howard M. Schwartz, Irwin Rubinstein, and others in their definitions of social case management emphasize its application in addressing complex needs conditioned by causal ties. They argue that social case management enables the provision of a multidisciplinary and coordinated response to such needs (Schwarz, 2023).

The National Association of Social Workers defines social case management as a method through which a case manager assesses, organizes, coordinates, and monitors different services provided to meet the multiple or complex needs of a beneficiary (NASW, 2013).

Theorists such as Nigel Woodside and Trudy McClam define social case management as a method of social work or a professional function aimed at ensuring a client-centered approach and promoting the realization and protection of beneficiaries' rights within the social service system (Woodside, McCalm, 2013). Furthermore, through social case management, beneficiaries are able to navigate more quickly and effectively within the system of services across different sectors (Frankel, et al., 2019).

There are also theories that consider the role of social case management within deinstitutionalization processes to be crucial, noting its importance in all cases where initiatives or interventions aimed at deinstitutionalization are implemented ((Lukersmith, et al., 2016). This is due to the fact that social case management enables the provision of coordinated and needs-based services to beneficiaries within the community.

Accordingly, social case management is also important within the framework of decentralization approaches and in the implementation of integrated service systems at the community level (Moxely, 1989).

The question of how social case management emerged and what historical trajectory it has followed also requires examination.

Social case management, as a practice somewhat distinct from social work, began to develop during the 1960s–1970s as a response to the intensive development of social protection systems, the introduction of new social services, the expansion of service coverage, and the deinstitutionalization movement (Lukersmith, et al., 2016).

At the same time, one of the main drivers for the application of social case management practices was the fragmentation of social services and the discontinuity in service provision processes. This necessitated the systematic and continuous delivery of services, ensured by social case management.

Alongside its application, social case management practices began to undergo institutionalization, becoming widely used method across various sectors (healthcare, child protection, care provision).

At present, social case management, being adopted across different sectors, aims to ensure a specialized and multidimensional approach to addressing the complex needs of beneficiaries.

In this regard, the relationship between social work and social case management is also noteworthy. Widely applied by social workers and spreading across all fields of social work, social case management has been consolidated and substantiated as a method of social work (Antonyan, et al., 2023).

Although there are approaches according to which social case management is considered a supportive variation of casework as a primary method, it has, in both practice and theoretical interpretations, significantly diverged from casework—particularly from individual, group, and family social work methods—and has acquired a distinct emphasis. Unlike these methods, or more generally the casework method, social case management emphasizes the principles of service coordination, cooperation, accessibility, and comprehensiveness.

Casework methods are therapeutic methods of social work, where priority is given to behavioral change, emotional support, capacity building, and relationship management (Barker, 2014). In contrast, within social case management, emphasis is placed on ensuring the coordinated provision of services aimed at meeting the diverse and complex needs of the beneficiaries.

Thus, social case management can be considered as a method of social work that is primarily applied by social workers in working with individuals or families with complex needs or high levels of social risk (Antonyan, et al. 2023).

At the same time, there are sufficient grounds to interpret social case management also as a methodology. Methodology is generally understood as a system of methods or techniques (Cambridge dictionary, 2026).

It is also interpreted as a theoretically grounded set of several methods and the techniques derived from them, aimed at achieving specific objectives.

The key characteristics of a methodology are:

1. theoretical foundations,
2. clearly defined objectives,
3. combined application of methods and techniques aimed at achieving those objectives (Callaos, 2014).

Based on this description, it can be asserted that social case management has all the prerequisites to be characterized as a methodology, if we take into account the following considerations:

1. Social case management has theoretical foundations.

Social case management is based on the theories or theoretical approaches that social work methodology is based on. The application of social work's theoretical foundation is vast and leverage case management intervention with individuals, couples, families, groups, and communities (Flink-Samnack, 2023).

As social work, social case management theoretical bases include the following theories or theoretical approaches:

- Systems theory that allows social case management to be defined as a system with structural elements, functional clarity, defined objectives, and interconnections between structure and function; Based on the systems theory, social case managers develop and improve support systems, including service delivery system, resources, opportunities, and naturally occurring social supports, that advance the well-being of individuals, families and communities (NASW, 2013). Systems theory also helps social case managers to navigate complex systems on behalf of clients and families (Flink-Samnack, 2023).
- The humanistic or person in environment approach emphasizes the interaction between the individual and the social environment, and the importance of a comprehensive approach to the individual's resources, risks and needs (NASW, 2013);
- Social exchange approach fuels a case manager's efforts to target macro or mezzo-level systemic issues and make changes in the service delivery systems. Within this approach social workers try also to mitigate disparities and social injustices promoting changes in systems' functioning, in the environment, relations and behavior models of the clients (Flink-Samnack, 2023).
- Strengths-based approaches, which emphasize identifying and reinforcing the beneficiary's strengths and promoting empowerment (NASW, 2013);
- Developmental theory, according to which social case management is aimed at developing the beneficiary's capacities and expanding opportunities and resources (Antonyan, et. al, 2023).

At the same time, social case management is also grounded in other theoretical approaches that form the basis of social work.

2. Social case management has clearly defined objectives.

The primary goal of social case management is to optimize client functioning and well-being by providing and coordinating high-quality services, in the most effective and efficient manner possible to individuals with multiple complex needs (NASW, 2013).

From this goal the main objectives of social case management stem that are: main objectives of social case management:

- ensuring the beneficiary's independence and self-sufficiency,
- promoting social inclusion within the community,
- providing integrated and coordinated social services,
- ensuring accessibility, targeting, and continuity of services (Giardino, De Jesus, 2023).

These objectives derive from key paradigms such as:

- comprehensive assessment and systematic use of individual and community resources,
- provision of service packages based on individual needs,
- ensuring the highest possible level of independent, socially inclusive functioning and self-sufficiency (Antonyan, et al., 2023).

3. Multiple methods are applied within social case management.

These include, for example, individual, group, and family work, methods of service coordination and mapping, other related methods or techniques. Social case

management ensures the systematic application of these methods and their associated techniques.

Thus, within the framework of this study, we will consider social case management as a **methodology** used in social work aimed at providing coordinated, needs-based services to beneficiaries with complex needs or high levels of risk, as well as ensuring their social inclusion, independent functioning, and self-sufficiency.

We should specify social case management methodology also as a specific one for promoting:

- the integration of social services,
- the deinstitutionalization of care services within communities,
- ensuring the coordinated and needs-based provision of community services.

At the same time, it should be noted that when the methodology of social case management is introduced in organizations providing social services, it typically undergoes the process of institutionalization and is applied with its full conceptual “toolkit” only when certain conditions are met.

In order to study the institutionalization of social case management, it is first necessary to analyze the concept of *institutionalization*.

Institutionalization is a concept widely used in sociology. Sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman interpret institutionalization as the mutual recognition and typologization of habitual actions by actors within social relationships (Berger, Luckman, 1966). According to them, institutionalization emerges when:

1. habitual actions are formed within social relations,
2. these habitual actions are mutually recognized and accepted by the participants of those relations,
3. these actions form institutions or become part of existing institutions.

As the authors note, in the case of institutionalization it becomes clear that action X will be performed by actor Y (Berger, Luckman, 1966).

W. Richard Scott, complementing the interpretations of Berger and Luckman, identifies three key components of institutionalization:

1. **regulative component** (legal regulations, policies, formal procedures),
2. **normative component** (professional standards, ethical principles),
3. **cultural-cognitive component**, interpreted as the mutual recognition, understanding, legitimization of the practices, capacity-building, and actual application by key actors (Scott, 1995).

In our view, the formation of these components can also be interpreted as the **stages of institutionalization**, reflecting the step-by-step process through which a given practice becomes institutionalized within a system of relations.

Within the context of this study, institutionalization will be understood as a process through which social practices, roles, and norms are formalized, legitimized, acquire stable application, and become integrated into the systems of roles, norms, or legal regulations of existing organizations. This interpretation serves as the basis for examining the institutionalization of social case management in organizations operating in Armenia.

Research Methodology

Within the framework of this article, a sociological study was conducted in January–February 2026.

The need for this research stemmed from the fact that, although social case management has a relatively rich history of application in Armenian organizations providing social services, it has never been comprehensively studied. In particular, it remains unclear whether social case management has been institutionalized within these organizations or is still applied in a fragmented and non-uniform manner.

At the same time, it is evident that social case management in Armenia has its own specific characteristics, which are also at the center of this study.

Accordingly, the following research objectives were formulated:

1. to analyze the specific features of the application of social case management methodology in Armenia,
2. to examine the stages of institutionalization of social case management methodology in social service agencies of Armenia and determine the current stage of its institutionalization,
3. identify the factors hindering the institutionalization of social case management in Armenian social service agencies and outline key recommendations to overcome them.

The study employed qualitative research methods, specifically:

- focus group discussions with professionals applying social case management,
- in-depth (unstructured) interviews with experts.
- content analysis of the main documents related to social case management.

Particularly, those were the following documents:

- legal regulations on integrated social services, unified social service and social case management,
- professional principles and ethical norms defined in social case management guidelines,
- coherent researches and analysis that directly or indirectly refer to social case management.

Focus group discussions were conducted with social workers applying the social case management methodology, including those employed in state, community, and non-governmental organizations.

Expert interviews were conducted individually with:

- heads of organizations providing social services,
- program coordinators,
- and specialists in the field of social protection.

In total, the study included:

- 8 focus group discussions (38 social workers),
- 11 expert interviews. 6 documents.

14 participants of the focus group discussions presented state agencies, 12 local self-government bodies and the other 12 non-governmental organizations.

The focus group discussions used to analyze the daily activities of social case managers, their main functions, changes in conducting those functions during the recent years, reasons of those changes, main challenges for effective implementation of

social case management methodology and their vision on further development of social case management in Armenian social services.

Expert interviews were conducted with the policy developers, researchers and social service coordinators. With them we discussed the phases of institutionalization of social case management in the social service agencies of Armenia, peculiarities of social case management methodology, the main challenges in the processes of institutionalization and recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of those processes.

All interviews were conducted in a face to face manner and based on pre-developed questionnaires, Participants were informed in advance about the objectives, tasks, and ethical principles of the study and signed informed consent forms.

Analysis of Research Results

Based on the objectives of the research the results can be presented in the following topics:

1. stages of the introduction and institutionalization of social case management in Armenia,
2. characteristics of social case management new methodology defined in newly adopted regulations,
3. the level of institutionalization of social case management in Armenia, the factors that hinder the institutionalization
4. recommendations for ensuring further institutionalization of social case management in Armenian social services agencies.

1. Stages of Introduction and Institutionalization of Social Case Management in Armenia

Based on the content analysis of the coherent documents, as well as the results of expert interviews hereby we can define the main stages of social case management introduction and institutionalization in Armenia.

From 1990 to 2010

During this period, social services began to be introduced in Armenia, and the organizations that were to provide social services to different groups of the population (children, families, refugees, persons with disabilities, and others in difficult life situations) were established. During this period, the institute of social work was also introduced, and with the involvement of social workers in the mentioned organizations, cases of the application of social case management were recorded. However, this phase was characterized by spontaneous, uncoordinated applications of social case management practices, improper adherence to procedures, principles, and stages, and the specialists applying these practices had unclear understandings of social case management. In this phase, social case management practices were mainly applied by specialists from organizations representing the public sector.

From 2010 to 2021

This phase was marked by the establishment of the integrated social services system in Armenia. In 2010, the RA Government approved the concept of developing the

system of integrated social services. Within this concept the integrated social services were defined as provision of services in a coordinated and cooperative way¹.

The concept approved the Government's policy to integrate social services and to establish territorial centers of integrated (complex) social services (RA legal regulation "On approving the concept for organizing the process of providing integrated social services", 2010). In these, significant importance was given to social case management, emphasizing its role especially in working with complex cases involving multiple services.

During this phase, particularly in 2017, the position of social worker was also introduced in the local self-government system, contributing to the fact that social case management practices began to be applied also at the community level as well, in particular by social workers of municipalities, aimed at supporting individuals in difficult life situations in the community.

In this phase, the first programs for developing the capacities of specialists in the application of social case management methodology were also launched, the first guidelines were developed, and initiatives aimed at the systematic application of social case management in various organizations were implemented.

In this phase, legal acts related to social case management were also adopted. This became the starting phase of the institutionalization of social case management practices that had been customary and applied in a non-systematic manner.

At the same time, during this phase, problems were recorded that conditioned the need to move to the next phase. Particularly, there were problems in the processes of developing the integrated social services system; in fact, this system was not fully established. This resulted to the situation, when:

- in state organizations providing social services, the social case management methodology was not fully introduced, remained fragmented, being applied not in all cases where it was necessary to be applied, and being implemented not with the full set of tools with which it could be,
- social case management in state, public, and community organizations continued to be applied without a unified approach, with different toolkits and different forms,
- the absence of a clear distribution of roles among social workers of different organizations led to role confusion among specialists involved in the social case management process.

In addition, one of the problems recorded in this phase was that neither in legal acts nor in work practice was a clear distinction between social case management and other methods of social work, which led to the fact that specialists for quite a long time identified social case management as a social work, considering that by working with each case and carrying out social work, they were implementing social case management.

From 2021 to present

A new phase in the development of the social case management methodology started with the introduction of the Unified Social Service in Armenia.

¹ Government of RA, "On approving the concept for organizing the process of providing integrated social services", 2012.

In 2021, the Charter of the Unified Social Service was also approved, which stipulated that:

1. the provision of integrated social services should be ensured through social case management,
2. the functions of the Unified Social Service include the assessment of the needs of persons seeking or receiving support within the framework of social case management and the provision of necessary social services².

In this phase, particularly in 2025, legal and normative regulations were adopted by which the following were clarified:

- the cases when the social case management methodology can be applied, and when social workers must be guided by this methodology,
- the unified toolkit of social case management,
- the distribution of roles of specialists within the framework of social case management, according to which the main responsibility for social case management in the community lies with the social workers of state organizations, namely the territorial centers of the Unified Social Service; in cases of child protection, with social workers operating at the community level; and in residential care institutions, including penitentiary institutions, with the social workers of those institutions. Accordingly, social workers of all other organizations are assigned the functions of early identification and prevention, especially those operating at the local self-government system, as well as the provision of specialized services, which is mainly assigned to specialists from the nongovernmental sector within the framework of the support network³.

The research showed that the last mentioned clauses are also in the list of the main features of social case management new methodology.

2. The characteristics of social case management new methodology established in social service agencies of Armenia

Based on the results of the research we can also clearly define the main characteristics or features of Armenian social case management. Those are the followings.

- Risk-based application of social case management methodology

Social workers apply the methodology depending on the level of risk associated with the case. It is primarily used in cases of the medium or high risk levels. Risk assessment is conducted using standardized screening tools.

- Importance of support networks in social case management methodology

A key feature is the central role of support networks. Social cooperation between professionals and organizations is mainly organized within the framework of case management.

- Inclusion of informal networks

Another distinctive characteristic is the frequent involvement of informal networks (family members, community actors) due to limited availability of formal services.

- Emphasis on resources' and services' mapping

² Charter of Unified Social Services, 2021.

³ Order of the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs "On Social Case Management and Home Visit Methodology", 2025.

As there is a lack of social services in the communities of Armenia, one of the main peculiarities of social case management is the implementation of the methods for mapping and coordinating the existing ones. Mapping of resources and services is an essential component of social case management, although different organizations use different tools and formats for that

3. The level of institutionalization of social case management methodology in the social service agencies of Armenia

The research helped us to identify the level of institutionalization of social case management in Armenia. Based on the results, we can assume that social case management has not passed through the whole phases of the institutionalization. Though it has its regular component defined in the legal regulations, as well as normative component presented in the professional guidelines, the institutionalization is stopped in the phase of cultural and cognitive institutionalization. This can be justified by the fact that, as the results of the research showed, the social workers who should use or implement new methodology are not fully familiar with that, not always oriented how to act and in what situation, have problems while following the main regulations, especially the SOPs of the newly defined methodology.

This means, that though the institutionalization of social case management in the social service agencies of Armenia has through legal or normative regulations, haven't yet reached the stage of its full implementation and systematic execution.

4. Factors hindering institutionalization of social case management in Armenia

According to the results of the research we can define the factors that hinder the institutionalization process of social case management in Armenia. First, as was mentioned above not enough efforts have been invested in rising awareness and competencies of social workers for implementing the new methodology of social case management. Not all of them are familiar with new regulations, not all of them have experience in using it and not all efforts are succeeded.

Besides the research revealed the tendency of organizations to maintain local approaches to the application of social case management

Particularly, professionals operating at the state, community, and non-governmental levels continue, by inertia, to rely on previous practices and tools used prior to the adoption of standardized approaches.

This is especially obvious in non-governmental organizations, where social case management is being implemented based on their own principles and using the toolkits they have. According to the respondents from nongovernmental organizations, they rely on the existing practice, as they lack information, experience and clear vision on what are the reasons of the changes in the methodology of social case management and what are the main mechanisms of implementing newly confirmed approaches and generalized toolkits.

As the interviews with social case managers from state and community organizations showed, though they are well informed on the newly adopted regulations on social case management but they don't have clear vision on how to implement them. They follow those regulations but need time to learn and getting expertized in new social case management approaches.

Hence, based on the results of the research we can assume that the institutionalization of social case management in social service agencies of Armenia is hindered by the following factors:

- a lack of confidence in the effective implementation of new approaches,
- insufficient awareness,
- challenges in legitimizing newly approved and generalized methodology of social case management, as well as the legitimizing the role distributions between the main participants,
- weak social norms of collaborative work in the community level, etc.

The problems of institutionalization of social case management are by some other factors that also have their influence. Those are:

The need for digitalization and the introduction of modern toolkits

Currently, most processes are carried out in paper-based formats, which:

- reduces efficiency,
- complicates information exchange,
- limits timely and coordinated responses to the needs of beneficiaries.

The study indicates that digital tools are particularly needed for:

1. transfer of social cases from one professional to another or from one agency (community) to another,
2. secure and efficient exchange of case-related information,
3. effective implementation of service referrals.

Problems in the further development of the system of integrated social services in the communities of Armenia

Those are the problems caused by the fact that there are still issues related to the establishment of the integrated social services system, since the absence of vertical integration at the level of service organization and weak cooperation at the horizontal level condition the problems of institutionalization of social case management.

In addition, the network of social services in Armenian communities is not sufficient. Particularly, there are communities that do not have certain services or, if they do, they are not sufficient to meet the full needs of the community. Most organizations providing social services are concentrated in large cities, while in other settlements the coverage of services is very sparse. Moreover, due to weak coordination, services of the same nature, may be provided in the same region, creating overlaps, while some regions may remain without the possibility of having any service/program (Yarmaloyan, 2017).

Since the social case management methodology is applied in work with families with complex needs and has an important “mission” to ensure the systematic and coordinated provision of services necessary to meet those needs, the problems of the range and geographical distribution of services in social and other sectors make it difficult for social workers to carry out effective social case management.

Conclusions

1. The social case management is widely discussed in academic literature but lacks a unified definition. However, most interpretations emphasize:

- its role in providing coordinated services to individuals or families with complex needs or with a medium or high risk,
 - its importance in decentralization, community-based services, and deinstitutionalization processes.
2. Social case management is closely linked to social work and can be considered a methodology within it.
 3. Based on the analysis, the following generalized definition of social case management can be proposed:
Social case management is a social work methodology aimed at providing coordinated, needs-based services to individuals or families with complex needs or in a medium or a high risk, and ensuring their social inclusion, independent functioning, and self-sufficiency.
 4. The research showed that the social case management methodology has the following features in Armenia:
 - application in medium- and high-risk cases,
 - mandatory formation of support networks,
 - inclusion of beneficiaries' social environment in support networks and in social case management in general,
 - emphasis on mapping of social services and community resources,
 - organization of social cooperation at the community level mainly within the framework of social case management.
 - role division of the main participants of the social case management,
 - generalized SOPs and toolkits for using while implementing social case management by the social workers from different sectors.
 5. Although legal, procedural, and ethical frameworks are in place and have been adopted recently, challenges remain at the **cultural-cognitive level**, particularly dismiss the following components of institutionalization:
 - mutual recognition and legitimization of the methodology by the main stakeholders responsible to apply it,,
 - not being ready to adopt new and generalized approaches and willingness to keep the still existing procedures: The force of habit,
 - capacity development and digitalization needs,
 - further development of integrated social services system in the country.

Recommendations

Based on the factors that hinder the process of institutionalization of social case management in organizations providing social services in Armenia, the following recommendations can be proposed:

1. **Strengthen and institutionalize inter-agency and network-based collaboration mechanisms** among state, community, and on-governmental actors involved in social service delivery. This should include formalized coordination protocols, clearly defined communication channels, and regular inter-organizational case conferences to reduce fragmentation and ensure integrated service provision.
2. **Develop and sustain continuous, practice-oriented capacity-building systems** for social workers and related professionals engaged in social case

management. Training programs should move beyond theoretical instruction and emphasize applied learning, supervision, mentoring, and workplace-based skill development aligned with standardized methodologies and tools.

3. **Establish a structured system for documenting, systematizing, and disseminating best practices** in social case management. This may include national or institutional repositories, practice manuals, and thematic case study collections aimed at strengthening methodological consistency and promoting evidence-informed practice.
4. **Accelerate the digital transformation of social case management systems** through the development of integrated electronic platforms. Such systems should support secure case transfer, standardized data collection, real-time information sharing, and inter-agency referrals while ensuring confidentiality and data protection standards.
5. **Harmonize and further standardize methodological tools and procedural frameworks** across all implementing institutions to reduce variability in practice. Particular attention should be given to ensuring consistent use of assessment tools, case documentation formats, and intervention protocols.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethics Statement

The author confirms that this study was conducted in accordance with the Journal's Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.

OPEC AND CLIMATE ACTION: ADAPTATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Onor C. Kester <https://orcid.org/0000.0001-6839-8463>

Senior Research Fellow, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA),
Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria. Email: Onorkester.c@gmail.com

Abstract: The Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has committed to combating climate change. However, this commitment has confronted its members with two contradictory imperatives. They are sustaining hydrocarbon dependent development and adapting to the global agenda for decarbonisation. As international climate discourse intensifies, OPEC's traditional rentier models of statecraft face unprecedented strain. This study examines how climate change discourse is reshaping the material and economic environment of OPEC states in the Global South dependent on oil and natural gas rents. Using qualitative data and a political economy approach, the study analyses how OPEC states collectively and individually negotiates the pressures of climate change commitments and national development imperatives. Employing the case studies of Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and the United Arab Emirate, the article highlights the adaptive strategies of these states. The study finds that these strategies range from economic diversification and renewable energy investments to symbolic green branding and resistance within international climate negotiations. The study concludes that while OPEC members rhetorically embrace aspects of the energy transition agenda, their developmental dependence on hydrocarbons creates a double-bind of climate vulnerability and economic inertia.

Keywords: *OPEC. Decarbonisation. Global South. Development. International Climate Politics. Climate Action. Rentier States. Net zero emissions.*

Introduction

OPEC accounts for nearly 80% of proven global crude oil reserves and around one-third of global oil production (OPEC, 2025a). For its members encompassing large producers such as Saudi Arabia to more fragile economies such as Nigeria and Venezuela, crude oil and natural gas revenues constitute the backbone of state budgets, export earnings, and national development agendas (Asheim et al., 2019). Often lacking diversified economic base, revenue from the exploitation of hydrocarbons finance infrastructure, welfare systems, political legitimacy (Beblawi & Luciani, 2016a; Ross, 2012), and even corruption in these state (David et al., 2024).

Yet OPEC's strategic position is increasingly threatened by the rise of global climate change discourse. Since the Paris Agreement in 2015, international pressure



has intensified toward a decarbonised future (Erickson & Brase, 2019). Pledges of “net-zero” by 2050 from major economies, regulatory measures such as the European Union’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), and financial divestment campaigns targeting fossil fuels (IEA, 2023; Zhao & Lin, 2025), collectively signal a declining space for hydrocarbons in the global energy mix. Moreover, scientific assessments by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Freund et al., 2018), emphasise the urgency of leaving a significant portion of fossil fuel reserves unexploited to avoid catastrophic warming. These pressures place OPEC economies in a paradox where their primary source of wealth is simultaneously the central driver of the climate crisis which global governance seeks to mitigate.

This paradox is particularly acute because most OPEC members belong to the Global South, where oil rents underpin not just fiscal revenues but also broader development frameworks and pathways. Unlike industrialised economies in the Global North, OPEC states despite significant oil revenue, face significant severe, economic, technological, and financial vulnerabilities (Karl, 1997; Stevens, 2007). These vulnerabilities severely limit their capacity to pursue a rapid energy transition. Thus, climate discourse, though framed as universal, intersects asymmetrically with OPEC, deepening existing inequalities between Global North and South. For OPEC, the challenge is not merely technical decarbonisation as it is often framed by the industrialised West, but balancing climate commitments with national development imperatives (Depledge, 2013).

The literature often frames OPEC in dichotomous terms either as a “climate laggard” obstructing international negotiations (Depledge, 2008), or as a cartel defending oil rents (Almoguera et al., 2011). However, this binary overlooks the complexity of how OPEC members are engaging with the discourse of climate change. Some members, like the United Arab Emirates (UAE), position themselves as pioneers of renewable energy investment, hosting global climate summits while simultaneously expanding hydrocarbons production. Others like Nigeria, struggle to reconcile oil dependency with chronic underinvestment in renewable infrastructure. These dynamics suggest a spectrum of adaptive strategies shaped by domestic political economy, developmental needs, and geopolitical positioning.

This article investigates two interrelated questions. Firstly, how is global climate change discourse affecting OPEC’s collective and national strategies? Secondly, how do OPEC countries balance the demands of climate change mitigation with the imperatives of national development? By answering these questions, the article contributes to scholarship on energy transitions, Global South political economy, and international climate politics. The article employs a comparative political economy approach analysing secondary literature, OPEC documents, national policy documents, and international climate reports. Three case studies; Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and the UAE, are used to illustrate divergent yet interconnected strategies of adaptation. The analysis highlights a recurring pattern of OPEC members rhetorically aligning with aspects of global climate discourse while pragmatically defending oil rents as central to their developmental survival.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding the paradox confronting OPEC countries in the age of climate change benefits greatly from a theoretical framework that moves from broader structural dynamics of resource dependence and international climate action to critical perspectives on power, justice, and inequality. This section provides an overview of the general theories that explain the political economy of oil dependence, the debates on climate governance and Global South Development, and the discourse around critical political economy and climate justice perspectives on which the study is anchored.

Rentier State Theory and Resource Dependence

A central starting point for analysing OPEC members is rentier state theory. The theory highlights how states that derive a large share of revenue from external rents especially hydrocarbons, develop distinct political and economic structures (Beblawi & Luciani, 2016a). In rentier economies, governments are insulated from taxation, creating a weak social contract between state and citizens while distribution of rents from mineral resources like crude oil, becomes a key mechanism of political legitimacy (Ross, 2012). OPEC countries exemplify this logic observable in Saudi Arabia's oil-financed welfare state (Gonand et al., 2019; Haque & Khan, 2019), to Nigeria's dependency on crude oil exports for the maintenance of predatory state structures (David et al., 2024; Emediegwu & Okeke, 2017). Therefore, hydrocarbons are the backbone of state-building, patronage, and development (Karl, 1997).

This dependence generates structural vulnerabilities. International crude oil price volatility, the "resource curse," and "Dutch Disease," have long constrained diversification efforts in oil-dependent states (Auty, 2015). Climate change pressures intensify these vulnerabilities by insisting that up to 80% of proven reserves must remain unexploited according to decarbonisation targets put forward by the Paris Agreement and IPCC, creating the critical concern of "stranded resources" while existing and ongoing investments in the oil industry become "stranded assets (Auty, 2012; Bos & Gupta, 2018; Kemitare et al., 2025; McGlade & Ekins, 2015; Van Der Ploeg & Rezai, 2020). Thus, rentier theory provides a useful entry point into understanding the political economy of OPEC where the persistence of oil rents underpins both state resilience and fragility in the face of external pressures for decarbonisation.

Climate Change Discourse and Global Governance

Alongside resource dependence, OPEC states are embedded in the global discourse of climate change, shaped by international institutions such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and milestone agreements like the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement. Climate governance is not simply a technical or scientific matter but also a deeply normative project that establishes expectations about how states should behave (Falkner, 2016). Discourses of "net zero", "energy transition", and "just transition" have become global benchmarks against which states are evaluated (Bos & Gupta, 2018; Depledge *, 2005).

For OPEC, this discourse introduces contradictions. On the one hand, participation in climate negotiations is essential to maintain legitimacy within the international community. On the other hand, the material basis of OPEC economies i.e., the exploitation of hydrocarbons, sits in direct contradiction with the decarbonisation agenda. Thus, climate discourse acts both as a constraint - limiting the long-term space

for fossil fuels, and as an arena of contestation, where OPEC states seek to reshape narratives in ways that highlight development and equity concerns

Development and the Global South Context

The developmental dimension is critical because most OPEC members are part of the Global South, where hydrocarbons finance not only state budgets but also broader aspirations for industrialisation, poverty reduction, and welfare provision (Ross, 2012). Unlike advanced industrial economies that can pivot toward renewables with relative financial and technological ease, oil-dependent states in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America face sharp trade-offs (Almeida et al., 2024; Blicharska et al., 2017; Kamal Uddin, 2017; Koch, 2021). Climate-induced demands for rapid decarbonisation risk undermining not just the fiscal, but also the broader economic and political base of these states before they can secure and institute alternative pathways to development in the face of the rising risk of global warming.

This tension connects to broader historical debates in development studies about structural dependency and global inequality (Ake, 1981; Amin, 1972; Kay, 2018; Mamdani, 1990; Rodney, 1972). For many OPEC members, hydrocarbons remain the only competitive advantage they have in the global economy. Consequently, the discourse of climate change while presented as universal, intersects with Global South states asymmetrically, deepening developmental constraints rather than alleviating them.

Critical Political Economy

To move beyond descriptive accounts, this article adopts a critical political economy perspective, which foregrounds issues of power, hierarchy, and inequality in global energy transitions. From this perspective, climate change discourse is not neutral but embedded in relations of dominance between Global North and Global South (Newell & Paterson, 2010). International calls for decarbonisation often obscure historical responsibility for emissions, while placing disproportionate adjustment costs on petroleum-dependent states. For OPEC members, critical political economy underscores two points. First, climate change discourse is a site of struggle, where Global South producers contest the rules of the game by invoking specific principles such as “common but differentiated responsibilities.” Second, OPEC’s adaptive strategies must be understood not only in terms of domestic economic policy but also as responses to shifting configuration of global power, whether through carbon border taxes, investor activism, or the geopolitics of renewable technologies.

Climate Justice as a Normative Lens

The last leg of this study’s theoretical framework, climate justice, emphasises fairness in both the distribution of burdens and benefits of climate action and the recognition of the historical responsibility for emissions (Baer, 2011; Okereke, 2010; Timmons Roberts & Parks, 2007). From this perspective, the demand that OPEC states rapidly decarbonise while still grappling with development deficits raises profound ethical dilemmas. For example, Nigeria’s dependence on oil rents to fund poverty alleviation collides with global expectations to leave reserves untapped (Bos & Gupta, 2018; Kemitare et al., 2025). Similarly, calls for a global transition often lack concrete mechanisms to ensure financial and technological transfers to the Global South (De Lucia, 2014). This dilemma becomes more poignant when it is considered that the bulk of the crisis with which the world struggles was triggered by the centuries of sustained

and rapid industrialisation using fossil fuel by the same countries seeking to extract commitment to international agreements by industrialising (or even agrarian) countries in the Global South who have often negligible carbon footprints (Hadzix, 2024; Okereke, 2010).

By applying climate justice, the study highlights the “double bind” facing OPEC members, where they are simultaneously vulnerable to the physical impacts of climate change including desertification, flooding, heat stress, and drought (Abdul-Razak et al., 2025; Brock, 2012; Raj et al., 2022), and marginalised within the governance structures that dictate the pace and terms of decarbonisation (Okereke, 2010). This lens reframes OPEC not as a monolithic obstacle but as comprising diverse actors seeking to reconcile survival, justice, and development within an inequitable global order.

Climate Change Discourse and Pressures on OPEC

The global discourse on climate change is not only about technicalities focusing on the science and technologies of the process and solutions, but also about language, narratives, and norms that shape expectations of state behaviour (Hajer, 2012). Discourse in this sense functions as both a form of governance and a site of contestation, defining what constitutes legitimate action and what is deemed irresponsible or obstructive behaviour (A. Hajer & Oomen, 2025). For OPEC, the international climate discourse has emerged as a powerful external pressure, challenging the legitimacy of hydrocarbon-based development models and forcing adaptation in rhetoric, strategy, and policy.

The Global Climate Narrative Shift from Mitigation to Net Zero

Since the early 1990s, climate change has been framed as a universal crisis requiring urgent collective action. Milestone agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Paris Agreement (2015), institutionalised this narrative, embedding expectations that all states should commit to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. While the Kyoto Protocol differentiates between Annex I (developed) and non-Annex I (developing) countries, the Paris Agreement shifted towards a more universalist framework, requiring all parties to submit Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) towards the reduction of Greenhouse gases by 2050 (Schroders, 2023). This universalist turn marked a critical discursive shift which liberalised the burden of mitigation, lifting it from the Global North and spreading it to all states including oil-dependent economies of the Global South (Falkner, 2016).

The concept of “net zero,” popularised after the Paris Agreement, further restructured global discourse. Net zero is framed as a moral and scientific imperative to limit global warming to 1.5^oC and that global emissions must attain balance by mid-century (IPCC, 2022). Major powers including the European Union (EU), the United States (U.S.), and China, have adopted net-zero pledges (Andresen & Agrawala, 2002; He, 2021), while financial institutions and multinational oil corporations have followed suit (Bach, 2019; Berkouwer & Peppelenbos, 2025). In this discourse, fossil fuels are cast as incompatible with planetary survival, while renewable energy is framed as the inevitable future. The result is the delegitimization of hydrocarbon dependence and the creation of reputational and political risks for countries that hold contrary opinions or refuse to sign or ratify global pacts (Depledge *, 2005).

OPEC in the Climate Discourse

OPEC occupies an ambivalent position in this discursive field. On one hand, its identity is closely tied to fossil fuels, making it a target of criticism from climate activists, policymakers, and scholars who portray it as an obstacle to global climate progress (Almoguera et al., 2011; Depledge, 2008). On the other hand, OPEC like many developing countries with development pathways mostly reliant on fossil fuels has actively sought to shape the discourse emphasising narratives of equity, development, and technological solutions (Johnson, 2017). In climate negotiations, OPEC countries frequently invoke the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” (CBDR), arguing that developed countries bear historical responsibility for emissions and therefore should bear a greater share of mitigation burden (Okereke, 2010). This rhetorical strategy reframes the climate challenge not as a universal obligation but as a matter of justice and fairness. By so doing, OPEC positions itself as a defender of Global South interests, even as it seeks to preserve space for continued hydrocarbon production (Depledge, 2008).

OPEC has also resisted the portrayal of oil as incompatible with climate action. Instead, it promotes discourses of “energy security”, “economic diversification”, and “technological neutrality”. For instance, the organisation emphasises carbon capture, utilisation, and storage (CCUS) as a pathway to reconcile fossil fuel use with emissions reduction (OPEC, 2025b). This reframing challenges the simplistic logic of fossil fuel versus renewable fuel by asserting that hydrocarbons can remain part of the global energy mix under the right technological conditions.

Discursive Instruments of Pressure on OPEC

The power of climate discourses is reinforced through material instruments that translate narratives into practice. One such mechanism is the financial divestment movement, which frames investment in fossil fuels as both economically risky and morally unacceptable (Ansar et al., 2013). As major institutional investors withdraw from hydrocarbons, OPEC producers face not only shrinking markets but also reputational stigma, even though the literature remain inconclusive about the effectiveness of divestment (Schwartz et al., 2024). The discourse of stranded resources and assets highlights this risk, suggesting that much of OPEC’s reserves may never be monetised if global climate goals are met (Bos & Gupta, 2018; Kemitare et al., 2025; McGlade & Ekins, 2015; Van Der Ploeg & Rezai, 2020).

Another discursive instrument is trade policy. The EU’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), for example, is justified in the language of climate responsibility but functions as an economic pressure on carbon-intensive exporters, many of which are in the Global South (Farag, 2025). By framing carbon-intensive trade as environmentally illegitimate, CBAM implicitly challenges the development models of OPEC states that rely on energy-intensive exports. Finally, the legitimacy of OPEC is increasingly challenged in global public opinion. With the increasing popularity and reach through social media, youth-led climate movements such as “Fridays for Future”, frame oil-producing states and corporate entities as moral villains who only care for profit at the expense of the earth’s survival (Mkono et al., 2020). This discursive environment reduces the political space for OPEC to justify hydrocarbons dependence, compelling members to adopt at least rhetorical alignment with climate goals.

OPEC's Discursive Adaptation: Balancing Development and Transition

Despite these pressures, OPEC has demonstrated considerable discursive agility. Collectively, the organisation has sought to position itself as a constructive participant in climate governance, highlighting its commitment to the Paris Agreement while emphasising the need for a balanced approach that considers energy security, economic growth, and environmental protection (UNFCCC, 2017). This narrative allows OPEC to resist being cast as a spoiler, laggard, or climate villain while maintaining rhetorical room for continued fossil fuel production.

The climate discourse thus functions as a double-edged sword for OPEC. On one side, it delegitimises hydrocarbons and creates pressures that undermine the rentier model of development. On the other, it provides normative resources such as justice, equity, and technological pathways that OPEC can appropriate to defend its interests. This discursive contestation is central to understanding OPEC's adoptive responses. By situating OPEC within the global discourse of climate change, it becomes clear that the organisation is not simply resisting material pressures but actively engaging in a struggle over meaning (Hajer, 2012; Johnson, 2017). Climate governance is as much about framing and legitimacy as it is about emissions and technology. OPEC's future, therefore, hinges not only on how fast the world transitions away from fossil fuels but also on how it successfully navigates the discursive terrain of climate politics.

OPEC's Adaptive Responses

The global discourse of climate change exerts intense pressure on OPEC states however, the organisation and its members have not responded passively. Instead, OPEC has developed a range of adaptive strategies that operate on both the collective and national/individual levels. Collectively, OPEC emphasises stability, energy security, and technological solutions as central to the climate transition. Individually, member states pursue varied paths of adaptation, shaped by domestic political economy, development imperatives, and geopolitical positioning. This section first examines OPEC's collective strategies and then turns to case studies of Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and the UAE, concluding with an assessment of commonalities and divergences across these responses;

OPEC'S Collective Strategies

One of OPEC's most visible adaptation to the changing global energy landscape has been its collaboration with other organisations to reinforce its position and bolster its collective bargaining power. Prominent among these collaborations is the OPEC+ which since 2016 has allowed OPEC to cooperate with non-member producers most notably Russia, to coordinate output levels and stabilise oil prices (Kozhanov, 2023; Montant, 2025). By consolidating its role in price management, OPEC+ secures the revenue base that underpins members' ability to pursue adaptation strategies (Fattouh & Sen, 2016; Montant, 2024). Other organisations with which OPEC collaborates in a world being redefined by the urgency of climate action and the associated challenges of energy security is the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) (OPEC, 2024).

These inter-organisational platforms reflect OPEC's recognition that the traditional market dominance of OPEC has weakened, requiring new forms of coalition-building to sustain not only influence but take on an active role in meeting climate action goals

and securing the earth (Economou & Fattouh, 2021). Discursively, OPEC presents itself as a responsible stakeholder in global energy governance. Official communiqués emphasise a “balanced approach” to the energy transition, foregrounding three interrelated objectives; energy security, economic development, and environmental sustainability (OPEC, 2025a). This tripartite framing allows OPEC to rhetorically align with international climate goals while defending continued investment in hydrocarbons.

Another collective adaptive measure adopted by OPEC is the creation of the OPEC Fund to support climate action (OPEC Fund, 2024). Accordingly the fund which adopted its first Climate Action Plan in 2022 has ambitious targets of increasing climate financing by 30% by year 2030 as well as other goals that include synchronising its objectives with those of the Paris Agreement. To secure the future the OPEC Fund emphasises three core areas namely (i) climate finance and energy mitigation (ii) food security and climate adaptation, and (iii) nature-based solution or protection of ecosystems and biodiversity. OPEC adaptation also promotes technological neutrality, arguing that climate objectives can be achieved not only through renewable energy but also through innovations in carbon management such as carbon capture, utilisation, and storage (CCUS)(OPEC, 2025a, 2025b) . By highlighting CCUS, OPEC contests the framing of fossil fuels as inherently unsustainable. Instead, constructing a narrative in which hydrocarbons remain part of the long-term energy mix. This narrative is reinforced through OPEC’s annual ‘World Oil Outlook’ which consistently projects oil demand remaining strong for decades, even under aggressive climate scenarios (OPEC, 2025a).

OPEC has also mobilised the discourse of justice and equity. In negotiations, its members stress the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities,” pointing out the fact that the highly industrialised North have contributed the most to the current climate change crisis and the accumulation of green gases in the earth’s atmosphere (Baer, 2011; Okereke, 2010; Timmons Roberts & Parks, 2007). Consequently, not only do these discourses highlight that the Global North bears historical responsibility for emissions, they are also the leading source of ongoing emissions. This strategy reframes climate action as an issue of fairness rather than purely environmental necessity, legitimising demands for financial and technological transfers to support the transition efforts of OPEC’s member states.

Adaptation in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia, OPEC’s largest producer, epitomises the tension between hydrocarbon dependence and climate adaptation. Oil accounts for roughly 70% of government revenue and 80% of export earnings (International Monetary Fund. Middle East and Central Asia Dept., 2022). Recognising the risks of long-term demand decline, the country initiated its Vision 2030 agenda, which aims to reduce dependence on oil rents. Key pillars of this diversification strategy include development of its tourism, financial services, and manufacturing sectors, alongside major infrastructure projects.

Concurrently, Saudi Arabia has promoted the concept of a Circular Carbon Economy (CCE), unveiled at the G20 Summit in the year 2020. The CCE framework emphasises reducing, reusing, recycling, and removing carbon emissions, integrating fossil fuels into a sustainable energy future rather than displacing them (Shehri et al.,

2023). Through this discourse, Saudi Arabia positions itself as an innovator in climate solutions while preserving hydrocarbons as central to the global energy system.

Saudi Arabia has demonstrated commitment to developing an energy mix also incorporating renewable/green energy sources such as the Sakaka Solar Plant and other proposed hydrogen projects. These pragmatic actions bolster its claims to energy transition. Paradoxically, Aramco, the state-owned oil company further demonstrates a policy of expanding oil production physical manifesting Saudi Arabia's position that renewable energy and fossil fuel can co-exist under the right conditions. This dual strategy represents a rhetorical alignment with climate discourse but also creates room for the material defence of hydrocarbon use and exploitation.

Adaptation in Nigeria

Nigeria illustrates the vulnerability of rentier states in the Global South to the demands of climate change. Oil accounts for around 90% of export earnings and half of government revenue (World Bank, 2022). Despite repeated diversification plans, the economy remains deeply mono-product being dependent on hydrocarbons particularly petroleum. Infrastructural deficits, governance challenges, and fiscal instability limit adaptive capacity. Endemic state corruption has played a significant role in the failure of its diversification efforts and the severely limited conditions of adaptive capacity in the country (David et al., 2024).

In climate negotiations, Nigeria emphasises the discourse of equity and vulnerability. The country highlights its relatively low per capita emissions compared to developed economies. Nigerian officials argue that the country cannot be expected to rapidly abandon hydrocarbons while poverty levels remain high and renewable energy infrastructure is underdeveloped. Domestically, Nigeria has adopted a Climate Change Act (2021) committing to net-zero emissions by 2060. However, implementation capacity is weak, and the government simultaneously pursues oil exploration in frontier basins to expand reserves (Lar et al., 2023; State House, 2023). Renewable energy projects, such as off-grid solar for rural electrification, remain marginal relative to oil and gas. Nigeria thus reflects the double bind of OPEC states where rhetorical commitment to climate discourse is strong but structural dependence on hydrocarbons for development is stronger.

Adaptation in UAE

UAE has crafted a distinctive adaptation strategy centred on green branding and international leadership (Dargin, 2021). As the first Middle Eastern country to announce net-zero target by 2050, and the host of COP28 in 2023, the UAE presents itself as a pioneer of climate action in the region. Through initiatives like Masdar City, a planned sustainable urban development, and large-scale solar investments like the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoun Solar Park, the UAE positions itself at the forefront of renewable energy. It has also invested heavily in hydrogen and carbon capture projects, diversifying its energy portfolio.

Yet the UAE remains deeply committed to hydrocarbons. The Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) is investing billions to expand oil production capacity with output targets projected to exceed 5 million barrels per day by 2030. This dual approach, expanding of oil alongside aggressive renewable investments, reflects a strategy of hedging i.e. maintaining oil rents while constructing a reputation as a global hub of green energy

Commonalities and Divergence in the Adaptive Strategies of Case Studies

The climate adaptation strategies of Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and UAE exhibit commonalities and significant differences which serves as a broad view of the state of climate adaptation in OPEC. Commonalities seem to converge around three key themes;

- i. All three countries rhetorically commit to net-zero or sustainable transitions even if the practicality, timeline and credibility of such commitments vary. This highlights a discursive alignment with global climate goals.

- ii. All three countries advocate and consistently promote narratives that justify continued petroleum production. Their advocacy at least in relation to Saudi Arabia and the UAE rely heavily on defence of hydrocarbons through innovative and technological optimism

- iii. All three countries seek to maintain hydrocarbon revenues as the fiscal foundation for development while cautiously pursuing diversification. This highlights the balancing of rents and reform

The divergences in their adaptive strategies are informed by domestic political economies;

- i. Saudi Arabia pursues a state-led diversification strategy backed by massive financial reserves, enabling ambitious but centralised adaptation projects

- ii. Nigeria struggles with weak institutions, fiscal instability, limited investment in capacity building, and endemic corruption which constrain its ability to move beyond oil dependence.

- iii. UAE leverages its small population, significant financial wealth, and global connectivity to brand itself as both a hydrocarbon power and a renewable energy pioneer.

These divergences highlight the unevenness of OPEC's adaptation. While wealthier members with more responsible governance can afford to experiment with dual strategies of expansion and transition, poorer members with histories of endemic corruption are trapped in the hydrocarbon dependency cycle. Collectively, however, OPEC continues to present a united front in international discourse, emphasising equity, technological neutrality, and the need for a balanced energy transition.

The Development vs. Decarbonisation Double Bind

Drawing from the above it can be argued that OPEC states are confronted with a predicament of structural contradiction between the developmental model underpinning rentier economies and the global push for decarbonisation. Rentier theory emphasises that states reliant on external rents, particularly oil and gas, structure their political economies around distributive rather than productive logics (Beblawi & Luciani, 2016b). Government legitimacy and social contracts in OPEC states are intimately tied to revenues from hydrocarbons, which fund subsidies, public sector employment, and infrastructural development.

Decarbonisation as packaged and being marketed by Global North actors as essentially exclusive of fossil fuel, represents not merely an environmental challenge but an existential disruption of the political economy but more importantly the survival of state regimes in OPEC. Indeed, if global oil demands decline in line with ambitious

climate scenarios, the fiscal foundation of rentier governance of many OPEC states may like erode. For many of these states, particularly those in the Global South with limited economic diversification like Nigeria, Iraq, Venezuela, Angola, the stakes are high with profound implications for economic stability, regime resilience, and social welfare systems all of which will be likely disrupted or even collapse if pipelines for oil rents are cut off.

Additionally, global financial flows increasingly discriminate against hydrocarbons. Major banks and investment funds have adopted Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria that restrict fossil fuel financing (IEA, 2023; Zhao & Lin, 2025). This dynamic accelerates the marginalisation of OPEC economies by constraining their ability to secure external capital for oil and gas projects, even as domestic fiscal space narrows due to price volatility. The simultaneous need to invest in renewable alternatives further strains already fragile budgets. This aligns with underdevelopment paradigms that the climate change action agenda as framed by the Global North has become a tool for the control and subordination of Global South nations.

Energy Poverty and Development Imperatives

While OPEC states are often portrayed as obstacles to climate action, they highlight a legitimate concern. This concern revolves around the persistence of energy poverty and developmental deficits in the Global South. According to the International Energy Agency over 600 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa lack access to electricity (IEA, 2022). For oil producers like Nigeria and Angola, the export of hydrocarbons generates the revenue needed to expand domestic energy infrastructure, even as global discourse calls for phasing them out. This creates a paradox where hydrocarbons are at once the problem and solution. They are the principal source of emissions driving climate change, yet they remain the only viable fiscal foundation for developmental investments in much of the Global South. Unlike wealthier OPEC members such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, poorer producers cannot rely on sovereign wealth funds or financial reserves to cushion the transition. Instead, they confront a development-decarbonisation double bind manifest as international pressure to transition to renewable energy colliding with immediate development imperatives including poverty alleviation, improving healthcare, and facilitating education.

Normative Dimensions: Climate Justice and Equity

This structural bind opens onto the normative terrain of climate justice. OPEC states often invoke the principle of “Common but differentiated responsibilities” (CBDR), enshrined in the United Nations FCCC (UNFCCC), to argue that the Global North has contributed disproportionately to emissions released into the earth’s atmosphere meaning they bear more responsibility for historical emissions (Baer, 2011; Bos & Gupta, 2018; Sultana, 2022). From this perspective, demands for rapid decarbonisation are viewed as unjust impositions that constrain the development of countries that contributed least to the problem. This has brought to the fore the issue of climate justice which in its simplest sense is the recognition and acknowledgment by international stakeholders that the effects of climate change are not felt equally across the globe rather, vulnerable and often marginalised communities bear the brunt of the burden despite contributing the least to the problem (UNDP, 2023). Consequently, at the heart of climate justice are concerns of fairness and equity in the recognition of

historical responsibility and in the distribution of burdens for climate action (Sultana, 2022).

Consequently, demands for rapid decarbonisation as a universal goal of climate action constitutes distributive injustice. This distributive injustice is further compounded by the asymmetry in adaptive capacity. Wealthy nations and often industrialised nations have the material resources and knowledge necessary to cushion the effects of rapid decarbonisation. In contrast, many OPEC countries do not have the material resources or technical knowledge and technology to cope with rapid transition. Therefore, requiring them to decarbonise at the same pace as developed, post-industrial and wealthy countries risks exacerbating global inequality.

Critical to the issue of climate justice is the notion of ‘intergenerational equity’ which argues that both the actions and inactions of present generations regarding resource use and environmental quality, will have effects on the rights and well-being of future generations (Chandler, 2023; Newell et al., 2021). While OPEC has not issued an official position on intergenerational equity, it has been a vocal advocate and supporter of environmental quality, sustainable economic growth, and human capital development through oil funding (Ayomitunde Aderemi et al., 2025). From this stand can be inferred, that hydrocarbon revenue, applying the study’s political economy approach, is central to financing investments in education, healthcare, transportation and other forms of infrastructure as well as diversification (Morteza et al., 2021), that will drive sustainable development that will benefit future generations. Therefore, prematurely cutting hydrocarbon sale is tantamount to denying developing societies the funding source to convert finite natural resources into long-term human development.

Balancing the Logic of Development and Decarbonisation

The double bind of development and decarbonisation thus crystallizes two diametrically opposed logics. On one hand, the logic of survival compels OPEC members to defend hydrocarbons as the fiscal basis of national development. On the other hand, concerns that they do not lose legitimacy and become isolated in international negotiations mean they must align, even rhetorically at least with global climate discourse, as packaged in the logic of decarbonisation. This explains why OPEC states simultaneously expand oil production while adopting net-zero pledges and investing in renewable energy.

From a normative standpoint, resolving this bind requires reimagining climate governance frameworks to incorporate justice-based considerations. This might involve substantial climate finance, technology transfers, or differentiated timelines that allow OPEC members to pursue gradual transitions without undermining developmental imperatives. Without such measures, the risk is a fragmented global order in which OPEC states resist decarbonisation, undermining collective climate goals.

Conclusion

The global discourse on climate change has placed OPEC at a critical juncture. The intensifying pressures for decarbonisation challenges both the organisation’s external legitimacy and the internal stability of its member states. This article has argued that OPEC’s responses can be understood through the double bind of development versus decarbonisation. Structurally, rentier political economies remain dependent on hydrocarbons for fiscal stability, making abrupt transitions politically and

economically unfeasible. Normatively, OPEC invokes principles of climate justice and equity, contending that the Global North bears historical responsibility and the Global South producers should not be forced to sacrifice development for a crisis they did not create.

The empirical analysis using the OPEC states of Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and UAE revealed variance in adaptive strategies by OPEC member states. Collectively, OPEC frames itself as a responsible stakeholder, advancing discourses of balance, technological neutrality, and equity. At the national level, the diverging adoptive pathways are largely influenced by political economy, domestic development, and political imperatives. While wealthier states like Saudi Arabia and UAE can pursue proactive adaptation, poorer nations like Nigeria are trapped in cycles of oil dependency. The common thread to all their strategies is that they seek to preserve hydrocarbon rents while rhetorically embracing climate discourse. The broader implication is that climate governance will struggle or even fail if the development dilemmas of OPEC states is not addressed. Accordingly, without financial and technological support, they are unlikely to pursue deep decarbonisation thus threatening global efforts to limit global warming. Conversely, if OPEC fails to adapt, members risk fiscal collapse and political instability outcomes with global security and humanitarian consequences. The following policy recommendations are put forward towards addressing the paradox of development versus decarbonisation facing OPEC states;

Policy Recommendations for OPEC

1. Reframe the organisational narrative beyond hydrocarbons to reduce the risk of alienating climate allies. OPEC should broaden its identity from a petroleum cartel to an energy transition stakeholder emphasising expertise in energy markets, investment mobilisation and, carbon management.

2. OPEC should deepen South-South cooperation with other developing countries in climate negotiations. They should coordinate advocacy for climate finance, technology transfer, and differentiated timelines to amplify its bargaining power beyond oil markets.

Policy Recommendations for OPEC Member States

3. Rentier states like Nigeria must invest in sectors that reduce fiscal dependence on hydrocarbons. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the UAE's green industrial policies illustrate viable models, though context-specific tailoring is essential.

4. Invest in human capital and institutional capacity because successful transitions rely heavily not just on economic diversification but also on strengthening governance institutions. OPEC states must prioritise investment in education, vocational training, anti-corruption and public sector reforms that prepare citizens for employment in non-oil sectors.

5. OPEC member states should hedge their chances by pursuing dual strategies built around maintenance of hydrocarbon revenue in the short-term while gradually scaling renewable energy sources in the long-term.

Policy Recommendations for International Actors

6. Support just transition partnerships by pursuing climate and transition agreements tailored specifically to different OPEC members

7. Facilitate technology transfers such as carbon capture, hydrogen production, and energy storage to empower OPEC states to integrate hydrocarbons into low-carbon pathways

8. Redesign climate finance mechanisms for hydrocarbon dependent economies to support and facilitate decarbonisation while supporting fiscal stability

9. Shift away from universal decarbonisation timetables to recognition of developmental equity in negotiations to reduce resistance to climate action by OPEC countries.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethics Statement

The author confirms that this study was conducted in accordance with the Journal’s Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.

THE SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA: WHAT CHANGED BETWEEN THE OLD AND THE NEW?

Kalu Ndubuisi Emegha, <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0558-8928>

PhD, Department of Political Science
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University
Igbariam, Anambra State, Nigeria.
Email: kn.emegha@coou.edu.ng

Sheriff F. Folarin, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3691-2824>

Professor, Institute for the Future of Knowledge
Faculty of Humanities, University of Johannesburg;
Department of Political Science, Texas State University. Email: jrj191@txstate.edu

Abstract: Africa, historically celebrated as the “Golden Continent,” has long been endowed with immense natural wealth (gold, diamonds, oil, cobalt, lithium, and more); however, it remains plagued by poverty, inequality, and political instability. This study draws on historical and contemporary evidence to argue that what Europeans coveted in the 19th century remains the focal point of foreign interest. From ancient civilisations such as Ghana, Mali, and Great Zimbabwe to the 19th-century Scramble for Africa, external powers have sought to control and exploit Africa’s resources. The colonial conquest restructured African economies into extractive systems to serve European industrialisation while dismantling indigenous governance and social cohesion. Despite political independence, these structures endure through modern neo-colonial mechanisms, including resource-backed debt, multinational corporate dominance, and aid dependency. This paper found that today’s competition for Africa’s critical minerals, driven by the global green energy transition, mirrors colonial exploitation with China, the U.S., and the EU securing long-term access under the guise of investment and development., which represent the new scramble for the continent, thus being marginally different from the old order or scramble highlighted by the Berlin Treaty of 1885. Therefore, the persistence of extractive systems underscores the need for African nations to reclaim economic sovereignty, pursue value-added industries, and strengthen intra-continental cooperation to transform resource wealth into sustainable development.

Keywords: *Colonialism, Economic dependency, Neo-colonialism, New Scramble, Old Scramble, Resource Curse.*



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Introduction

Long before the industrial era, Africa's wealth was globally recognised, as empires such as Ghana, Mali, and Songhai flourished due to their control of gold-producing regions and dominance of trans-Saharan trade networks. Endowed with gold, salt, ivory, and other goods, cities like Timbuktu became legendary trade hubs connecting sub-Saharan Africa with North Africa and the wider Mediterranean (Matlosa, 2025). Egypt was the chief exporter of gold as early as 2000 BC, and ancient historian Herodotus marvelled at the abundance of gold in Ethiopia. He famously noted that: "The furthest inhabited country towards the southwest is Ethiopia, and their gold is found in great abundance from ancient times until now" (Harding, 2024). The continent's natural endowment made it a natural target for external powers seeking to grow their empires. What followed was the slave trade, territorial conquest, and economic plunder (Afigbo, 1987). The Berlin Conference gave European powers the green light to partition Africa, with no regard for indigenous cultures, languages, or governance structures (Otite, 1994). At its height, Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, and the Netherlands had divided nearly all of Africa, leaving only Liberia and Ethiopia as non-colonised states (Harding, 2024).

Notably, European powers with populations significantly smaller than the territories they occupied assumed control over vast lands in Africa. Belgium, with a population of only 7.5 million at the time, laid claim to the Congo Free State, which was 65 times larger than Belgium itself. Portugal, with a population of just over 5 million, colonised Angola and Mozambique, each about 21 times its size (Ashimolowo, 2007). These staggering figures underscore the audacity and greed of colonialism and highlight how Africa's resources were, and continue to be, the real attraction (Teperek, 2025). As such, these colonial templates, a mix of resource theft, political subjugation, and artificial borders, laid the foundation for persistent underdevelopment.

Independence did not bring liberation from exploitation. As Aja (2002) notes, while most African nations gained political freedom in the mid-20th century, economic dependence deepened. The new model of "development" promoted by the West reinforced dependency by tying African economies to extractive industries controlled by multinational corporations. Post-independence, new forms of control emerged, i.e., "Neocolonialism", through multinational corporations, foreign funding, and strategic trade agreements that target Africa's raw materials (Aja, 2002). Today, the fundamental drivers of exploitation remain intact, even as the rhetoric has shifted. Thus, Africa now supplies the world with materials critical for the green and digital economies, such as green energy and rare minerals; however, the continent continues to suffer from underdevelopment, conflict, and poverty. Cobalt from the Democratic Republic of Congo powers electric cars in the West; lithium from Rwanda fuels mobile phone production in Asia; and oil from Nigeria and Gabon feeds Europe's energy demand. Meanwhile, the countries providing these raw materials remain underdeveloped, facing infrastructure deficits, unstable governance, and persistent poverty (Schibli, 2025).

This enduring paradox is at the heart of this study, which posits that Africa's bounty continues to attract foreign intervention, and the patterns of extraction and economic marginalisation established in the 19th century persist to date. This paper explores these dynamics in detail, beginning with an examination of Africa's ancient wealth, through

the 19th-century colonial era, the scramble for Africa, and the contemporary structure of neo-colonial extraction. It draws upon historical data, contemporary economic statistics, and global geopolitical analysis, and posits that Africa remains poor not because nature has changed or the people are lazy, but because global systems are structured to extract, rather than to empower (Otite, 1994; Aja, 2002). To this end, the study also aims to challenge the prevailing narrative of African underdevelopment as a result of internal dysfunction. While acknowledging the role of corrupt governance and internal divisions, it demonstrates that these are often products of, or exacerbated by, external interventions. In view of these, this paper invites its readers to reflect on the long arc of history, to question modern global relationships with Africa, and to confront the uncomfortable truth that what Europeans found in the 19th century has not changed; the perceived difference is that the exploitation is now more discreet, more structured, and more systemic. Africa's natural wealth is unchanged; what has changed is who controls it and under which guise, replacing overt colonial conquest with systemic economic dependency.

Africa presents one of history's greatest paradoxes- as a continent endowed with abundant natural resources, from gold and diamonds to oil, gas, and critical minerals such as cobalt and lithium; yet it remains one of the world's most impoverished continents. This raised pressing questions: How can a continent so naturally wealthy remain so economically underdeveloped? Why does foreign interest in Africa continue to revolve around extracting its resources? Why has Africa remained the epicentre of foreign interest, extraction, and exploitation for centuries? The central thesis of this paper is that natural resources are the heart of foreign interference in Africa, as historical patterns of division, extraction, and underdevelopment established during colonialism persist, although in modern forms. The central argument is that the scramble for Africa, either in the 19th century, the post-independence period, or more recently, remains the same. The only difference is the newcomers from the Eastern Bloc, the scope of exploitation, and the masks of civility that the new scramble seems to adorn. Despite changing global contexts, foreign powers continue to covet Africa's natural wealth. The paper argues that Africa's predicament has shifted from overt colonial exploitation to seemingly benevolent development strategies, disguised in modern rhetoric such as aid, investment, and partnership.

Conceptual Delineations

Scramble for Africa and Territorial Partitioning

The Scramble for Africa historically refers to the period during the late 19th and early 20th centuries when European powers rapidly colonised and partitioned the African continent. This process was formalised by the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, where European states agreed on rules for territorial claims without African representation, leading to arbitrary borders that disregarded existing ethnic and cultural boundaries (Pakenham, 1991; Herbst, 2000). The colonial partitioning was driven by economic interests, geopolitical competition, and the desire to control resources and strategic territories (Pakenham, 1991).

The borders drawn during this period often split ethnic groups and combined rival communities within artificial political units, sowing seeds for future conflicts and governance challenges (Herbst, 2000). These colonial boundaries have largely

persisted post-independence, shaping national identities and political dynamics in contemporary Africa (Herbst, 2000; Englebert, 2009).

In the contemporary era, the "new scramble" for Africa involves renewed competition among global powers and multinational corporations for access to Africa's natural resources, markets, and geopolitical influence. While formal colonial rule has ended, patterns of economic dependency and external influence continue, often described as neo-colonialism (Taylor, 2014; Carmody, 2011). This new phase reflects continuity in external interests shaping Africa's political economy, albeit through more complex and indirect mechanisms such as foreign direct investment, debt, and security partnerships (Taylor, 2014; Akahome & Igwe, 2026).

Economic Exploitation

The Scramble for Africa was primarily motivated by economic exploitation, as European powers sought to secure access to Africa's abundant natural resources to fuel their industrial economies (Pakenham, 1991). Colonial administrations established extractive economic systems that prioritised the export of raw materials such as minerals, rubber, and agricultural products to Europe, while limiting local industrial development (Rodney, 1972). This created a pattern of economic dependency, where African economies were integrated into the global capitalist system as suppliers of cheap raw materials and consumers of manufactured goods from Europe. The imposition of monopolistic trade practices and forced labour further entrenched economic inequalities and underdevelopment. Thus, economic exploitation was central to the Scramble for Africa, shaping both colonial policies and the enduring structural challenges African countries face today (Rodney, 1972; Akahome & Igwe, 2026).

Political Control and Sovereignty Issues

The Scramble for Africa was a late 19th-century process where European powers rapidly colonised African territories, driven largely by economic interests and geopolitical competition. This led to the imposition of artificial borders without regard for existing ethnic or political divisions. Political control was established through military conquest and colonial administration, often undermining indigenous governance systems (Adetula, 2026). Sovereignty issues arose because these imposed borders and foreign rule disrupted traditional authority and created lasting challenges for post-colonial African states, which inherited contested boundaries and struggled with internal divisions. Additionally, sovereignty remains complicated by external influences and neo-colonial dynamics, affecting Africa's political autonomy today (Pakenham, 1991; Herbst, 2000; Krasner, 1999).

Post-Colonial Economic and Political Developments

The post-colonial period in Africa, beginning in the mid-20th century, marked a significant transition as newly independent states sought to assert political sovereignty and achieve economic development after decades of colonial rule. Politically, many African nations embarked on state-building efforts aiming to unify diverse ethnic groups within arbitrary colonial borders, often inheriting weak institutions and limited administrative capacity (Herbst, 2000). While independence raised hopes for democracy and self-governance, many countries faced challenges such as authoritarianism, military coups, and civil conflicts, partly due to colonial legacies of divide-and-rule and centralised power structures (Young, 1994).

Economically, post-colonial Africa grappled with transforming extractive colonial economies into diversified and self-sustaining systems. Many states adopted import-substitution industrialisation and state-led development models to reduce dependence on former colonial powers (Rodney, 1972). However, structural issues such as inadequate infrastructure, reliance on commodity exports, and fluctuating global markets hindered sustained growth. Furthermore, debt crises in the 1980s and the imposition of structural adjustment programs by international financial institutions led to economic liberalisation, privatisation, and austerity measures with mixed social and economic outcomes (Adejumobi, 2000).

Despite these challenges, there have been notable political and economic reforms in recent decades, including increased democratisation, regional integration efforts, and economic diversification in some countries (Adejumobi, 2000). Nonetheless, persistent issues like corruption, inequality, and external dependency continue to affect Africa's development trajectory.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted 'Dependency Theory,' which originated in the late 1950s and 1960s as a critical response to modernisation theory, primarily developed by Latin American scholars such as Raúl Prebisch, André Gunder Frank, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023). It emerged to explain why many post-colonial countries remained underdeveloped despite global economic growth (Prebisch, 1950; Frank, 1967).

Dependency Theory posits that the economic development of peripheral (developing) countries is conditioned by their structural dependence on core (developed) countries (Adebanwi, 2026). This relationship results in the transfer of resources from the periphery to the core, thereby hindering autonomous development in the former. Underdevelopment is thus not a stage preceding development, but a condition actively produced and maintained by the global capitalist system through unequal exchange, exploitation, and political domination (Frank, 1967; Aja, 2002).

Key proponents include Raúl Prebisch, who highlighted the declining terms of trade for primary commodity exporters (Prebisch, 1950); André Gunder Frank, who emphasised the concept of "development of underdevelopment" (Frank, 1967); and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who analysed the political and economic structures sustaining dependency.

Major Propositions of the Theory

Structural Inequality: The global economic system is divided into core and periphery, where the core exploits the periphery through trade, investment, and political influence.

Unequal Exchange: Peripheral countries export raw materials and import manufactured goods, leading to unfavourable terms of trade and resource drain.

Historical Continuity: Colonialism established patterns of economic dependence that persist in new forms post-independence.

Limited Autonomy: Peripheral states have constrained policy space due to external pressures and internal elite interests aligned with the core.

Need for Structural Change: True development requires breaking dependency through delinking from the global capitalist system or restructuring it fundamentally (Prebisch, 1950; Frank, 1967; Aja, 2002).

Application of the Theory to the Study

Dependency Theory provides a robust framework to analyse the continuities and changes (Uchendu, 2000) between the Old Scramble for Africa—characterised by direct colonial conquest and territorial partition—and the New Scramble, marked by neo-colonial economic penetration, foreign investment, and geopolitical competition. The theory helps explain how the legacy of colonial exploitation established structural dependencies that persist in contemporary Africa's economic and political relations with global powers.

In the Old Scramble, European powers imposed direct political control to extract resources and integrate African economies into the global capitalist system as raw material suppliers (Imobighe, 1998). Dependency Theory elucidates how this historical process created a pattern of underdevelopment and economic dependence that shaped African states' post-colonial trajectories. In the New Scramble, although formal colonial rule has ended, the theory highlights how multinational corporations, foreign governments, and international financial institutions continue to exert influence through investment, trade agreements, and security partnerships that maintain Africa's peripheral status.

Moreover, the theory's emphasis on unequal exchange and limited autonomy sheds light on how African countries navigate pressures from global actors while attempting to assert sovereignty and pursue development. It also frames the New Scramble as a continuation of structural dependency, albeit through more complex and indirect mechanisms such as debt, aid conditionalities, and geopolitical alliances.

Thus, Dependency Theory not only explains the historical roots of Africa's economic and political challenges but also provides critical insights into the evolving nature of external engagement with the continent. It underscores that while the forms of control and competition may have changed, the underlying dynamics of dependency and inequality remain central to understanding what has changed—and what has stayed the same—between the Old and New Scrambles for Africa.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative comparative historical research design to explore and analyse the differences and continuities between the Old Scramble for Africa (late 19th to early 20th century) and the New Scramble for Africa (post-colonial era to present). This design is suitable because it allows for an in-depth examination of complex historical and contemporary phenomena, focusing on political, economic, and social dimensions over time.

Major Areas of Qualitative Comparative Historical Research Design:

1. Comparative Historical Analysis

The study systematically compared the characteristics, actors, motivations, and consequences of the Old Scramble for Africa with those of the New Scramble. This

involves analysing colonial-era partitioning, imperial ambitions, and the geopolitical context of the 19th century alongside contemporary patterns of foreign investment, resource competition, and geopolitical influence in Africa today.

2. Document and Literature Review

A comprehensive review of primary and secondary sources was conducted, including historical documents, treaties, colonial records, contemporary policy papers, academic articles, and reports on post-colonial economic and political developments. This provides a rich empirical base to trace changes in actors (from European powers to global and regional players), strategies, and impacts on African states and societies.

3. Thematic Content Analysis

The study employed thematic content analysis to identify and interpret key themes such as territorial partitioning, economic exploitation, political control, sovereignty issues, and development challenges. This method elucidates how the nature of competition and control over African resources and governance has evolved.

4. Case Studies

To deepen understanding, selected case studies of specific African countries or regions affected by both the Old and New Scrambles were analysed. These case studies illustrate how historical colonial borders and legacies continue to influence contemporary geopolitical and economic dynamics.

Sources of Data

Data for the study were drawn from the following: Archival materials and historical records from colonial administrations and international treaties; Scholarly articles, books, and reports on colonial history and contemporary African geopolitics; Policy documents and analyses from international organisations and think tanks; and Media reports and expert commentaries on recent foreign investments and geopolitical manoeuvres in Africa.

Analysis of Africa's Wealth Before the 19th Century

Long before colonial borders and European interference, African civilisations thrived on the strength of their natural resources, vibrant trade networks, and sophisticated governance systems. These early societies demonstrated remarkable economic acumen and global connectivity, debunking stereotypes of primitiveness or isolation.

(1) West African Kingdoms and Trans-Saharan Trade

Between the 7th and 14th centuries, empires like Ghana, Mali, and Songhai rose to prominence through their control over the lucrative "Trans-Saharan gold and salt trade" (Lee, 2014). Ghana, established by the Soninke people in the 7th century, accumulated immense wealth by taxing caravans carrying salt, ivory, and kola nuts across its territory. The Mali Empire, succeeding Ghana, reached its zenith under Mansa Musa (1312–1337 CE), a ruler whose pilgrimage to Mecca distributed so much gold that it destabilised regional markets (Ashimolowo, 2007). The empire also fostered intellectual advancement by developing centres like Timbuktu and Djenné into renowned hubs for Islamic scholarship and learning. Following Mali, the Songhai Empire emerged as West Africa's largest state, continuing with the accumulation of wealth through trade along the Niger and Sahara. In West Africa, resource-rich

kingdoms utilised tax systems to enrich their state coffers and foster cultural development (Cartwright, 2024).

(2) East African Coastal Trade and Swahili City-States

Along the Indian Ocean western coastline, the Swahili city-states such as Kilwa, Mombasa, and Sofala thrived from approximately the 8th to the 16th century. Kilwa, for instance, became a powerful economic hub, exporting gold, ivory, and slaves to Arabia, India, and beyond, while importing luxury goods in return (Vernet-Habasque, 2024). These coastal cities were connected to inland African polities such as Great Zimbabwe and Mapungubwe, whose wealth derived largely from controlling gold fields and long-distance trade routes. The archaeological findings at Great Zimbabwe, including Chinese pottery, Arabian glass beads, and gold artifacts, attest to these sophisticated international trade links (Lee, 2014). Across East and Southern Africa, trade networks linked coastal city-states with inland societies, enabling prosperous commerce and wealth-sharing (Vernet-Habasque, 2024).

(3) Southern African Economies and Early Complex Societies

The Great Zimbabwe’s economic foundation was rooted in control of regional gold sources and cattle-rearing businesses. Its elite structures, skillfully crafted in stone, symbolise the wealth and power of a highly organised society (Afigbo, 1987). The city’s reach extended across the Indian Ocean trade network via Swahili ports such as Sofala. These pre-colonial societies featured complex socio-economic structures. Africa’s pre-colonial trade enabled the spread of religion, technology, and knowledge. Mali became a centre of learning and Islamic jurisprudence, attracting scholars from across the Muslim world to Timbuktu and its famous Sankore University (Vernet-Habasque, 2024).

Table 1: Africa’s Wealth before the 19th Century

Empire/Kingdom	Wealth Source	Economic Influence
Ghana Empire	Gold and Salt Trade	Controlled trade routes and taxed caravans
Mali Empire	Gold, Agriculture	Massive wealth under Mansa Musa, scholarly centres
Songhai Empire	Salt, Trade Control	The largest empire in West Africa expanded commerce
Great Zimbabwe	Gold, Cattle	Regional trade hub, architectural sophistication
Swahili City-States	Ivory, Slaves, Gold	Traded with the Middle East, India, and China

Source: Vernet-Habasque (2024).

Table 1 above shows the diverse sources of wealth and economic roles of major African civilisations in the 19th century. The historical record shown in the table above illustrates that most African societies before European colonialism had a foundation of wealth, and they were far from passive or underdeveloped. They built powerful empires, structured complex economies, traded globally, and cultivated centres of learning and culture.

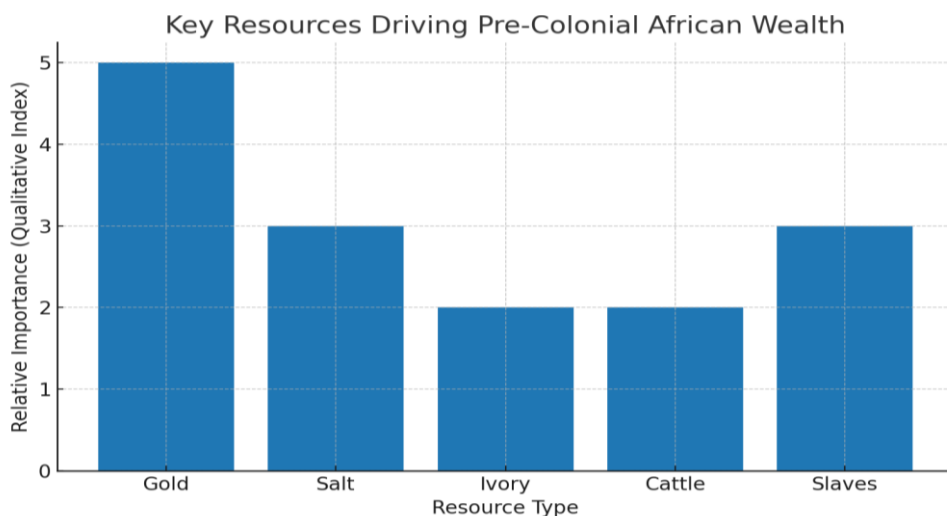


Figure 1: Key Resources Driving Pre-Colonial African Wealth

The chart illustrates the relative importance of different natural resources in building the economies of African empires. Gold still dominates as the primary source of wealth, as these civilisations dispelled the myth that Africa's decline resulted from preexisting backwardness. Instead, they remind us that contemporary underdevelopment stems not from lack of natural endowment or ingenuity, but from centuries of disruption and exploitation and the erasure of indigenous structures. In a continent where Nigeria flares off gas from reserves estimated at over 32 trillion cubic feet (with little domestic benefit), and where Zambia and Botswana export millions of tons of copper while struggling with basic infrastructure, the contradiction of Africa's wealth and poverty becomes clearer (Vernet-Habasque, 2024). Furthermore, foreign-backed armed conflicts, resource-driven civil wars, and political destabilisation remain common across resource-rich countries; a pattern too consistent to ignore.

Colonial Encounters and the 19th-Century Exploitation of Africa

The 19th century marked a critical shift in the relationship between Africa and Europe, characterised by exploration, imperial conquest, and the systematic extraction of African wealth. While European interests in Africa had existed for centuries, the 19th century witnessed formal colonisation under the guise of civilisation and commerce. European colonialism in Africa was not a mere political undertaking; rather, it was an economic operation designed to transfer wealth from Africa to Europe through calculated dispossession of land, minerals, and labour (Rodney, 1972; (Harding, 2024).

(1) The Scramble for Africa and the Berlin Conference

The Berlin Conference (1884–1885) formalised the partition of Africa among European powers, setting off a wave of territorial occupation. This event was not designed to benefit Africans but to regulate European rivalry while maximising resource extraction. Between 1880 and 1914, European control over African land increased from 10% to over 90% (Harding, 2024).

Table 2: Colonial Territories versus Population of Colonial Powers (circa 1900)

Colonial Power	Population (Millions)	Major African Colonies	Territory Size Relative to Home Country
Belgium	7.5	Congo Free State	65x larger
Portugal	5.5	Angola, Mozambique	21x larger
France	41.5	Algeria, Senegal, Mali, etc.	Approx. 20x larger collectively
UK	41.0	Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, etc.	Approx. 30x larger collectively

Source: Harding (2024).

Table 2 above demonstrates the disproportionate control of African territories by small European populations, emphasising the imbalance of power and scale of exploitation. Despite being a small European nation, Belgium, with a population of only 7.5 million at the time, gained control over the Congo Free State, a territory over 65 times larger. Under King Leopold II, the Congo was subjected to brutal extraction of rubber and ivory, leading to an estimated 10 million Congolese deaths (Harding, 2024). Similarly, Portugal, with just over 5 million people, assumed control of Angola and Mozambique, regions over 21 times larger than Portugal itself. These territories were rich in copper, cobalt, and oil, and served as raw material sources for Europe’s industrial growth. African resources became embedded in European development, while Africans were left with environmental degradation, displacement, and underdevelopment (Harding, 2024).

(2) The Exploitation of Minerals and Agriculture

Colonial economies were designed around monoculture and mineral extraction, such that in West Africa, British and French colonisers redirected local agriculture to focus on cocoa, groundnuts, and palm oil; products valuable to European industries. In Southern Africa, minerals like gold and diamonds were extracted in massive quantities, particularly by British-owned corporations like De Beers (Mamdani, 1996). In Nigeria, the British implemented a cash-crop economy that disrupted traditional systems of food production and created long-term dependency on imports. Meanwhile, natural gas and oil fields in the Niger Delta, estimated to hold over 32 trillion cubic feet of gas, were commercialised primarily for export, leaving behind communities plagued by environmental damage and poverty (UNEP, 2011; Ofor, & Udeuhele, 2021).

Table 3: Key African Resources Exploited in the 19th Century

Resource	Region/Country	Colonial Usage
Gold	South Africa, Ghana	Currency reserves, jewellery, and finance
Copper	DR Congo, Zambia	Industrial manufacturing
Rubber	DR Congo	Tire and industrial goods production
Palm Oil	Nigeria, Ghana	Soap, lubricant, and candle industries
Ivory	Central Africa	Luxury goods in Europe
Oil	Nigeria, Angola	Fuel and industrial power

Sources: Harding (2024).

Table 3 shows the widespread extraction of valuable natural resources across Africa, serving European industrial expansion while local populations remained impoverished. The Democratic Republic of Congo, now recognised for having over 1 million metric tons of cobalt, which is critical for modern electronics, was similarly plundered for copper, rubber, and palm oil during colonial rule further reiterates that these extractions enriched colonial powers and laid the groundwork for the modern global digital economy (Harding, 2024).

(3) Justifying Exploitation: Racism and the Myth of Civilising Africa

Colonial expansion was rationalised through racist ideologies that portrayed Africans as inferior and in need of European “civilisation”. Such narratives justified slavery, forced labour, and political domination; hence, by dehumanising Africans, Europeans legitimised theft on a continental scale (Ngang, Iloh & Yuni, 2025). This attitude was visible in policies such as forced taxation and the creation of “customary” authorities that displaced indigenous governance structures. These systems not only eroded African identity but also created elite classes loyal to colonial interests; structures that remain embedded in post-independence politics (Ngang, Iloh & Yuni, 2025).

European colonisers constructed roads, railways, and ports, but not for African development. These infrastructures, according to Ngang, Iloh and Yuni (2025), were purposefully built to link mines and plantations to ports for export. For instance, the railway from Katanga (DRC) to the Atlantic Coast was designed exclusively to transport copper and cobalt to Europe (Schibli, 2025). The educational and healthcare investments were minimal and strategically restricted to a few schools that existed then. These institutions focused on training Africans to become clerks and intermediaries, rather than professionals or entrepreneurs. As such, colonialism engineered a system of economic and intellectual dependence (Ngang, Iloh & Yuni, 2025).

(4) Legacy of the 19th Century Exploitation

The colonial resource drain created profound structural inequalities, as Ngang, Iloh & Yuni (2025) posit that, despite being the source of global commodities, Africa became an underdeveloped periphery. It is noteworthy to say that the wealth extracted from Africa translated into modernity and industrialisation in Europe, while Africa was left impoverished and politically fragmented. In recent years, the continuity of this exploitation has been discussed under the concept of “Neo-colonialism”, where global corporations and international institutions dominate African economies, often using debt and trade agreements to enforce dependency (Bond, 2021).

Thus, the 19th century colonial encounters with Africa were not historical accidents but calculated operations of exploitation. The mineral and agricultural wealth that had sustained African civilisations for centuries was reoriented toward European needs (Schibli, 2025). For Africa, colonisation destroyed indigenous economies and instituted systems of inequality that persist today. This paper posits that the same resources, gold, oil, cobalt, and copper, that drew Europeans to Africa in the 19th century continue to attract foreign powers under modern economic guises. It appears that nature may not have changed; rather, what Europeans found in Africa in the 19th Century is what they are still searching for.

The Post-Colonial Legacy: Continuities and Contradictions

While the end of colonialism in the mid-20th century ushered in political independence for African states, the economic and structural legacies of colonialism have persisted. This section explores the paradox of independence without sovereignty over economic resources, the continuation of extractive patterns, and the contradictions embedded in Africa's post-independence political economy. The question remains that if nature has not changed, why has Africa not prospered with its vast wealth?

(1) Continuity in Economic Exploitation amid Africa's Critical Role in Global Energy

Africa's strategic significance is underscored by its control of critical raw materials as Africa holds nearly 30% of the world's mineral reserves, including: Platinum group metals in South Africa and Zimbabwe; Lithium in the DRC, Mali, and Zimbabwe; Rare earth elements in Burundi and Madagascar; Bauxite and manganese in Ghana and Guinea; Natural gas and oil in Nigeria, Angola, Algeria, and Mozambique (Etteng, 1994). Despite formal independence, most African nations continue to export raw materials while importing finished products, a colonial economic structure originally designed to benefit the colonisers. DR Congo supplies more than 70% of the world's cobalt, a mineral essential for manufacturing lithium-ion batteries used in electric vehicles, smartphones, and renewable energy storage systems (Schibli, 2025). With the global push toward a green energy transition, cobalt has become as geopolitically valuable today as oil was in the 20th century (Schibli, 2025).

The extraction-export model persists, with global corporations and former colonial powers continuing to dominate the mining, oil, and agricultural sectors (Teperek, 2025). Nigeria has over 32 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, yet widespread gas flaring continues, and electricity shortages persist. Even though DR Congo holds over 70% of the world's cobalt reserves, 70% of its population lives below the poverty line (World Bank, 2024). The global race to secure these resources has led countries to re-establish strong diplomatic and economic footprints in Africa. According to a 2024 UNCTAD report, over 40% of Africa's extractive industries are under partial or full foreign ownership, particularly from China, the EU, and the U.S. (World Bank, 2024). Foreign multinational corporations (MNCs) such as Glencore, TotalEnergies, and Shell still dominate Africa's mineral and energy sectors, repatriating profits while leaving minimal local benefits. According to Ohs (2025), "Africa's post-colonial economic framework is still largely determined by global commodity markets and foreign investors; an extension of the colonial extractive logic posture". This continuity, therefore, perpetuates underdevelopment, dependency, and economic vulnerability.

(2) Modern Neocolonialism: Aid and Economic Dependency

Modern neo-colonialism represents the continued economic, political, and cultural domination of African states by former colonial powers and global financial institutions (Mireille, Alain, & Adejare, 2024). This form of indirect control ensures that Africa's rich natural resources are continually extracted with limited benefits for the continent's people. Although most African countries achieved political independence in the mid-20th century, many remain entangled in exploitative trade relationships, mounting external debts, and heavy reliance on foreign aid and multinational corporations. A major manifestation of modern neocolonialism is the perpetual cycle of 'Aid dependence', where African countries receive grants and loans

from Western nations or institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. They often provide such aid with policy strings attached, governing how African nations should manage their economies, education, and governance. A 2024 World Bank report showed that 71% of donor funding to Africa is tied aid, meaning it must be spent on products or services from the donor country. This paper posits that such aid often comes with the extraction of more resources, as clearly illustrated in Table 5 below:

Table 4: Aid versus Illicit Financial Outflows from Africa (in USD Billions)

Year	Aid Received	Illicit Outflows	Net Resource Loss
2015	47	70	-23
2018	50	85	-35
2022	45	89	-44

Sources: Mireille et al., (2024); World Bank, (2025).

The table shows that Africa consistently loses more resources than it gains through aid. Despite receiving billions in development aid, illicit financial flows driven by tax evasion, profit repatriation, and corruption lead to a net loss, sustaining dependency and underdevelopment. In 2022 alone, Africa received \$45 billion in aid, yet over \$89 billion was lost through illicit financial flows, profit repatriation, and tax evasion (UNECA, 2023). Consequently, aid has often served as a tool to maintain economic leverage, rather than genuine development.

The mounting debt crisis is also one of the most evident manifestations of neo-colonialism. African nations, burdened with infrastructure gaps and budget deficits, often turn to international lenders such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and bilateral creditors. It is affirmed that these loans are frequently conditioned upon economic reforms that prioritise foreign interests, reduce government spending on social services, and open domestic markets to external investors. Thus, the structural adjustment programs (SAPs), which were introduced in the 1980s, forced most African countries to cut education, health, and public sector spending, while prioritising debt repayment (Mireille et al., 2024). The outcome was a weakened state apparatus and increased poverty, as clearly demonstrated in the chart below:

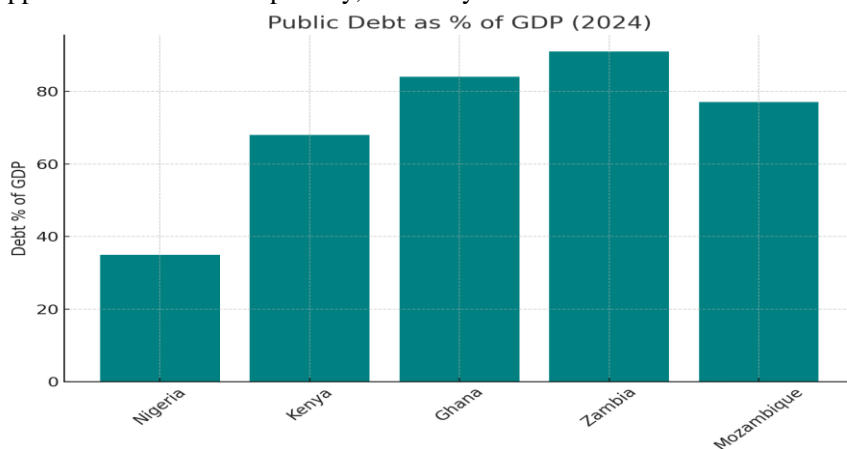


Figure 2: Public Debt as a Percentage of GDP in Selected African Countries

The chart shows the growing debt burdens of countries like Zambia, Ghana and even Mozambique, indicating how external borrowing has created a dependency cycle reminiscent of colonial economic exploitation (African Development Bank, 2023). Debt is utilised as a tool of control, and according to the African Development Bank (2023), over 60% of African nations are either in debt distress or at high risk of it. Many of these debts are tied to infrastructure projects financed by Chinese and Western creditors. In some cases, resource-backed loans force countries to repay with oil, cobalt, or bauxite, locking them into contracts that resemble colonial concession agreements. These levels of indebtedness compromise national sovereignty and economic autonomy, forcing governments into conditionality dictated by international lenders.

(3) Political Fragmentation, Division, and the Resource Curse

The division of Africa at the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 created arbitrary national boundaries that ignored ethnic, cultural, and linguistic realities. Ngang, Iloh and Yuni (2025) affirm that this continues to haunt Africa’s post-colonial politics, resulting in ethnic rivalries, civil wars, and weak national cohesion. These nations possess immense natural resources yet face persistent economic hardship, political instability, and external exploitation. Through their histories, we trace how colonial legacies, neo-colonial interventions, and poor governance contribute to the ongoing underdevelopment of resource-rich African countries.

Take countries like Nigeria, Sudan, and the DR Congo, for example; they have experienced prolonged internal conflicts rooted in colonial boundary-making and unequal resource allocation. As Ngang, Iloh and Yuni (2025), argue, colonial boundaries produced states without nations, leading to post-colonial governance crises”. The fragmentation has weakened continental solidarity, making it easier for external actors to exploit resources by pitting communities, militias, or political elites against each other. This tactic, called “Divide and Extract, is not new; rather, it was used by colonial rulers and is still visible in conflict zones around mineral-rich regions like Katanga in DR Congo or the Niger Delta in Nigeria.

The term ‘Resource Curse’ refers to the paradox where countries rich in natural resources experience poor economic growth, weak institutions, and widespread corruption. Many African nations fall into this category because instead of fostering development, resource wealth often leads to elite capture, rent-seeking, and weakened accountability. Equatorial Guinea is an empirical example where oil accounts for over 90% of its GDP, yet 76% of the population lives in poverty. Similarly, Angola is Africa’s second-largest oil producer, but wealth inequality remains among the highest in the world (Ngang, Iloh and Yuni, 2025).

Nigeria is Africa’s largest economy and holds the continent’s largest reserves of natural gas (32 trillion cubic feet) and oil. Oil accounts for over 90% of Nigeria’s export earnings (Imobighe, 1998). Yet, the country grapples with high unemployment, widespread poverty, and underdeveloped infrastructure. Corruption and poor management of oil revenues have led to what is known as the ‘resource curse’ (Ngang, Iloh and Yuni, 2025). Regions like the Niger Delta suffer environmental disasters due to frequent oil spills and gas flaring. Mozambique is rich in natural gas, coal, rubies, and titanium, with the discovery of offshore gas fields attracting international investment worth billions of dollars. However, large-scale exploitation has not

translated into significant local development; the Cabo Delgado region, where much of the gas is located, has been plagued by insurgency as poverty/unemployment remain widespread (Ngang, Iloh and Yuni, 2025). Thus, resource-rich regimes often concentrate wealth and power in the hands of political elites, undermining democratic development, creating a situation where foreign companies partner with authoritarian regimes to access resources in exchange for bribes, royalties, or arms rather than development investments.

Table 5: Natural Resources and Poverty Rates in Selected African Countries

Country	Key Natural Resource(s)	Poverty Rate (%)
Nigeria	Oil, Gas	40.1
DR Congo	Cobalt, Copper, Diamonds	72
Equatorial Guinea	Oil	76
Angola	Oil, Diamonds	52
Zambia	Copper	54.4

Sources: Ngang, Iloh and Yuni (2025).

These statistics evidently illustrate the 'resource curse' where African countries rich in resources still experience high poverty rates. This contradiction highlights failures in governance, unequal distribution of wealth, and continued external exploitation.

(4) Persistence of Extractive Infrastructure and Technology

Infrastructure in Africa is largely tailored toward extraction and export rather than internal development. Cartwright (2024) emphasises that railways, roads, and ports were built to serve mines and plantations, connecting them directly to ports, not communities. Cartwright (2024) affirms that post-independence governments have often expanded this infrastructure, rather than reconfiguring it to serve national development goals. Thus, the colonial economic geography remains largely intact, whereby port cities dominate economies while hinterlands remain disconnected. The lack of intra-African trade and regional integration perpetuates dependency on Europe, China, and the U.S. Today, China is building roads, railways, and pipelines, mostly focused on resource corridors rather than rural transformation (Cartwright, 2024). Table 6 depicts how the built infrastructures focus on creating corridors for mineral extraction:

Table 6: Major African Mineral Resources and Foreign Interest

Resource	Country	Key Foreign Players	Strategic Use
Cobalt	DR Congo	China, USA	Batteries, Electric Vehicles
Lithium	Zimbabwe, Mali	China, EU	Green Energy, Tech Devices
Oil & Gas	Nigeria, Angola, Algeria	USA, France, China	Energy Production
Rare Earths	Madagascar, Burundi	China, USA	Electronics, Military Tech
Copper	Zambia, Botswana	China, Glencore	Electrical Wiring, Infrastructure
Uranium	Niger, Namibia	France, Russia	Nuclear Energy

Source: Boafo, Obodai, Stemm, & Nkrumah, (2024).

As shown above, Table 6 highlights the most sought-after minerals in Africa and the global powers involved. It reveals that China, the USA, and European countries continue to dominate extraction and supply chains for resources essential to modern technology and energy. African governments, as a result, are often caught in debt traps due to overreliance on foreign contractors and financiers.

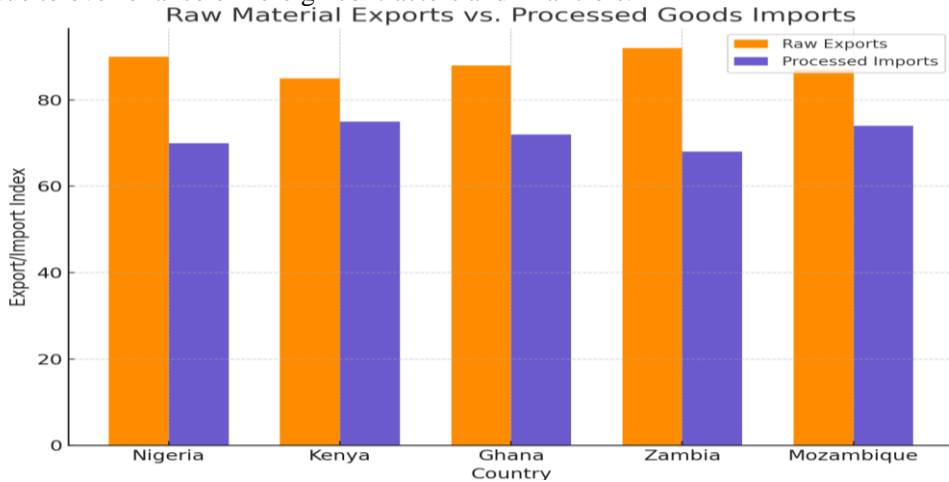


Figure 3: Raw Material Exports versus Processed Goods Imports.

As demonstrated in Figure 3 above, Africa remains a net exporter of raw materials and importer of refined goods as the terms of trade continue to disadvantage African economies. The imbalance shown highlights how African countries continue to export unrefined natural resources while importing expensive finished goods. This dependency replicates colonial trade patterns, stifles domestic industrialisation, and limits value addition within the continent. The 19th century patterns of exploitation-extraction without value addition, division without integration, wealth without welfare have remained shockingly persistent. Though the actors have changed (from colonial empires to aid providers and foreign investors), the logic remains intact. Africa remains the most resource-rich yet underdeveloped continent, not due to a lack of endowments, but because of systemic global and internal structures that perpetuate dependency and exploitation.

(5) The Modern Scramble for Africa: Strategic Interests and 21st Century Resource Competition

The turn of the 21st century marked a shift in the manner in which global powers engage with Africa. The post-colonial contradiction is that Africa gained political independence without economic sovereignty (Ngang et al., 2025; Ohs, 2025; Mireille et al., 2024). As a result, many African nations are free in theory but still controlled by external economic interests, leaving their natural wealth untransformed into human development. While colonialism has formally ended, the continent remains a hotspot of global competition, particularly for strategic natural resources. The “New scramble for Africa” involves a complex web of bilateral agreements, multinational investments, soft power diplomacy, and covert operations, all aimed at securing access to critical minerals, oil, gas, and other commodities indispensable to modern industrial economies. Today’s competition mimics the original 19th-century scramble, albeit with

sophisticated tools and players, including China, the United States, the European Union, Russia, and emerging powers such as India and Turkey.

Perhaps the most conspicuous player in the modern scramble is China. It is through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that China has invested billions in African infrastructure projects ranging from ports, highways, railways, and power plants. In return, China secures long-term mining concessions and favourable trade terms. For example, in Zambia, Chinese firms control significant shares of copper production (Emegha & Offor, 2019). In the DRC, a resource-for-infrastructure deal signed in 2008 saw Chinese firms granted mining rights in exchange for building roads and hospitals. Critics argue that these engagements reflect a new form of neocolonialism where Africa swaps sovereignty for loans and infrastructure (Okonkwo, 2011). Debt distress, opaque contracts, and environmental degradation have characterised many of these partnerships. Yet some African leaders defend Chinese involvement as an alternative to exploitative Western financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank. As China uses state-owned enterprises and diplomacy, the West relies heavily on multinational corporations, with oil giants like Shell, TotalEnergies, and ExxonMobil dominating Africa's energy sector. Tech companies, including Tesla and Apple, are directly or indirectly linked to mining operations in the DRC, often through intermediaries accused of child labour and environmental abuse (Moyo, 2023).

Conclusion

This paper has argued and posited that Africa's abundant resources remain the factor in the interminable quest for fortunes by both Europeans in the 19th century and their counterparts and newcomers from North America and the Far East in the 20th and 21st centuries. The scramble for Africa thus has two phases- the old and the new, with the old representing the direct colonial occupation, and the new being the economic invasions veiled in humanitarian interventions and political help.

Tracing the historical arc from ancient African kingdoms like Egypt and Ethiopia, renowned for their gold and knowledge, to the devastating intrusion of European colonial powers in the 19th century, and finally to the present-day neocolonial scramble for Africa's vast mineral wealth, the patterns seem different, but the soul and intent are not. The findings across the sections of this paper demonstrate a disturbing continuity: what Europeans found in Africa (gold, oil, copper, cobalt, lithium, uranium, and human labour) continues to fuel global capitalism while leaving Africans impoverished and divided. Africa stands today as it did centuries ago: rich in natural resources, strategically significant in geopolitical terms, and deeply coveted by foreign powers. What has changed is not the continent's wealth, but the mechanisms of its exploitation; the difference today is that exploitation now comes through multinational corporations, unfair trade agreements, and resource-backed loans that perpetuate dependency and debt.

The continent's abundance remains intact, but exploitation will continue until the continent reclaims ownership politically, economically, and intellectually. History need not repeat itself if African nations unite around common values of sovereignty, sustainability, and shared prosperity. Africa's condition raises a fundamental paradox: How can a continent so abundantly blessed continue to suffer such levels of poverty, inequality, and political fragmentation? This contradiction underscores that Africa's

problem is not a lack of wealth, but a lack of power over that wealth. Until Africa takes ownership of its resources, controls its trade terms, strengthens intra-continental cooperation, and radically restructures its political economy, the continent will remain the warehouse of the world and not the workshop of its own future.

Recommendations: Africa's Path towards Reclaiming Sovereignty and Wealth

The historical exploitation of Africa's immense natural wealth has resulted in centuries of economic underdevelopment, political instability, and cultural dislocation. These recommendations focus on pragmatic pathways for African nations to reclaim agency, redistribute wealth internally, and challenge the modern structures of dependency. Africa must not only recognise its wealth but strategically mobilise it for the benefit of its people.

(1) Strengthening governance and transparency: Africa must invest in Anti-corruption institutions that are legally empowered and free from political influence. Transparent mining contracts are quintessential for citizens to know what their governments agree to on their behalf and hold them accountable.

(2) Building value-added industries: Africa should adopt a regional industrial policy to prevent resource-rich countries from competing destructively, but instead collaborate on infrastructure and processing zones. Also develop in-country refineries and support local entrepreneurs in mining regions with access to training, technology, and capital to enter processing industries.

(3) Regional integration and collective bargaining: African states remain fragmented in trade and diplomacy; hence, stronger negotiation power can be gained through regional integration and collective bargaining.

(4) Reduced reliance on foreign intermediaries: Intra-African trade currently accounts for only 16% of the continent's exports compared to 70% in Europe. If Africa can boost this, it will reduce the need to seek markets abroad.

(5) Education, innovation, and indigenous knowledge: For true independence, Africa must invest in knowledge-based economies. Exporting raw materials but importing knowledge creates a dependency loop. STEM-focused education systems must be prioritised to produce local engineers, data analysts, and geologists. Partnerships with diaspora researchers can also bridge the technology gap, as African scholars abroad remain underutilised in local development.

(6) Revitalisation of indigenous knowledge: Traditional ecological practices should be further adopted in agriculture and natural medicine. Investment in indigenous knowledge can create eco-friendly and culturally appropriate solutions to sustainability and governance.

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Conflict of Interests

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Ethics Statement

The author confirms that this study was conducted in accordance with the Journal's Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.

BETWEEN SECURITY ANXIETY AND LEADERSHIP DEMAND: PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICS AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN ARMENIA AHEAD OF THE 2026 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Arthur V. Atanesyan <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8458-2447>

Dr. Sci. (Pol.), Professor, Head of Applied Sociology Department, Faculty of Sociology, Yerevan State University, Yerevan, Armenia. Email: atanesyan@ysu.am

Samson Mkhitaryan <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9033-7819>

PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Applied Sociology, Yerevan State University. Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, National Academy of Sciences of Armenia. Email: mkhityansamson@ysu.am

Abstract: This article examines public perceptions of Armenia’s political situation, leadership, and electoral prospects based on six focus group discussions conducted in October–November 2025. The study explores how citizens evaluate recent developments in the country, perceive key challenges facing the Armenian state, assess political actors, and imagine the characteristics of an ideal political leader. The findings demonstrate that concerns about national security, statehood, and political leadership dominate public discourse. Although participants acknowledged certain positive developments, including digitalization, infrastructure improvements, and modernization of public services, these achievements were largely overshadowed by anxieties related to security, governance, national identity, and political legitimacy. Respondents expressed widespread distrust toward political elites and institutions while simultaneously demonstrating strong interest in electoral participation and leadership change. The image of the ideal leader was strongly associated with competence, patriotism, decisiveness, and the capacity to ensure national security. The study contributes to understanding political attitudes in contemporary Armenia and illustrates how collective perceptions of insecurity shape political evaluations and expectations.

Keywords: *Armenia, political leadership, public opinion, focus groups, elections, political trust, national identity, security perceptions.*

Introduction

The political transformation initiated by Armenia’s 2018 Velvet Revolution fundamentally altered the country’s political landscape. Initially accompanied by widespread public optimism and expectations of democratic consolidation, the



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subsequent years brought a series of developments that significantly reshaped public attitudes. The 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh, the displacement of the Armenian population from the region, continuing security challenges, and ongoing political polarization have transformed public discourse and political expectations.

In such contexts, perceptions of political leadership become especially important. Citizens increasingly evaluate political actors not only through policy outcomes but also through symbolic representations of competence, security, patriotism, and national resilience. Public perceptions therefore provide an important lens through which broader political dynamics may be understood.

This article analyzes six focus group discussions conducted in Armenia during October–November 2025. The discussions explored participants' assessments of current developments in Armenia, perceptions of political actors, attitudes toward elections, and expectations regarding political leadership. Particular attention is paid to how participants connect evaluations of governance with broader concerns about security, statehood, and national identity.

The article addresses four research questions:

1. How do participants evaluate Armenia's current political and social situation?
2. What developments are perceived as positive and negative?
3. What characteristics define the ideal political leader?
4. How do citizens perceive existing political actors and the approaching parliamentary elections?

Literature Review

Political trust represents one of the central concepts in studies of democratic legitimacy. According to Easton (1965), political systems depend not only on institutional performance but also on diffuse support generated through citizens' beliefs about the legitimacy of political authority. Subsequent research has demonstrated that declining trust in institutions often coincides with increased personalization of politics and growing expectations toward individual leaders (Norris, 2011).

Leadership evaluations constitute a particularly important dimension of political behavior. Voters frequently rely on perceptions of competence, integrity, strength, and empathy when evaluating political candidates (Kinder, 1986). In contemporary politics, personalization processes increasingly shift attention from parties and programs toward individual leaders (Rahat & Sheaffer, 2007).

Research on post-conflict societies suggests that security concerns often become dominant frameworks through which political developments are interpreted (Bar-Tal, 2013). Under conditions of perceived existential threat, citizens tend to prioritize leadership qualities associated with strength, protection, and national survival over procedural democratic considerations.

In Armenia, recent scholarship has highlighted the profound impact of war, geopolitical uncertainty, and identity-related debates on public discourse. Questions of sovereignty, security, historical memory, and national identity continue to shape political attitudes and electoral preferences.

Methodology

The study is based on six focus group discussions conducted between October and November 2025. Participants were recruited from Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor, Tavush, and Syunik. Groups represented different age categories and included both men and women. Participants were selected from citizens who did not support the current government.

Each focus group consisted of approximately eight participants. Discussions explored perceptions of Armenia's current situation, assessments of political developments, evaluations of political actors, leadership preferences, and expectations regarding the 2026 parliamentary elections.

The discussions were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Recurring narratives, symbolic representations, evaluative categories, and explanatory frameworks were identified and compared across groups. Quotations presented below illustrate dominant themes rather than isolated opinions.

As with all qualitative research, the findings should not be interpreted as statistically representative of the Armenian population. Instead, they provide insight into the meanings, narratives, and perceptions shared among participants.

Findings

Positive Developments: Limited Achievements in a Broader Context of Concern

Although discussions were predominantly critical, participants identified several positive developments that had occurred in recent years. The most frequently mentioned achievement was digitalization and modernization of public administration. Participants appreciated the transition to electronic systems and centralized databases.

One participant explained:

“The fact that everything is moving to electronic platforms and personal data are entered into electronic systems is already a form of development because it makes everything easier.” (Anna, Yerevan, 18–29)

Similarly, participants referred to improvements in taxation, formalization of employment, and reduced bureaucratic obstacles. These developments were generally viewed as practical improvements affecting everyday life.

Infrastructure improvements represented another commonly acknowledged achievement. Participants from Syunik and Tavush particularly emphasized school renovation projects and road construction. As one participant noted:

“Almost all schools are being renovated, roads are under reconstruction, and the city has made significant progress during the last two years.” (Satenik, Syunik, 18–29)

Educational opportunities were also viewed positively. Younger participants emphasized increased accessibility of higher education, online learning opportunities, and technological modernization. However, positive evaluations were frequently accompanied by qualifications. Many respondents argued that such developments reflected broader technological progress rather than exceptional governmental performance. According to one participant:

“Digitalization is not the result of some special policy. Time itself required these changes.” (Nairi, Yerevan, 18–29)

Thus, even when participants acknowledged improvements, they often questioned their political significance.

Security as the Central Political Concern

The most striking finding across all focus groups was the centrality of security concerns. Discussions repeatedly returned to questions of national defense, territorial integrity, geopolitical vulnerability, and state survival.

Participants often interpreted all other political developments through the lens of security.

One respondent stated:

“I observe only regression, both externally and internally. Neither Armenia’s borders are properly protected nor is there internal security.” (Eva, Yerevan, 18–29)

Another participant identified security as the country’s primary challenge:

“The first issue is undoubtedly security.” (Eva, Yerevan, 18–29)

Security concerns extended beyond military issues. Participants frequently connected national security to social cohesion, demographic decline, education, and governance. For many respondents, the security crisis represented not merely a policy problem but a broader challenge to Armenian statehood itself.

Several participants described Armenia as existing in an “existential struggle,” while others referred to “free fall,” “degradation,” and “uncertainty.” Such language suggests that security concerns function as a master narrative shaping interpretations of political reality.

Distrust Toward Political Institutions and Elites

Another dominant theme involved widespread distrust toward political institutions and political elites. Participants frequently argued that democratic institutions had weakened and that power had become increasingly concentrated.

One respondent stated:

“The separation of powers no longer exists. Legislative, executive, and judicial powers are concentrated and effectively subordinated to one person.” (Nairi, Yerevan, 18–29)

Others criticized what they perceived as selective application of democratic principles and limitations on freedom of expression. Distrust extended beyond current authorities. Many participants expressed skepticism toward virtually all political elites.

As one participant explained:

“The same mafia continues. Faces change, but they are all connected.” (Samson, Yerevan, 18–29)

This perception is significant because it suggests that dissatisfaction is directed not only toward specific political actors but toward the political class as a whole. Political competition is therefore often interpreted as competition among interconnected elite groups rather than between genuinely distinct alternatives.

National Identity and the Armenian Apostolic Church

Questions of national identity occupied a prominent place in the discussions. Participants frequently expressed concern about cultural change, weakening national values, and perceived threats to Armenian identity.

The Armenian Apostolic Church emerged as an especially important institution within these discussions. Participants consistently described the Church as a central component of Armenian history, identity, and statehood. One respondent remarked:

“For centuries the Church served as a foundation of our statehood.”
(Armen, Yerevan, 18–29)

At the same time, participants expressed dissatisfaction with what they perceived as the Church’s insufficient public engagement during recent crises. This apparent contradiction reveals the unique position of the Church in Armenian public consciousness. Respondents simultaneously regarded it as sacred and beyond ordinary political criticism while expecting it to play a more active moral and national role.

A participant from Syunik summarized this expectation:

“Faith and the Church have the ability to unite the Armenian nation around a common purpose.” (Andranik, Syunik, 18–29)

Thus, the Church functions not only as a religious institution but also as a symbolic guardian of national identity.

External Actors and Geopolitical Narratives

Participants frequently discussed the influence of external actors on Armenia’s political situation. Many respondents perceived Armenia as highly dependent on stronger international actors. Russia, the United States, Turkey, Azerbaijan, France, and international organizations were all mentioned as significant influences.

A recurring theme was disappointment with international organizations. Participants frequently described organizations such as the United Nations and European institutions as ineffective, biased, or unable to protect Armenian interests. Several respondents also expressed disappointment with Russia’s role during recent conflicts. At the same time, many viewed Armenia as lacking sufficient autonomy to pursue an independent geopolitical course.

Particularly noteworthy was the widespread perception that Turkey and Azerbaijan currently exert substantial influence over Armenia’s political environment. These perceptions reinforce the broader dominance of security concerns identified throughout the discussions.

Electoral Participation and Democratic Engagement

Despite expressing deep dissatisfaction with political institutions, most participants considered electoral participation an important civic responsibility. One respondent explained:

“I have always voted since I turned eighteen. In 2026 I will vote as well because otherwise anything can happen.” (Donara, Gyumri, 45+)

Participants frequently argued that abstention allows others to determine political outcomes and potentially facilitates electoral manipulation. At the same time, some respondents expressed doubts regarding the effectiveness of voting.

As one participant stated:

“If I had known what would happen, why would I have gone to vote?” (Ararat, Syunik, 18–29)

This combination of participation and skepticism reflects a paradox frequently observed in democratic systems experiencing declining institutional trust. Citizens continue participating while simultaneously questioning the responsiveness and legitimacy of political institutions.

Constructing the Ideal Political Leader

Perhaps the most coherent and consistent findings emerged in discussions regarding the ideal political leader. Participants overwhelmingly emphasized competence, patriotism, decisiveness, education, responsibility, and leadership capacity.

One participant summarized this preference by invoking iconic national figures:

“We need people like Monte and Nzhdeh¹.” (Masis, Syunik, 18–29)

The ideal leader was expected to possess practical administrative skills as well as symbolic qualities associated with national defense and collective resilience. Interestingly, respondents demonstrated substantial consensus regarding demographic characteristics. Most preferred a male leader over forty years old, family-oriented, and ideally possessing military experience.

Several participants also emphasized economic success as evidence of competence. Wealth itself was not viewed negatively, provided it was perceived as the result of achievement rather than corruption.

These findings suggest that leadership expectations are closely linked to contemporary perceptions of insecurity. Participants sought leaders capable of providing protection, stability, and strategic direction rather than merely administrative management.

Images of Political Actors

Participants evaluated political actors through highly symbolic and emotional language. Among all figures discussed, acting prime-minister Nikol Pashinyan² generated the strongest positive as well as negative reactions. Participants frequently described him as manipulative, dishonest, inconsistent, and weak. Nevertheless, some acknowledged his communication skills and political resilience.

Samvel Karapetyan³ received predominantly positive evaluations. Participants frequently described him as a successful businessman, philanthropist, patriot, and

¹ Armenian National heroes.

² Re-elected in June 2026 parliamentary elections as the major fraction leader.

³ Elected as major oppositional party leader.

benefactor. However, questions remained regarding his political experience and leadership capabilities.

Robert Kocharyan⁴ produced the most polarized evaluations. Some participants described him as strong, experienced, and capable, while others associated him with corruption, authoritarianism, and personal ambition.

A notable feature of these discussions was the extensive use of animal metaphors. Participants associated politicians with wolves, lions, foxes, snakes, jackals, and other animals. Such symbolic representations reveal the emotional and moral dimensions through which political actors are interpreted.

Conclusion

The findings reveal that political perceptions among government-critical citizens in Armenia are structured primarily around concerns about security, statehood, and leadership. Positive developments in administration and infrastructure are acknowledged but rarely regarded as politically decisive.

Instead, evaluations of political actors are filtered through broader narratives of national vulnerability and collective insecurity. Security concerns serve as the central interpretive framework through which governance, democracy, identity, and leadership are assessed.

The study also reveals a significant crisis of political trust. Participants expressed skepticism toward political institutions and elites while simultaneously maintaining strong expectations regarding leadership. This combination reflects a broader personalization of politics, whereby hope for political improvement becomes concentrated in individual leaders rather than institutions.

Finally, the findings demonstrate the continuing importance of national identity in Armenian political discourse. Discussions concerning the Church, education, cultural values, and external actors all reflected broader concerns about preserving Armenian statehood and identity under conditions of perceived uncertainty.

Participants acknowledged certain positive developments, particularly in digitalization and infrastructure. However, these achievements were largely overshadowed by concerns regarding security, governance, democratic institutions, and national identity.

The ideal political leader was imagined as competent, patriotic, decisive, and capable of ensuring national security. Existing political actors were evaluated through highly symbolic and emotional frameworks reflecting broader societal anxieties.

The findings suggest that contemporary Armenian political attitudes cannot be fully understood through conventional measures of policy satisfaction alone. Rather, they are deeply shaped by collective perceptions of vulnerability, uncertainty, and the future of Armenian statehood itself.

⁴ In June 2026 parliamentary elections has been elected as the second big oppositional party leader.

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JUST TRANSITION FROM BELOW: HOW MINeworkERS IN ZIMBABWE LINK LABOUR RIGHTS TO CLIMATE JUSTICE

Antonater Tafadzwa Choto, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6430-5458>
Ph.D., Sociology Department, University of Johannesburg, South Africa
Email: tafadzwach2010@gmail.com

Abstract: This article examines how mineworkers in Zimbabwe engage with and reshape climate justice debates amid the expansion of extractive industries and the global green transition. Drawing on qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews with mineworkers, trade union officials, and civil society actors, the study explores how experiences of labour exploitation, unsafe working conditions, and environmental degradation shape workers' understandings of climate justice. The findings indicate that while civil society organisations and policy actors have largely shaped climate justice discourse, mineworkers are articulating claims grounded in everyday struggles and seeking to participate in shaping just transition processes. These claims centre on demands for stronger regulation of labour and environmental standards, more equitable redistribution of mineral wealth, and forms of reparative justice for communities affected by extractivism. Engagement with transnational labour networks further contributes to the emergence of a worker-centred climate justice consciousness linking workplace struggles to broader socio-ecological concerns. By foregrounding worker agency, the article advances a labour-centred perspective on climate justice in the Global South and argues that a just transition must be democratically negotiated, socially redistributive, and historically attentive.

Keywords: *climate justice; mineworkers; just transition; extractivism; labour rights; regulation; redistribution; reparations; Zimbabwe.*

Introduction

Climate justice debates in Zimbabwe have gained momentum alongside the expansion of critical mineral extraction linked to the global green transition. As global demand for minerals such as lithium increases, Zimbabwe has emerged as an important site of extraction and investment within renewable energy supply chains (Mkodzongi, 2024). The country possesses some of the world's largest lithium reserves, and recent investments in lithium beneficiation further underscore its growing strategic importance in global decarbonisation. Huayou Zimbabwe, through Prospect Lithium Zimbabwe at the Arcadia Mine, reportedly invested approximately US\$400 million to construct a lithium processing plant for electric-vehicle battery production (Ndlovu, 2025). According to *The Sunday Mail* (19 April 2026), the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe



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identified lithium, alongside gold and platinum group metals, as central to the country's mineral-led development strategy.

While these developments are frequently presented as opportunities for economic growth and participation in low-carbon transitions, they also expose important social and ecological contradictions. The expansion of critical mineral extraction has generated employment opportunities, but it has simultaneously exacerbated labour precarity, unsafe working conditions, displacement, and environmental degradation within mining communities (Sovacool, 2021). These tensions reflect broader inequalities within global capitalism, where decarbonisation in the Global North increasingly depends on intensified extraction in resource-rich economies of the Global South. From a labour sociology perspective, the green transition therefore raises important questions concerning labour exploitation, uneven development, and worker experiences within emerging green economies.

Despite growing scholarship on extractivism and climate justice in Africa, especially in Zimbabwe, relatively limited attention has been paid to how mineworkers themselves understand and engage with these processes. Existing debates have largely focused on states, corporations, policy actors, and civil society organisations, with comparatively less emphasis on workers' experiences and perspectives. Yet mineworkers occupy a strategic position within the green transition because they directly confront its social and ecological consequences through everyday experiences of production, labour exploitation, and environmental harm.

This article examines how mineworkers in Zimbabwe link labour struggles to broader questions of climate justice and just transition. Drawing on qualitative interviews with mineworkers, trade union officials from the National Mine Workers Union of Zimbabwe (NMWUZ) and the Zimbabwe Diamond and Allied Minerals Workers Union (ZDAMWU), as well as civil society actors from the Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG), the article argues that sections of workers are developing forms of climate justice consciousness grounded in demands for stronger labour and environmental protections, equitable distribution of mineral wealth, and greater participation in decision-making processes.

The article draws on a framework centred on regulation, redistribution, and reparations to analyse how climate justice claims emerge from below within Zimbabwe's extractive sector (Lenferna, 2025; Gaughran, 2025; Manduna, 2024; Táíwò, 2022). Regulation refers to the enforcement of labour, environmental, and occupational safety standards; redistribution concerns the equitable allocation of benefits derived from mineral extraction; and reparations address the historical and ongoing harms associated with extractive capitalism. This framework provides a lens for understanding how labour rights and environmental justice become interconnected within resource-dependent economies shaped by unequal development.

The article contributes to labour sociology by examining how climate justice consciousness is emerging through workplace struggles and worker–community relations within extractive capitalism. More broadly, it contributes to scholarship on climate justice and transition in three ways. First, it centres mineworkers within climate justice debates. Second, it advances a labour-centred analysis of climate justice by demonstrating how workers connect workplace exploitation to broader socio-ecological inequalities. Third, it contributes to debates on green extractivism in the Global South

by showing how the expansion of critical mineral extraction simultaneously generates economic opportunities while reproducing labour precarity, environmental degradation, and new forms of socio-economic inequality.

The article proceeds by reviewing literature on mining labour, extractivism, and just transition debates, before outlining the theoretical framework and research methodology. It then presents the empirical findings and concludes by reflecting on the implications of worker-led climate justice struggles for just transition politics in resource-dependent economies.

Literature Review

Labour and Exploitation in Zimbabwe's Mining Sector

Mineworkers in Zimbabwe, as in much of Southern Africa, have historically experienced exploitative working and living conditions characterised by low wages, unsafe workplaces, and inadequate social protection (Sachikonye, 2011; Mkodzongi and Spiegel, 2019). These inequalities are rooted in colonial systems of extraction that relied on coercive labour regimes and generated enduring patterns of racialised and unequal development (van Onselen, 1976). Mining labour has also historically been associated with traditions of worker resistance and militancy, which continued into the postcolonial period (Raftopoulos and Phimister, 2004). Although the organisational strength of labour has weakened under neoliberal restructuring and political repression, workplace struggles remain an important feature of Zimbabwe's mining sector.

Despite political independence, many structural dynamics of extraction have remained intact. Mineral wealth continues to disproportionately benefit foreign capital and domestic elites, while workers and mining communities experience labour precarity, underdevelopment, and environmental degradation (Sachikonye, 2011; Gukurume and Nhodo, 2020). Contemporary mining operations are frequently characterised by unsafe working conditions, insecure employment arrangements, and weak enforcement of labour and environmental regulations (Mkodzongi and Spiegel, 2019). Resource governance has therefore reproduced uneven development in mining regions while intensifying socio-ecological vulnerabilities (Lafitte, 2022).

Recent transformations in the sector have deepened these contradictions. Following the "Look East" policy, Zimbabwe has attracted significant Chinese investment (Saunders, 2008; Jenkins, 2014), while its lithium reserves have positioned it at the centre of the global green transition (Mkodzongi, 2024). These contradictions have deepened with the expansion of lithium extraction and growing foreign investment linked to the global green transition. Zimbabwe's lithium reserves have positioned the country within global renewable energy supply chains, particularly in relation to electric vehicle battery production (Mkodzongi, 2024). However, scholars argue that the transition to low-carbon economies often reproduces new forms of inequality and environmental harm in resource-dependent economies of the Global South, a process commonly referred to as "green extractivism" (Sovacool, 2021; Gudynas, 2021; Dunlap and Böhm, 2019). In Zimbabwe, lithium extraction simultaneously contributes to global decarbonisation while reproducing labour exploitation, displacement, and socio-ecological inequality within mining communities (Lafitte, 2022; Nyamwanza and Bhatasara, 2025).

Within climate justice scholarship, extractive industries are understood as sites of socio-ecological conflict where struggles over labour, livelihoods, land, and environmental governance intersect (Newell and Mulvaney, 2013; Schlosberg, 2013). Political ecology and environmental justice research further demonstrate that workers and affected communities are not merely passive victims of extractivism, but active agents who contest environmental degradation and articulate alternative visions of development (Martinez-Alier, 2001; Bebbington et al., 2008). However, much of the literature on extraction and climate justice in Africa has focused primarily on states, corporations, and resource governance, with comparatively limited attention paid to how mineworkers themselves understand and contest these processes in their everyday struggles.

Trade Unions, Climate Injustice, and the Struggle for a Just Transition

The concept of a just transition emerged within labour movements as a response to the social consequences of environmental restructuring and has since evolved into a wider political framework linking climate action to social justice, democratic participation, and equitable development (Räthzel et al., 2018; McCauley and Heffron, 2018). Labour environmentalism scholarship further demonstrates how workplace struggles intersect with questions of ecological sustainability and social justice, particularly in industries associated with environmental degradation and extractivism (Barca, 2019; Moody, 2017).

Within climate justice scholarship, extractive industries are understood as sites of socio-ecological conflict where struggles over labour, livelihoods, land, and environmental governance converge (Newell and Mulvaney, 2013; Schlosberg, 2013). Environmental justice scholars argue that these conflicts extend beyond environmental harm to encompass questions of participation, recognition, and unequal power relations within extractive governance (Özkaynak and Rodríguez-Labajos, 2017; Perreault, 2013). Political ecology and environmental justice research further demonstrate that workers and affected communities are not merely passive victims of extractivism, but active agents who contest environmental degradation and articulate alternative visions of development (Martinez-Alier, 2001; Bebbington et al., 2008; Bond, 2012; Barca, 2019).

Across Africa, trade unions have expanded their engagement with climate justice and just transition debates by linking workers' concerns over wages, occupational safety, and job security to broader socio-ecological questions (Satgar, 2015; ITUC-Africa, 2022). In South Africa, labour movements such as COSATU and NUMSA played an important role in bringing labour perspectives into climate justice debates, particularly around COP17 in Durban in 2011, linking environmental concerns to inequality, energy democracy, and worker participation (Satgar, 2015; Räthzel et al., 2018). Research on labour-environmental alliances further highlight the growing role of organised labour in contesting exclusionary forms of green development and shaping alternative development pathways (Moody, 2017; Barca, 2019). Research further demonstrates that trade unions have advanced climate justice through workplace initiatives, climate education, and policy advocacy, while evidence from Europe and elsewhere shows that organised labour can influence climate governance and challenge socio-economic inequalities associated with environmental transitions

(ITUC, 2015; Labour Research Service, 2018; TUC, 2014; UNISON and University of Leeds CERIC, 2022; Whyte and Crawford, 2023).

At the same time, growing global demand for critical minerals has intensified debates around the contradictions of the green transition. Resource-rich countries in the Global South, including Zimbabwe, have become increasingly important within renewable energy supply chains due to rising demand for minerals such as lithium and platinum group metals (Hund et al., 2020; International Energy Agency, 2021; Mkodzongi, 2024). However, scholars argue that the transition to low-carbon economies often reproduces labour precarity, displacement, and environmental degradation, a process increasingly described as “green extractivism” (Sovacool, 2021; Gudynas, 2021). These dynamics reveal how global decarbonisation efforts may simultaneously generate new forms of socio-ecological inequality within extractive economies of the Global South.

Recent scholarship on labour, climate justice, and extractivism foregrounds the role of grassroots struggles in contesting corporate power and neoliberal forms of “green” development (Bond, 2012; Klein, 2014; Satgar, 2018). However, much of this literature has focused largely on states, civil society organisations, and transnational advocacy networks, with comparatively less attention paid to workers’ own experiences and understandings of climate justice. Limited research examines how mineworkers themselves interpret climate justice, connect workplace struggles to environmental concerns, and seek to shape transition politics from below.

By foregrounding workers’ experiences and agency, this article contributes to emerging scholarship on labour-centred climate justice and worker-led understandings of just transition within extractive economies. The study further provides insight into the contradictions of extractive-led transitions, particularly where the economic opportunities associated with critical minerals coexist with persistent labour exploitation, environmental degradation, and uneven development.

Theoretical Framework – Regulation, Redistribution, Reparations, and Climate Justice

To analyse how mineworkers in Zimbabwe link labour rights with climate justice, this study draws on emerging debates within climate justice scholarship that conceptualise justice through three interrelated dimensions: regulation, redistribution, and reparations (Lenferna, 2025; Gaughran, 2025; Manduna, 2024; Táíwò, 2022). Scholars in environmental sociology and political ecology argue that climate injustice is rooted in structural inequalities embedded within extractivist political economies, particularly in postcolonial contexts where labour exploitation and environmental degradation remain closely interconnected. The framework is acutely relevant in Zimbabwe, where weak regulatory systems, unequal resource distribution, and unresolved historical injustices continue to shape extractive development.

While this study adopts the “three Rs” framework, it is also informed by broader climate justice approaches, particularly distributive, procedural, and recognition justice (Schlosberg, 2013). These perspectives are complementary. Regulation aligns with procedural justice through democratic participation and accountability; redistribution reflects distributive justice through the equitable allocation of resources and benefits; while reparations extend recognition justice by addressing historical and structural

inequalities. Together, these approaches provide an integrated analytical lens for examining how mineworkers understand and articulate climate justice through everyday struggles over labour conditions, environmental protection, and community wellbeing.

Regulation refers to the institutional and political mechanisms governing labour, environmental, and occupational practices within extractive industries. Regulatory systems are inherently political because they shape whose interests are protected and whose risks are externalised (Jasanoff, 2004). Ostrom's (2010) concept of polycentric governance further highlights the importance of participatory and multi-level approaches in addressing complex environmental challenges. In extractive economies such as Zimbabwe, weak enforcement of labour and environmental standards frequently enables corporations to externalise social and ecological costs onto workers and mining communities. From a climate justice perspective, regulation therefore requires not only stronger legal protections, but also meaningful participation of workers and affected communities in governance and decision-making processes (Schlosberg, 2013; Lenferna, 2025). Analytically, this dimension is used to examine how mineworkers understand unsafe working conditions, labour precarity, environmental degradation, and failures of institutional accountability within Zimbabwe's mining sector.

Redistribution concerns the equitable allocation of benefits derived from natural resource extraction and low-carbon transitions. Climate justice scholars argue that green transitions risk reproducing existing inequalities unless the social and economic benefits of extraction are redistributed more equitably (Manduna, 2024; Lenferna, 2025). In resource-dependent economies such as Zimbabwe, redistribution extends beyond wages to include questions of community development, infrastructure provision, access to services, and democratic control over mineral wealth. Redistribution, therefore, links climate justice to broader struggles over economic democracy, social protection, and equitable development within extractive regions. Within this article, redistribution provides an analytical lens for examining workers' demands for fair wages, compensation, livelihood security, and broader socio-economic benefits for mining communities affected by extraction.

Reparations address the historical and ongoing harms associated with extractive capitalism and unequal global development. Environmental justice scholarship demonstrates that ecological destruction and labour exploitation are rooted in racialised and colonial systems of accumulation that continue to shape contemporary extractive economies (Bullard, 1993; Táíwò, 2022). Extending this analysis, Sullivan and Hickel (2025) argue that Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) facilitated the transfer of Africa's mineral wealth into the global capitalist economy without adequate compensation, deepening ecological destruction and socio-economic inequality across the continent. Contemporary debates on climate justice and "loss and damage" further frame reparations as a form of structural repair that includes ecological restoration, compensation, debt justice, and recognition of historically marginalised communities (Abraham, 2025). In this study, reparations are therefore understood not only in financial terms, but also through demands for environmental restoration, community wellbeing, social investment, and recognition of the disproportionate burdens borne by workers and mining communities within the Global South.

Taken together, regulation, redistribution, and reparations provide an integrated framework for analysing how mineworkers connect workplace struggles to broader questions of climate justice and just transition. The framework makes it possible to examine how workers interpret labour exploitation, environmental degradation, and uneven development not as isolated problems, but as interconnected dimensions of extractive political economies. It also enables analysis of how workers' demands move beyond immediate workplace concerns towards broader claims for democratic participation, environmental accountability, equitable development, and socially just transition processes.

The framework further highlights a central contradiction within the global green transition. While countries such as Zimbabwe are increasingly positioned as strategic suppliers of critical minerals required for decarbonisation, the conditions under which these minerals are extracted frequently reproduce labour exploitation, environmental degradation, and socio-ecological inequality. The key challenge, therefore, is not simply participation in the green transition, but how transition processes are governed, who benefits from extraction, and whether workers and affected communities are able to shape the terms of socio-ecological transformation.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine how mineworkers in Zimbabwe understand and articulate the relationship between labour rights and climate justice. Qualitative methods are particularly suited to examining lived experiences, meanings, and emergent forms of consciousness, especially in contexts where workers' perspectives are often marginalised in policy and academic debates (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

Data were generated through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with participants selected using purposive sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015). Participants were chosen based on their involvement in mining labour, trade union activity, and civil society engagement within Zimbabwe's extractive sector. The final sample comprised 18 participants, including mineworkers from Arcadia Mine, Bikita Minerals, and Hwange Colliery, trade union officials from the National Mine Workers Union of Zimbabwe (NMWUZ) and the Zimbabwe Diamond and Allied Minerals Workers Union (ZDAMWU), and representatives from the Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG), as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 – Participants' Information

No.	Company / Organisation	Status	Reference Code
1	Arcadia Mine	Mineworker	MW1
2	Arcadia Mine	Mineworker	MW2
3	Arcadia Mine	Mineworker	MW3
4	Arcadia Mine	Mineworker	MW4
5	Bikita Minerals	Mineworker	MW5
6	Bikita Minerals	Mineworker	MW6
7	Bikita Minerals	Mineworker	MW7
8	Bikita Minerals	Mineworker	MW8

9	Hwange Colliery	Mineworker	MW9
10	Hwange Colliery	Mineworker	MW10
11	Hwange Colliery	Mineworker	MW11
12	Hwange Colliery	Mineworker	MW12
13	NMWUZ	Trade Union Official	UO1
14	NMWUZ	Trade Union Official	UO2
15	ZDAMWU	Trade Union Official	UO3
16	ZDAMWU	Trade Union Official	UO4
17	CNRG	CSO Official	CSO1
18	CNRG	CSO Official	CSO2

Although the sample size is relatively small, the study prioritised depth over breadth, consistent with exploratory qualitative research concerned with meaning-making rather than statistical representativeness. Participants were drawn from strategically important mining sites and organised labour formations with active involvement in workers' struggles, enabling the study to capture diverse experiences of labour exploitation, environmental degradation, and climate justice within Zimbabwe's mining sector. Interviews continued until thematic saturation was reached, whereby recurring patterns relating to labour precarity, environmental injustice, regulation, redistribution, and reparative demands became consistently evident across participant narratives.

Interviews were conducted both face-to-face and remotely, with each lasting approximately 60 minutes. Given geographical dispersion and connectivity constraints, some follow-up interviews were conducted via WhatsApp using voice notes and recorded responses, a method recognised for its flexibility in qualitative research while maintaining reliable records for transcription and analysis (Seitz, 2016). The interview guide explored working conditions and labour rights, environmental impacts of mining, perceptions of climate change and climate justice, and the role of trade unions and civil society organisations in shaping just transition debates. In addition to interview data, the study drew on secondary materials, including policy documents, organisational reports, and advocacy publications.

Ethical clearance was obtained and all participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Given the politically sensitive nature of labour research within Zimbabwe's extractive sector, pseudonyms and reference codes are used throughout the article. The researcher's longstanding engagement with labour and social justice issues in Zimbabwe assisted in building trust with participants and navigating politically sensitive research environments. At the same time, reflexive attention was paid to the potential influence of the researcher's positionality and political commitments on data interpretation and representation.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. The analytical process involved familiarisation with the data, coding, theme development, and interpretation through iterative comparison across interview transcripts. Both inductive and deductive coding strategies were employed, allowing themes to emerge from participants' narratives while also engaging with the study's analytical framework of regulation, redistribution, and reparations. Triangulation with

secondary reports and policy documents further strengthened the credibility and analytical rigour of the findings.

Findings

The findings show that sections of mineworkers are developing forms of climate justice consciousness through everyday experiences of labour exploitation, environmental degradation, and workplace insecurity. While civil society organisations play an important agenda-setting role, mineworkers are not passive recipients of these discourses. Rather, they are emerging as active agents articulating climate justice claims from below.

The analysis is organised around three themes derived through thematic coding: (i) workers' rights as a foundation for climate justice; (ii) the role of transnational labour networks in shaping climate consciousness; and (iii) the interaction between workers and civil society actors in advancing climate justice.

Together, these themes reveal both convergence and tensions between workers' immediate material concerns and climate justice agendas, while illustrating how workers' struggles align with the pillars of regulation, redistribution, and reparations.

1. Workers' Rights as a Foundation for Climate Justice (Regulation and Redistribution)

A central finding is that a section of mineworkers frames climate justice through workplace experiences of labour exploitation, unsafe working conditions, and weak regulatory enforcement. Rather than separating environmental concerns from labour struggles, workers interpret them as interconnected dimensions of extractive injustice.

As UO3 from ZDAMWU explained:

While lithium mining has generated employment opportunities for local communities, these benefits are undermined by poor labour conditions and weak enforcement of environmental and labour regulations. Chinese investors, who dominate large sections of Zimbabwe's mining sector, capitalise on high unemployment and employ most workers on short-term contracts. At major lithium operations such as Bikita Minerals in Masvingo and Arcadia Mine in Goromonzi, a large proportion of workers are either employed on temporary contracts or subcontracted (UO3, interview 2026).

Workers linked these conditions to insecure employment arrangements, subcontracting, and weak enforcement of labour protections within Zimbabwe's expanding lithium sector. Although the government introduced Statutory Instrument 71 of 2026 to restrict very short-term contracts, participants expressed scepticism regarding enforcement capacity and corporate compliance.

Workers, therefore, interpreted climate injustice not only through environmental degradation, but also through uneven regulatory power within extractive economies.

These concerns were reinforced by UO1 from NMWUZ, who noted:

In our petition, we highlighted the increasing worker abuse and the blatant disregard of labour laws and environmental standards by Chinese investors operating in Zimbabwe's mining sector (UO1, interview 2026).

UO1 added that such tensions are becoming more visible in the public sphere, where social media videos frequently depict violent confrontations between workers and Chinese employers.

The significance of these findings lies in how workers connect labour exploitation to broader questions of extractive governance and accountability. Climate justice is therefore understood not simply as environmental protection, but as a struggle over regulation, labour rights, and democratic participation within the green transition.

Workers' testimonies also revealed how occupational risks and environmental harm are experienced as mutually reinforcing. MW6 (interview 2026) stated: "We work with hazardous materials without proper protection, which results in chest infections and cancer."

These concerns extended beyond the workplace itself. Participants described pollution, unsafe blasting practices, and water contamination affecting surrounding communities, findings that align with reports from CNRG (2025) and EnviroPress (2025) documenting mining-related fatalities and environmental harm. Such experiences challenge narrow distinctions between labour and environmental issues by illustrating how workplace precarity and ecological degradation are embedded within the same extractive processes.

Workers also articulated clear redistributive demands centred on compensation, community development, and democratic control over mineral wealth. As MW7 explained:

The government must ensure that mining companies provide adequate compensation and resettlement support, including proper housing and investment in public infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, and roads. Workers and affected communities should also participate meaningfully in decision-making processes concerning the governance and distribution of mineral wealth. (MW7, interview 2026).

This reflects a redistributive understanding of climate justice in which sections of workers and mining communities are beginning to demand a more equitable allocation of the social and economic benefits derived from extraction. Rather than viewing climate justice solely through environmental concerns, participants linked it to broader struggles over public infrastructure, livelihoods, and community wellbeing.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that mineworkers increasingly frame climate justice through demands for stronger regulation of labour and environmental standards, equitable redistribution of mineral wealth, and greater participation in extractive governance. The findings advance climate justice scholarship by showing how labour struggles constitute an important site through which climate justice consciousness is produced from below. They also contribute to labour sociology by illustrating how workers increasingly connect workplace exploitation to wider socio-ecological inequalities associated with green extractivism and just transition politics.

2. Transnational Labour Networks and the Formation of Climate Consciousness (Regulation, Redistribution, and Reparations)

A second theme concerns the role of regional and international trade union networks in shaping workers' understanding of climate justice. Engagement with international federations such as IndustriALL enabled sections of workers and union officials to connect local experiences of labour exploitation and environmental degradation to broader global dynamics of extractivism, inequality, and climate change.

As UO4 (interview 2026) explained: "The climate crisis is not only an environmental issue but also a social and economic justice issue." Participation in regional workshops and labour education programmes contributed to the politicisation of environmental concerns by linking climate change to capitalist extraction, labour exploitation, and unequal development. These findings suggest that climate justice consciousness is not produced automatically through environmental exposure alone, but is actively shaped through worker education, transnational solidarity, and labour organising. Climate justice, therefore, emerged not as an abstract environmental discourse but as a framework through which workers interpreted workplace insecurity, ecological degradation, and economic inequality.

This process was also evident in workers' accounts of environmental harm within mining communities. MW9 from Hwange Colliery stated: "Through IndustriALL workshops, I realised that the issues we were raising are directly connected to climate justice" (MW9, interview 2026).

Workers linked air pollution, blasting, and fears of environmental collapse to structural dynamics of extractive development and weak regulatory oversight. These accounts reveal how workers increasingly connect localised ecological harm to global processes associated with the green transition and unequal patterns of resource extraction.

At the same time, participants expressed ambivalence towards transitions away from fossil fuels. While workers recognised the environmental necessity of decarbonisation, they also feared exclusion from its economic benefits. As MW10 observed:

The transition away from coal cannot be abrupt, but should occur gradually alongside investments in clean energy and technologies that ensure workers are not displaced (MW10, interview 2026).

This reflects a redistributive understanding of climate justice centred on employment security, social protection, and equitable transition planning. Workers did not reject decarbonisation itself; rather, they challenged forms of transition that externalise economic risks onto labour while concentrating benefits elsewhere.

Echoing these concerns, UO3 warned that green transitions frequently generate new forms of labour insecurity:

These transitions, often celebrated in boardrooms and at international climate conferences, carry profound and painful consequences for workers on the ground including job losses, skills displacement,

deteriorating occupational health and safety conditions, and the erosion of hard-won labour protections (UO3, interview 2026).

Such concerns highlight growing worker scepticism towards transition processes that exclude labour from decision-making structures. The findings, therefore, reveal an important contradiction within green transitions: while decarbonisation is presented as environmentally progressive, workers fear that transition processes may reproduce existing inequalities if labour protections and democratic participation are absent.

Workers articulated demands aligned with reparative justice. MW11 (interview 2026) argued that mining corporations should contribute towards “clean energy provision and social development in Zimbabwe.” These demands extended beyond environmental protection to include questions of historical inequality, developmental justice, and social investment within mining communities.

Extending this critique, MW12 criticised the contradiction between global decarbonisation and local environmental destruction, arguing that countries such as Zimbabwe continue to bear disproportionate socio-ecological burdens despite contributing relatively little to global emissions. This reflects growing worker awareness of uneven global power relations within climate governance and increasing scepticism towards forms of green industrialisation dependent on environmentally destructive extraction in the Global South.

These findings therefore demonstrate that climate justice consciousness among mineworkers is actively produced through labour education, transnational organising, and regional solidarity networks. The findings advance climate justice scholarship by showing how workers interpret climate change not only as an environmental problem, but as a question of labour rights, unequal development, and democratic participation within transition processes. They contribute to labour sociology by illustrating how trade union networks facilitate the politicisation of environmental issues and the emergence of labour-centred forms of climate justice consciousness within extractive sectors.

3. Civil Society–Labour Alliances and the Expansion of Climate Justice Struggles (Reparations and Redistribution)

The third theme concerns the role of civil society–labour alliances in expanding workers’ engagement with climate justice beyond immediate workplace concerns. While mineworkers often prioritise wages, safety, and working conditions, collaboration with civil society organisations enabled broader reflection on extractivism, environmental degradation, and community wellbeing.

CNRG played an important role in this process through training programmes and campaigns focused on environmental justice, water governance, and community rights within lithium-mining regions. As CSO1 explained:

The CNRG has been engaged in climate justice campaigns focused on water governance in lithium-mining communities. Lithium extraction consumes significant quantities of water, contributing to water contamination and the depletion of local water sources (CSO1, interview 2026).

These concerns extended climate justice debates beyond the workplace itself by linking mining activities to broader questions of public health, agricultural livelihoods, and ecological sustainability. Civil society interventions, therefore, contributed to expanding workers' understandings of how extractive industries affect both labour and community reproduction.

Other civil society organisations are also actively contributing to climate justice advocacy and community mobilisation against extractivism in Zimbabwe, complementing CNRG's labour-oriented interventions. According to information shared on the Facebook page of ActionAid Zimbabwe, it also facilitated community dialogues around extractivism, displacement, environmental regulation, and benefit-sharing in mining communities such as Goromonzi and Bikita. These initiatives reinforced demands for greater accountability, transparency, and democratic participation within mining governance. The findings suggest that civil society organisations function not only as advocacy actors, but also as important mediators in politicising environmental issues within mining communities.

Participants further highlighted how these collaborations contributed to worker-led forms of climate justice advocacy. CSO2 noted:

Through the trainings, workers began questioning not only wages and working conditions, but also environmental destruction and the lack of meaningful community development (CSO2, interview 2026).

This demonstrates how labour struggles move beyond workplace-based demands towards structural critiques of extractive development. Rather than viewing labour exploitation and environmental degradation as separate issues, workers came to understand them as interconnected dimensions of unequal development within extractive economies.

This shift was particularly evident in MW1's account of how engagement with CNRG transformed their understanding of mining and development:

Although the mine created employment opportunities, the wages are low, and my initial concern was advocating for better pay and working conditions. However, through the training provided by CNRG, I came to understand how lithium mining, despite contributing to renewable energy projects, is simultaneously causing environmental destruction in our community. I now advocate not only for workers' rights, but also for clinics, hospitals, roads, clean water, and access to electricity (MW1, interview 2026).

Workers' demands therefore moved beyond wages and occupational safety towards redistributive claims centred on public infrastructure, social investment, and community wellbeing. These findings reveal how mineworkers increasingly interpret climate justice through demands for equitable development and meaningful participation in determining how mineral wealth is governed and distributed.

Extending this perspective, MW2 explained:

Through the CNRG trainings, we not only acquired skills but also gained confidence, and we are becoming leaders within the community, as we

advocate for our interests to be considered in the climate transition (MW2, interview, 2026).

This points to the emergence of workers not only as labour actors, but also as community-based climate justice advocates. The findings, therefore, illustrate how civil society–labour alliances contribute to new forms of political consciousness and grassroots mobilisation within extractive regions.

Union officials also linked climate justice organising to wider critiques of extractive development. As UO2 noted:

Communities were experiencing environmental degradation and displacement to pave the way for mining activities, yet no meaningful development or infrastructure was being created in these areas (UO2, interview 2026).

This reflects growing criticism of extractivist development models that prioritise mineral exports and foreign investment while neglecting social investment, ecological restoration, and community welfare. Participants therefore articulated claims aligned with reparative justice, particularly around displacement, environmental destruction, and the unequal burdens borne by mining communities.

At the same time, tensions remained within civil society–labour alliances. UO3 observed that unions frequently lacked the technical expertise and financial resources available to civil society organisations. This highlights an important contradiction within climate justice organising: although labour participation is expanding, trade unions continue to operate within unequal organisational and resource conditions that may constrain their influence within environmental governance processes.

These findings demonstrate that civil society–labour alliances play an important role in expanding workers' understandings of climate justice beyond immediate workplace concerns. The findings advance climate justice scholarship by showing how climate justice consciousness is shaped through collaboration between labour and civil society actors within extractive communities. They also contribute to labour sociology by illustrating how workers emerge as community-based political actors who connect labour struggles to broader demands for reparations, redistribution, environmental accountability, and democratic participation within just transition processes.

Discussion

Mineworkers, Climate Justice and the Just Transition

The findings demonstrate that mineworkers in Zimbabwe are developing labour-centred forms of climate justice consciousness grounded in their everyday experiences of labour exploitation, environmental degradation, and socio-economic marginalisation. Rather than treating workplace struggles and environmental concerns as separate issues, workers understand them as interconnected dimensions of extractive injustice embedded within Zimbabwe's integration into global green transition supply chains. In this sense, climate justice emerges not simply as an environmental discourse, but as a broader struggle over labour rights, democratic participation, and equitable development.

The study, therefore, challenges perspectives that position workers primarily as passive victims of environmental harm or as obstacles to decarbonisation processes. Instead, the findings show that mineworkers actively interpret, reshape, and politicise climate justice through workplace struggles, trade union organising, and alliances with civil society organisations. Workers' demands extend beyond wages and occupational safety to include environmental accountability, community wellbeing, redistribution of mineral wealth, and participation in shaping transition governance. Climate justice consciousness is thus socially produced through labour struggles, worker education, and experiences of extractive development.

These findings strongly align with emerging scholarship conceptualising climate justice through the interconnected dimensions of regulation, redistribution, and reparations (Lenferna, 2025; Gaughran, 2025; Manduna, 2024; Táíwò, 2022). Regulatory failures were evident in the weak enforcement of labour, occupational safety, and environmental protections, enabling corporations to externalise social and ecological costs onto workers and mining communities. Redistributive demands emerged through calls for fair wages, compensation, infrastructure development, and community benefits from mineral extraction. At the same time, workers articulated reparative claims centred on ecological restoration, recognition of displacement and environmental harm, and redress for the unequal burdens borne by mining communities within extractive economies.

The findings also illuminate a central contradiction within just transition politics in resource-dependent economies of the Global South. While the global demand for critical minerals such as lithium creates opportunities for investment, industrial upgrading, and employment creation, it simultaneously risks reproducing labour precarity, socio-ecological inequality, and environmentally destructive forms of green extractivism (Manduna, 2024; Táíwò, 2022). Recent investments in lithium beneficiation and processing in Zimbabwe illustrate this contradiction. Although such developments are presented as pathways towards economic growth and participation in global decarbonisation, workers' experiences suggest that the benefits of the green transition remain unevenly distributed, while labour exploitation and environmental degradation persist within mining communities.

The findings further contribute to debates within labour sociology and political ecology by demonstrating how workers increasingly connect local workplace struggles to broader global systems of unequal development and climate governance. Consistent with research on labour–environmental alliances in South Africa and other parts of the Global South (Satgar, 2015; Barca, 2019), Zimbabwean mineworkers have come to frame climate change as both an environmental and socio-economic justice issue. However, this study extends existing scholarship by showing how workers in a resource-dependent economy actively reinterpret climate justice from below through their lived experiences of extractivism, labour precarity, and uneven development.

Importantly, the findings suggest that workers do not reject decarbonisation itself. Rather, they contest forms of transition that externalise economic and ecological risks onto labour and mining communities while concentrating benefits elsewhere. Workers, therefore, advocate forms of transition centred on democratic participation, labour protections, social investment, and environmental accountability. In this regard, the

study highlights the importance of institutionalising worker participation within climate governance and just transition policy processes.

Overall, the study advances labour-centred climate justice scholarship by demonstrating that mineworkers are not peripheral to just transition politics, but are emerging as important political actors shaping alternative visions of socio-ecological transformation. Addressing the contradictions of green extractivism in Zimbabwe and similar resource-dependent economies, therefore, requires stronger labour and environmental regulation, equitable redistribution of mining revenues, ecological restoration, and meaningful worker participation in transition governance.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that climate justice in Zimbabwe is being shaped not only within policy and civil society spaces, but also through the everyday struggles of mineworkers themselves. Grounded in experiences of labour exploitation, unsafe working conditions, displacement, and environmental degradation, mineworkers are developing labour-centred forms of climate justice consciousness that connect workplace struggles to structural questions of democratic participation, equitable development, and environmental accountability.

The findings show that workers' experiences and demands align closely with the interconnected dimensions of regulation, redistribution, and reparations. Regulatory failures were reflected in weak enforcement of labour, occupational safety, and environmental protections, allowing corporations to externalise social and ecological costs onto workers and mining communities. Redistributive demands emerged through calls for fair wages, community development, public infrastructure, and more equitable allocation of the benefits derived from mineral extraction. At the same time, reparative claims were evident in demands for ecological restoration, compensation for displacement, and recognition of the unequal burdens imposed on mining communities within extractive economies.

The study also highlights a central contradiction within just transition politics in resource-dependent economies of the Global South. While the global demand for critical minerals such as lithium creates opportunities for economic growth and industrial development, the conditions under which these minerals are extracted frequently reproduce labour precarity, environmental degradation, and uneven development. The challenge, therefore, is not simply participation in the green transition, but how transition processes are governed, who benefits from extraction, and whether workers and affected communities can shape the terms of socio-ecological transformation.

By foregrounding mineworkers' experiences and agency, this article contributes to labour-centred climate justice scholarship in three important ways. First, it demonstrates that workers are not passive victims of environmental harm or obstacles to decarbonisation, but active political actors who increasingly reinterpret climate justice through everyday experiences of extractivism and labour precarity. Second, it shows how workplace struggles are becoming important sites for the production of climate justice consciousness from below. Third, it contributes to debates on green extractivism by illustrating how global decarbonisation efforts may simultaneously

reproduce new forms of socio-ecological inequality within mineral-dependent economies of the Global South.

The Zimbabwean case, therefore, demonstrates that a just transition cannot be reduced to technological change or market-driven environmental reforms alone. Rather, socially just transitions require stronger labour and environmental protections, democratic participation in transition governance, equitable redistribution of resource wealth, and attention to the historical and ongoing harms associated with extractive development. Ultimately, the study highlights the importance of centring labour within climate politics and recognising mineworkers as key actors in shaping alternative socio-ecological futures.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethics Statement

The author confirms that this study was conducted in accordance with the Journal's Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.

FROM ACCESS TO OUTCOMES: HOUSING POLICY AND THE CONSTRAINTS OF INTEGRATION AMONG FORCIBLY DISPLACED PERSONS FROM NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Mira Antonyan, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2708-0819>

PhD, Associate Professor, Chair of Social Work and Social Technologies,
Yerevan State University, Armenia. Email: antonyan.mira@ysu.am

Abstract: Housing policy is widely framed as a key mechanism of socio-economic integration in contexts of forced displacement; however, theoretical debates increasingly distinguish between processes and outcomes, challenging the assumption that formal access necessarily leads to sustainable integration. This article examines the constraints of integration within housing policy by analyzing the mechanisms through which access to housing support is translated - or fails to translate - into integration outcomes. Drawing on original empirical research conducted in Armenia following the mass displacement from Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023, the study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, combining administrative data, a survey of 717 households, and qualitative interviews. The findings demonstrate that integration outcomes are shaped by a structural gap between formal and effective access. Financial intermediation, housing market dynamics, and institutional features of programme design interact to constrain beneficiaries' ability to convert legal eligibility into actual housing outcomes. This results in selective participation, uneven integration pathways, and dynamics of partial inclusion that may be understood as forms of "double marginalisation". The article advances process-oriented and socio-ecological approaches to integration by conceptualising access as a mediated and conditional process. It argues that the constraints of integration are not inherent to displacement itself, but emerge from the interaction between policy design, market dynamics, and institutional environments.

Keywords: *forced displacement, refugee integration, housing policy, access to services, structural constraints, social policy.*

Introduction

In September 2023, following military operations by Azerbaijan, approximately 115,000 ethnic Armenians were forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh, representing more than 4 per cent of Armenia's total population (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024). This event not only triggered a major humanitarian crisis but also placed immediate and significant pressure on the country's social, economic, and institutional systems.



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Over recent decades, scholarship on forced displacement has increasingly conceptualized integration as a multi-dimensional and processual phenomenon shaped by the interaction of institutional, social, and market environments (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2014; Ager & Strang, 2008). Within this framework, housing policy is often positioned as a central instrument of integration, providing conditions for stability, security, and socio-economic inclusion (Phillips, 2006). Yet the assumption that housing provision directly produces integration, remains empirically underexamined.

In response to the displacement crisis, the Government of Armenia developed and implemented a housing support programme aimed at enabling permanent settlement through a combination of financial subsidies, housing certificates, and credit mechanisms. At the policy level, housing provision was framed not only as material assistance but as a foundation for long-term stability and socio-economic integration.

Despite its comprehensive design and high political priority, the programme's practical implementation has remained limited. Available data indicate that only a relatively small proportion of displaced households have applied to or benefited from the programme, while the number of completed housing transactions remains modest. This reveals a clear paradox: a policy framework explicitly oriented towards integration coexists with limited uptake and constrained outcomes.

Theoretical literature increasingly distinguishes between integration as a process and as an outcome, emphasizing that formal access alone does not constitute a sufficient condition for full social and economic inclusion (Spencer & Charsley, 2021). Social-ecological approaches further demonstrate that integration depends not only on individual capacities but on the institutional and environmental conditions through which these capacities can be realised (Ungar, 2011). At the same time, sociological perspectives highlight the coexistence of partial inclusion and ongoing marginalization, whereby formal inclusion does not necessarily translate into meaningful social participation (Bauman, 2004).

Despite these advances, empirical research has only partially examined the mechanisms through which housing policy translates—or fails to translate—into integration outcomes. In particular, limited attention has been paid to structural gaps between formal and effective access (Ager & Strang, 2008), shaped by financial systems, housing market dynamics, and institutional programme design.

This article addresses this gap by examining the extent to which, and the mechanisms through which, housing policy facilitates or constrains the socio-economic integration of forcibly displaced persons from Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia. It proposes an analytical approach linking policy design, financial environments, and market conditions to integration outcomes, and argues that the constraints of integration should be understood as structurally produced phenomena emerging from the gap between formal and effective access.

Theoretical Framework

Integration in contexts of forced displacement is increasingly conceptualised in contemporary scholarship as a multi-dimensional, relational, and processual phenomenon shaped by the interaction of institutional, social, and market environments (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2014; Ager & Strang, 2008). This perspective challenges normative and linear models, which assume that integration is a direct and predictable

outcome of policy interventions or access to resources. Instead, process-oriented approaches conceptualize integration as a dynamic and unevenly unfolding process, mediated by structural conditions and varying across domains (Spencer & Charsley, 2021).

At the center of this debate lies the distinction between integration as a process and as an outcome, which problematizes the linear assumption of “access → integration” (Ager & Strang, 2008). Outcome-oriented approaches tend to focus on observable indicators, such as housing attainment or employment, whereas process-oriented perspectives shift attention to the mechanisms through which such outcomes are produced—or fail to materialize. From this perspective, formal access cannot be considered a sufficient condition for integration, as it does not capture the practical realization of that access.

Social-ecological frameworks, particularly the work of Michael Ungar, deepen this analysis by conceptualizing integration and resilience as outcomes of the interaction between environmental resources and individual capacities (Ungar, 2011; 2012). Within this approach, the critical issue is not only the availability of resources, but their accessibility, usability, and alignment with institutional contexts. Integration thus depends on whether individuals are able to convert available resources into meaningful outcomes within specific social and institutional environments. In this sense, “access” becomes inherently relational and multi-layered, encompassing legal, financial, social, and practical dimensions.

At the same time, sociological theories highlight that integration processes are characterised by the coexistence of inclusion and exclusion. From the perspective of Zygmunt Bauman, late modern societies are marked by forms of partial and contradictory inclusion, giving rise to dynamics of “double marginalisation,” in which individuals are formally incorporated into institutional systems yet remain excluded from full socio-economic participation (Bauman, 2004; 2016). Integration, therefore, should not be understood as a final stage of inclusion, but as a dynamic and potentially unequal process shaped by structural conditions.

These perspectives are complemented by approaches that conceptualise integration as domain-specific and asynchronous, emphasising that progress across different domains—such as housing, employment, and social networks—may vary significantly (Ager & Strang, 2008; Spencer & Charsley, 2021). This helps explain why material stability in one domain, such as housing provision, does not automatically translate into broader socio-economic integration.

Despite these advances, empirical research remains limited in explaining the specific mechanisms through which policy design, financial environments, and market conditions mediate integration processes (Phillips, 2006). In particular, insufficient attention has been paid to structural gaps between formal entitlement and effective access, which may result in selective implementation and differentiated outcomes. This limitation is especially evident in housing policy, where access is often defined in normative terms, without sufficient consideration of the socio-economic conditions that shape its realisation.

This article builds its theoretical framework around this gap by conceptualising integration as a process mediated by the interaction between formal and effective access. By integrating insights from social-ecological resilience, process-oriented

integration theory, and sociological perspectives on marginalisation, it develops a combined analytical model in which integration outcomes are understood as the product of interactions between institutional design, market dynamics, and the practical capacities of beneficiaries. This framework provides a basis for explaining unequal integration outcomes and for rethinking the role of policy in shaping them.

Research Methodology

This study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to analyse integration as a mediated process shaped by the interaction of institutional, financial, and market factors (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative phase identifies patterns of access and integration, while the qualitative phase focuses on tracing the mechanisms underlying these patterns (Beach & Pedersen, 2013).

This design is directly informed by the theoretical framework, which distinguishes between formal and effective access and conceptualises integration as a multi-level, processual phenomenon (Ager & Strang, 2008; Spencer & Charsley, 2021). Accordingly, the methodological objective is not only to describe outcomes, but to identify the causal pathways through which policy design produces differentiated integration trajectories.

The study is based on multi-source data triangulation, ensuring both internal and structural validity (Denzin, 1978; Flick, 2018). The empirical foundation integrates administrative data, quantitative survey data, and qualitative evidence.

Administrative data provide insight into programme implementation, including the issuance and use of housing certificates and completed transactions, enabling reconstruction of policy dynamics in practice. Quantitative survey data were collected from 717 households selected through random sampling from a verified beneficiary database. Data collection relied on Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) using a semi-structured instrument, ensuring comparability across responses and reducing interviewer bias (Groves et al., 2009).

These data are complemented by qualitative evidence, including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with beneficiaries and sectoral experts. This component captures lived experiences, perceptions, and practical barriers to participation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The integration of these data sources enables macro-level patterns to be interpreted through micro-level experiences, thereby enhancing explanatory depth.

The concept of the “household” is operationalized as a unit of individuals who co-reside and share a common budget. The sample includes forcibly displaced persons with temporary protection status who are either potential or actual beneficiaries of the housing support programme.

The spatial distribution of the sample reflects the actual settlement patterns of the displaced population, ensuring comparability between urban and regional contexts. This is particularly important given that access and integration processes are significantly mediated by territorial factors such as labour markets, service availability, and housing conditions (Ager & Strang, 2008).

The analysis follows an integrated, multi-stage approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative component maps the relationship between access and outcomes, examining programme coverage

and utilisation, socio-economic and territorial variation, and stage-specific drop-offs throughout the implementation process.

The qualitative component applies thematic analysis alongside mechanism tracing to explain the processes underlying observed patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Beach & Pedersen, 2013). Particular attention is given to the role of financial intermediaries, especially banks, structural constraints within housing markets, and the practical functioning of programme design.

The integration of these strands enables the construction of an explanatory framework in which integration outcomes are interpreted as the result of structurally mediated processes rather than direct policy effects.

The study ensures multiple dimensions of validity. Triangulation is achieved through the integration of diverse data sources (Denzin, 1978), while complementarity between quantitative and qualitative methods strengthens explanatory capacity (Greene et al., 1989). Internal validity is supported through the identification of causal mechanisms and consistency of explanatory pathways (Beach & Pedersen, 2013), and analytical generalisation is achieved by linking empirical findings to broader theoretical frameworks (Yin, 2018).

The study has several limitations. Administrative and survey data primarily reflect individuals already engaged with the programme, resulting in the underrepresentation of self-excluded populations. Qualitative data, while not statistically representative, provide in-depth insights into underlying mechanisms (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Finally, the study is context-specific and conducted at an early stage of programme implementation; its aim is therefore not statistical generalisation, but theoretical explanation (Yin, 2018).

Despite these limitations, the multi-layered integration of data and the chosen methodological design provide sufficient analytical depth for the development of robust theoretical conclusions.

Results and Analysis

The analysis presented in this section is grounded in a process-oriented understanding of integration, with particular emphasis on the distinction between formal and effective access as a central analytical lens (Ager & Strang, 2008; Spencer & Charsley, 2021). The objective is to identify the mechanisms through which formal access to housing policy is translated—or fails to translate—into integration outcomes. Within this framework, integration is conceptualized not as a fixed outcome, but as a mediated process shaped by the interaction of institutional, financial, and market forces (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2014).

This approach moves beyond linear models that treat the existence of policy as a sufficient condition for integration, instead focusing on the structural conditions that determine the practical realisation of access (Spencer & Charsley, 2021). The analysis therefore follows a causal logic linking formal access, the structural constraints that limit its realisation, and the differentiated outcomes that emerge as a result.

The empirical analysis integrates quantitative and qualitative data to capture both aggregate patterns and the mechanisms underlying them. While quantitative data reveal trends in programme participation and utilisation, qualitative evidence provides insight

into how beneficiaries perceive and navigate programme constraints in practice (Ungar, 2011).

Building on the analytical framework, this subsection examines how the distinction between formal and effective access is reflected in empirical patterns. By integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence, it demonstrates how this distinction manifests in the implementation of the housing support programme.

At the institutional level, the programme is designed to ensure relatively broad formal access through clearly defined eligibility criteria and financial instruments. However, administrative data indicate that this access does not translate into corresponding levels of utilisation.

This gap becomes evident when comparing 5,480 approved housing certificate applications with 2,476 completed transactions, including mortgage loans and housing purchases. This distinction reveals two critical stages of participation: entry into the programme and successful completion of a housing solution. The overall conversion rate of 45.2 per cent indicates that more than half of certificate recipients do not progress to the transaction stage. Within the analytical framework, this drop-off reflects not merely procedural delay, but the structural gap between formal and effective access (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Effective access is further differentiated across socio-demographic characteristics, particularly household size. Single-person households exhibit a conversion rate of only 20.0 per cent, compared to 56.6 per cent among households with six or more members. This disparity indicates that programme implementation depends not only on formal eligibility, but on financial capacity and access to credit.

Smaller households—including single elderly individuals, persons with disabilities, and single parents—are significantly more likely to remain at the entry stage. This pattern aligns with social-ecological perspectives, which emphasise that the availability of resources does not ensure their effective utilisation (Ungar, 2011).

Similar dynamics emerge in relation to household composition. Households without children account for 33.4 per cent of certificate recipients but only 22.5 per cent of completed transactions. In contrast, households with three or more children increase from 28.1 per cent at the certificate stage to 37.6 per cent at the transaction stage. This suggests that the financial structure of the programme favours larger households, although this advantage does not eliminate other constraints related to housing conditions and socio-economic stability.

Age structure reinforces these patterns. The average age of certificate recipients is 43, compared to 41.4 among those completing transactions, indicating that younger beneficiaries are more likely to progress. The marked decline in participation among individuals aged 65 and above suggests substantial barriers to translating eligibility into outcomes.

Evidence from socially vulnerable groups further supports this pattern. Female-headed households exhibit a conversion rate of 40.4 per cent, below the overall average, indicating that income constraints and care responsibilities may limit effective access even when formal eligibility is met.

Spatial patterns also play a critical role. Approximately 70.1 per cent of transactions occur within the same region, indicating limited secondary mobility. This behaviour reflects the importance of maintaining access to employment, education, and social

networks and aligns with domain-specific approaches to integration (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Temporal analysis suggests that key bottlenecks occur after certificate issuance. While allocation has become relatively efficient, the transition to completed transaction takes, on average, approximately 102 days. This indicates that constraints are concentrated in subsequent stages, including housing search, financing, and transaction formalisation.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that access cannot be understood solely in legal or programme terms. Rather, it is a multi-layered phenomenon shaped by financial, spatial, social, and institutional factors (Ungar, 2011). The gap between formal and effective access thus emerges as a central mechanism mediating the impact of housing policy, producing selective participation and differentiated integration outcomes.

The quantitative findings presented in Section 4.2 demonstrate that formal access does not systematically translate into actual utilization, and that this gap exhibits a clear socio-demographic pattern. This subsection explains these dynamics by identifying the structural mechanisms through which policy design, financial environments, and market conditions mediate the realisation of access.

The central argument is that the “access gap” cannot be attributed to a single factor; rather, it emerges from a set of interrelated constraints that together produce a system of selective access. Integration outcomes are thus shaped by the interaction of multiple structural conditions, consistent with process-oriented approaches that emphasis multi-level mediation (Spencer & Charsley, 2021).

The effectiveness of the housing support programme is fundamentally dependent on the banking system, which operates not only as a technical intermediary but as a decisive institutional filter. Although the programme design assumes the combined use of housing certificates and mortgage loans, quantitative evidence shows that this mechanism does not eliminate financial barriers to home acquisition.

The median value of housing units is approximately AMD 20 million, while the combined median value of loans and certificates is around AMD 16 million, indicating a systemic financing gap. This gap is not merely a reflection of individual resource limitations; rather, it constitutes a structural constraint, as its resolution depends on creditworthiness, income stability, and bank risk assessments.

As a result, the banking system performs a process of selective filtering. Beneficiaries who meet financial criteria are able to convert formal access into completed transactions, whereas others are effectively excluded despite formal eligibility. This mechanism can be understood as institutionally mediated access filtering, consistent with social-ecological perspectives that emphasise that resource availability does not guarantee utilisation (Ungar, 2011).

Housing market dynamics constitute a second key factor shaping programme access. The data reveal significant spatial disparities in housing prices, ranging from a median of approximately AMD 30 million in Yerevan to around AMD 12 million in regional areas.

However, market constraints extend beyond price differentials. More affordable locations are often characterized by limited access to employment, education, and essential services. This creates a structural trade-off. Financially accessible areas may

be socially and economically non-viable, while more viable locations remain financially out of reach.

Under these conditions, beneficiary behaviour becomes predictable. Approximately 70.1 per cent of transactions occur within the same region where beneficiaries were already residing, indicating limited secondary mobility. This pattern reflects the importance of maintaining access to employment, education, and social networks and aligns with domain-specific approaches to integration, which recognise that priorities across different domains may diverge (Ager & Strang, 2008).

While formally neutral in its stated criteria, the programme design generates differentiated outcomes through its support calculation mechanisms. Quantitative evidence identifies household size as one of the strongest predictors of effective access.

Larger households receive higher-value housing certificates, increasing their competitiveness in the housing market and enhancing their capacity to overcome financial constraints. However, this advantage does not eliminate the broader structural barriers they face. Conversely, smaller households encounter the opposite dynamic: the level of support they receive is often insufficient to compete effectively in the market, resulting in their systematic exclusion from the transaction stage.

Programme design thus not only reflects existing inequalities but actively reproduces them by generating unequal starting conditions across social groups. This dynamic is consistent with theoretical perspectives on the selective effects of policy interventions, which demonstrate that formally inclusive instruments can produce differentiated outcomes in practice (Spencer & Charsley, 2021).

The structure of transactions indicates that the overwhelming majority of programme-supported housing acquisitions occur within the secondary market, while the construction component remains marginal, accounting for approximately 1.25 per cent of cases. This suggests that the programme does not expand housing supply but instead operates within an already supply-constrained market.

Under these conditions, programme effectiveness becomes structurally dependent on existing market limitations, including price inflation, quality disparities, and restricted availability. Financial support alone is therefore insufficient to offset supply-side constraints, a finding consistent with broader empirical literature on housing policy (Phillips, 2006). In effect, the programme redistributes access within the existing market rather than transforming its underlying structure.

The analysis further indicates that the primary constraints of the programme are located not at the point of entry, but in subsequent stages of implementation. While the issuance of housing certificates has become relatively efficient, the transition from certification to completed transaction takes, on average, approximately 102 days.

This period reflects a multi-stage process involving housing search, bank approval, and transaction formalisation. Beyond its duration, the process introduces uncertainty and increases the risk of dropout, particularly for vulnerable groups. Temporal complexity thus functions as an additional filtering mechanism, reinforcing and deepening existing inequalities in access.

The analysis demonstrated that access to the housing programme is mediated by interrelated structural constraints, including financial intermediation, market dynamics, and programme design. This subsection examines the behavioral manifestations of these constraints through the combined analysis of quantitative and qualitative data.

The findings show that formal access does not translate into corresponding levels of participation. Only 45.2 per cent of certificate recipients progress to the transaction stage. Rather than representing simple “drop-off,” this pattern is more accurately understood as a systematic form of self-exclusion.

From a theoretical perspective, this interpretation is consistent with process-oriented approaches to integration (Ager & Strang, 2008). Social-ecological frameworks, particularly those developed by Michael Ungar, emphasize that behavior is shaped not only by available resources but also by perceptions of accessibility and usability.

It is therefore important to distinguish between formal exclusion and self-exclusion. The evidence indicates that self-exclusion is most pronounced among groups with lower probabilities of successful participation. Single-person households, for example, reach the transaction stage in only 20.0 per cent of cases, compared to over 50 per cent among larger households.

Qualitative evidence further suggests that beneficiaries withdraw from the process due to perceived financial risks, income instability, and uncertainty in the housing market. Self-exclusion thus emerges as an adaptive response to structural constraints rather than a purely individual decision.

From a sociological perspective, this dynamic reflects the coexistence of partial inclusion and ongoing marginalization. As argued by Zygmunt Bauman, individuals may be formally incorporated into institutional systems while remaining excluded from their substantive outcomes. In this case, beneficiaries possess legal access through housing certificates but fail to achieve housing security, resulting in incomplete and unstable forms of integration.

The analysis presented in the previous sections, demonstrates that formal access to the housing support programme is systematically mediated by structural constraints and behavioral responses. This subsection synthesises these findings to show how they produce differentiated and unequal integration outcomes.

Quantitative evidence indicates that integration outcomes are socially stratified. Household size emerges as a key determinant: single-person households achieve housing outcomes in only 20.0 per cent of cases, compared to 56.6 per cent among households with six or more members. Housing provision, as the material foundation of integration, is therefore distributed unevenly according to structurally conditioned factors.

Similar patterns are observed across other socio-demographic characteristics. Female-headed households exhibit a lower conversion rate (40.4 per cent), while older and smaller households are underrepresented at the transaction stage. Programme outcomes are thus systematically skewed towards beneficiaries with greater resource capacity. Formal inclusivity is effectively translated into selective integration, with unequal access to integration pathways across social groups.

These disparities cannot be explained solely by individual resource differences. As demonstrated in the preceding analysis, they are produced by interrelated structural mechanisms, including financial intermediation, market constraints, and programme design. These mechanisms operate as filters that determine which beneficiaries are able to convert formal access into actual housing outcomes.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce process-oriented understandings of integration, according to which integration is not a linear or automatic outcome but a mediated and conditional process. Within a social-ecological framework, integration outcomes depend not only on individual capacities but also on the institutional and market environments in which these capacities are enacted. The data show that these environments differ significantly across social groups, resulting in unequal distributions of integration opportunities.

At the same time, these dynamics reflect the coexistence of partial inclusion and ongoing marginalisation. Following Zygmunt Bauman, formal inclusion within institutional systems may coexist with substantive exclusion. Beneficiaries who possess legal access to the programme often fail to achieve housing security, resulting in incomplete and unstable forms of integration.

Spatial patterns further highlight the conditional nature of integration. The majority of beneficiaries (70.1 per cent) remain within the same region, reflecting the importance of maintaining access to social networks, employment, and services. However, this often constrains housing options, particularly in high-cost markets, resulting in integration pathways shaped by structural limitations rather than optimal outcomes.

Housing provision, as the material basis of integration, is thus selectively realised, shaped by both beneficiary resources and the institutional and market environments in which they operate. Integration becomes differentiated and unequal, with the most vulnerable groups facing both limited access and constrained outcomes.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that integration is not an automatic outcome of housing policy. Rather, it should be understood as a mediated process in which structural conditions and behavioural responses jointly shape the distribution of outcomes. In this sense, inequalities in integration are not unintended side effects but predictable consequences of the structural logic of the programme.

This study reinterprets the relationship between housing policy and integration at both empirical and theoretical levels, demonstrating that integration cannot be understood as a linear outcome of formal access. Instead, it emerges as a multi-level and mediated process in which structural conditions and behavioral responses jointly shape both the possibilities of integration and their distribution (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2014).

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce and extend process-oriented approaches by showing that the link between access and outcomes is conditional upon its practical realisation (Ager & Strang, 2008; Spencer & Charsley, 2021). The study contributes to the integration literature by introducing a clear conceptual distinction between formal and effective access, where the latter constitutes the operative condition of integration. This distinction helps explain why identical policy instruments produce markedly different outcomes across social groups.

Within a social-ecological framework, particularly in the work of Michael Ungar, integration depends not only on individual resources but also on the institutional and market environments within which these resources can be activated. The findings demonstrate that these environments are unevenly structured, generating unequal opportunities across social groups. Integration thus becomes a relational process

shaped not simply by the presence of resources, but by the conditions governing their accessibility and usability.

At the same time, the results can be interpreted through a sociological lens as a dynamic interplay between partial inclusion and structural exclusion. As argued by Zygmunt Bauman, formal inclusion within institutional systems may coexist with substantive exclusion from their outcomes. In this case, beneficiaries are formally incorporated into the programme's institutional framework, yet this inclusion does not translate into stable housing outcomes. Integration therefore appears as a contradictory process in which mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion operate simultaneously.

The analysis further demonstrates that policy interventions may produce selective outcomes even when they are formally inclusive (Spencer & Charsley, 2021). In the case of the housing programme, selectivity is generated through the combined effects of financial intermediation, market constraints, and programme design. These mechanisms function as institutional filters structuring access to integration.

From a policy perspective, programme effectiveness should be evaluated not only in terms of formal coverage or resource allocation, but in relation to the practical realization of access across different social groups. The current model of financial intermediation, based on market-driven lending logic, systematically constrains access for more vulnerable populations, underscoring the need for risk-sharing mechanisms, expanded state guarantees, and alternative financial instruments.

At the same time, housing policy cannot be effective without addressing structural constraints within the housing market. Demand-side interventions, when not accompanied by supply expansion, are likely to intensify price pressures and further restrict effective access (Phillips, 2006). A combined approach is therefore required, integrating financial support with policies aimed at expanding housing supply.

At the level of programme design, the findings show that a "one-size-fits-all" approach produces differentiated outcomes in practice. Different social groups require differentiated instruments that account for variations in financial capacity, social position, and territorial conditions. Without such differentiation, programmes risk reproducing existing inequalities.

Finally, the analysis demonstrates that integration cannot be achieved through sector-specific policy alone. While housing constitutes a critical precondition, it cannot independently ensure socio-economic inclusion. Effective integration requires a systemic approach linking housing policy with employment, social protection, and community integration measures (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Overall, the study shows that integration is a structurally conditioned and processual phenomenon shaped by the interaction of policy design, market conditions, and beneficiary behaviour. This interaction determines not only the level of integration achieved, but also its distribution across social groups.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that the relationship between housing policy and integration cannot be understood as linear or automatic. The analysis shows that formal access does not translate into effective utilization, as it is systematically mediated by the interaction of policy design, financial environments, and market conditions. The combined effects of these factors produce a structural gap between formal and effective

access, which in turn leads to selective participation and differentiated integration outcomes.

The findings identify a clear causal chain: formal access → structural constraints → behavioral responses → unequal outcomes. Each stage of this chain functions as an institutional filter, determining which beneficiaries are able to convert legal eligibility into actual housing outcomes. As a result, integration is not distributed evenly, but follows a structurally conditioned logic.

From a theoretical perspective, the study advances process-oriented and social-ecological approaches to integration by demonstrating that integration should be understood as a mediated and conditional process, rather than a direct outcome of resource provision. In doing so, it refines the concept of “access” by distinguishing between its formal and effective dimensions, and by identifying the gap between them as a central source of unequal integration outcomes.

From a policy perspective, the findings indicate that the effectiveness of housing programmes depends not only on their scale or formal coverage, but on the conditions that enable their practical realization. Without mechanisms for redistributing financial risk, expanding housing supply, and improving institutional environments, such interventions are likely to reproduce selective access and unequal integration pathways.

Overall, integration emerges as a structurally conditioned process, shaped not only by the existence of policy interventions but by the environments in which they operate. This suggests that ensuring integration requires not only expanding access, but fundamentally reconfiguring the conditions under which access becomes effective.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethics Statement

The author confirms that this study was conducted in accordance with the Journal’s Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.

“SOCIETIES IN MOTION”: A CURRICULUM MODEL FOR TEACHING THE SOCIOLOGY OF MIGRATION

Aram Vartikyan, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9949-4650>

Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Sociology; Researcher at the Laboratory of Territorial Studies and Development; Researcher at the Laboratory of Applied Sociological Research; Director of the Center for Migration Studies.

Faculty of Sociology, Yerevan State University. Email: aram.vartikyan@ysu.am

Abstract: This methodological article presents the significance, structure, and pedagogical peculiarities of the course Sociology of Migration designed for Bachelor-level students of social and humanitarian specialties. Today, migration has emerged as one of the most influential social processes shaping demographic transformations, labor markets, urban development, cultural interactions, political conflicts, and identity formation. In the context of world’s societies complex and even chaotic developments, forced displacement, and increasing transnational mobility, sociology students require systematic theoretical and methodological training to comprehend migration as a multidimensional social phenomenon. Particular attention is devoted to migration-related integration processes. Contemporary societies increasingly encounter challenges associated with social inclusion, intercultural communication, ethnic relations, discrimination, segregation, and the adaptation of migrants within receiving communities. Consequently, the course introduces students to major sociological approaches to integration, assimilation, multiculturalism, transnationalism, and acculturation, enabling them to critically analyze the complex relationships between migrants and societies. The article argues that the incorporation of migration sociology into BA-level sociological education is essential for the development of analytical, critical, and research-oriented competencies. The course combines theoretical lectures with seminar discussions, case-study analysis, comparative perspectives, visual materials, and elements of empirical interpretation. Particular emphasis is placed on establishing connections between sociological theory and contemporary migration realities in both global and local; sending and receiving contexts. The anticipated educational outcomes include the development of sociological imagination, reasoning, the capacity to analyze migration and integration processes, enhanced analytical and communicative competencies, and the preparation of students for further academic research and professional engagement in migration-related fields.

Keywords: *Sociology of Migration, Theories of Migration, Inclusion, Integration, Acculturation, Teaching Methodology.*



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Introduction: Migration as the Axis of Contemporary Societal Existence

Multidimensional spatial mobility is one of the defining characteristics of contemporary humanity. Nearly 4 % of the world's population — more than 305 million people — lives away from its homeland (International Organization for Migration, 2022). Migration movements, together with their derivative effects, are the outcome of social, political, economic, and structural processes within societies. They have undeniable consequences for all levels and spheres of societies' present and future existence, from the everyday life of the individual to social macrostructures and the geopolitical positioning of states (de Haas, & Miller, 2014).

Today, migration is a fundamental factor in population reproduction (Massey et al., 1993). Demographic replenishment in accordance with the labor-market needs of the West is realized through the large-scale movement of populations from the Global East and South (Preston et al., 2001; Poston Jr. & Micklin, 2005). Sending societies are emptied while being relieved of pressure on their local labor markets. Yet the balancing of markets does not protect systems and structures of social reproduction from the crisis of depopulation.

Neoliberal marketization and the imperative of exchange rationality dehumanize the migrant, reducing them to nothing more than a labor resource and a participant in consumer markets (Jones, 2016). The labor market of receiving states is not homogeneous. The local population, though quantitatively insufficient, occupies central, advantageous, promising, stable, and secure positions, leaving the opposite positions to newcomers who have left their homes (Piore, 1970; Wrench, 2019).

The incorporation of migrants into the economy of the receiving society is directed toward the geographical balancing of labor supply and demand. Migrant remittances to low- and middle-income countries amount to approximately 700 billion US dollars (World Bank, 2023).

Migration processes are not only economic. They are decisive for the social structures of both receiving and sending societies. Human movements are embedded in systems of power hierarchy, family, gender, and other role structures, as well as in systems of capital reproduction and redistribution.

Migration's participation in the cultural reproduction of societies and groups is undeniable. Group and ethno-national belongings are disrupted as a result of the migration-driven reconfiguration of place of residence and everyday life (Cohen, 2008). We are witnessing the continuity of conflictual regimes of differentiation, social trust, justice, and morality.

Migration disseminates the civilizational imperative of the present age. Labor mobility is, of course, the leading form, yet higher education and science, once nationally bounded, have also become transnational. Abroad are 7–9 million students and researchers, and more than 45 million highly qualified specialists — an immense mass of the creative class that bridges ideas and dominant cultural forms between societies (International Organization for Migration, 2024).

The focal points of migration-related impacts are the cities of receiving societies, which are responsible for the reproduction of productive, commercial-economic, political, administrative relations and symbolisms (Sassen, 2001; Price & Benton-Short, 2008). The division of labor is itself urbanistic (Castells, 1977). The circulation

of population produces a housing market, a perceptual hierarchy of urban places and spaces, and the resulting institutionalization.

Movements are becoming feminized. Women are massively incorporated into the sectors of service, care, low-technology industry requiring cheap labor, and trade — the peripheral and prospectively insecure segments of receiving economies (Parreñas, 2001). Exploitation, violence, and social restrictions are evident here. Migration changes gender identity, gendered social responsibility, and functionality. In the homeland, the absent man is replaced by the woman (De León, 2024).

Thus, the influential presence of migration in the life of societies allows us to argue that including the study of this phenomenon in the social-science curriculum is more than necessary. Without the necessary academic attention to migration, a multidimensional understanding of modernity loses one of its fundamental axes.

The study of migration provides a rich foundation for the practical — political — application of science (Bauböck, 1994). Without attention to migration-related impacts, strategies and instrumental policies concerning social integration, markets, population reproduction, social services, security, and the planning and governance of urban spaces remain incomplete.

Taking into account the complexity of migration processes and their significance for the existence of societies, we argue that the phenomenon should be studied within the framework of the discipline “**Sociology of Migration**,” where the methodological potential of sociology becomes central. According to É. Durkheim, sociology deals with social cohesion and solidarity, while migration, being constitutive, reconfigures mechanical and organic solidarities, disrupting and reproducing the normative foundations of society (Durkheim, 1893/2014). In the Weberian tradition, migration is responsible for the rationalization of social relations and, subsequently, for the reproduction of status-based and power groups (Weber, 1978).

“Sociology of Migration” is presented at the Bachelor level in its generalized form. At this stage, the purpose of education is not narrowly specialized knowledge or final professionalization. Students must be provided with broad conceptual understandings and trained in a sociological mode of perceiving and interpreting reality (Cabrera & Sweet, 2023). “Sociology of Migration” corresponds precisely to this mission by enabling students to connect the biographies of individuals and groups with macro-structures and macro-processes, to demonstrate theories within empirical reality, and to theorize and place within a coherent cognitive framework phenomena including their own everyday life. Thus, “Sociology of Migration” becomes one of the finest exercises in **Millsian** sociological imagination (Mills, 2000).

“Sociology of Migration” also assumes an integrative mission by bringing together under one conceptual framework distinct domains of sociological knowledge:

- **The reproduction of societies:** students become familiar with (dis)-integrative processes and their contexts.
- **The social structure of societies:** this enables discussion of inequalities between groups.
- **The reproduction of cultural forms and symbolic systems:** students become acquainted with identities and their trajectories.
- **The everyday life of the social subject:** students become familiar with the reproduction of society at the micro-level.

The discipline is normative in character and provides not only essential knowledge, but also contributes to the cultural socialization of students. The transnational essence

of migration directs students toward the diversity of social reality, challenging the cognitive ethnocentrism and stereotypical worldview specific for youth.

“Sociology of Migration”: The Structure of the Course

The course encompasses a wide range of topics whose combination reflects the extensive diversity of the sociological understanding of migration. It shapes students’ sociological perception not only of migration and related processes, but also of broader social reality. The course cultivates professional imagination and critical thinking, while enabling students to uncover the foundations and underlying preconditions of the superficial manifestations of social relations and social developments.

Topic 1. Conceptualizing Migration

The purpose of this section is to conceptualize “**migration**” and to present its sociological definition in a way that reflects the structural specificity of the phenomenon and demonstrates its historical-social, socio-structural, and agential determination. These definitions distinguish migration from other forms of movement, as well as from the overly broad or, conversely, excessively narrow and situational formulations employed in other disciplines and administrative practices (de Haas, 2021).

The lecture aims to replace students’ everyday perceptions and politicized stereotypes concerning migration with scientific objectivity. As P. Berger argues, “*Sociology requires moving beyond what appears self-evident toward the systematic interpretation of reality*” (Berger, 1963). Through the example of migration, such an understanding of phenomena becomes a universal instrument for the objective comprehension of society.

Topic 2. Historical Forms of Migration Movements

The purpose of the lectures included in this section is to present the historical panorama of human mobility, as well as the qualitative preconditions, political, economic, and cultural characteristics, and consequences of particular historical stages (Manning, 2005). The focus of students’ attention includes:

1. **The prehistoric period** (Gamble, 2013):
 - movements of nomadic tribes,
 - the formation of agricultural communities or Neolithic migrations,
 - the emergence of civilizations.
2. **Classical (ancient) and medieval migrations:**
 - the large-scale resettlement of *Greek, Germanic, Turkic, and Slavic* peoples (Pohl, 2018),
 - migration and the expansion and decline of the Roman Empire (Moatti, 2006),
 - migration and the expansion of the Arab Caliphate: *Conquista* and *Re-conquista*.
3. **Early modernity and the origins of capitalism:**
 - the Great Geographical Discoveries,
 - the colonial partition of the New World, Africa, and Asia,
 - spheres of influence in the East and Asia (Manning, 2005).

4. **The industrial era:**
 - the mass resettlement of the Americas (Roger Daniels, 2002),
 - industrial urbanism,
 - internal movements within empires and the redistribution of peoples.
5. **Forced displacements (first half of the twentieth century)** (Gatrell, 2013):
 - the Armenian Genocide,
 - the World Wars,
 - Soviet deportations.
6. **Postwar migrations (second half of the twentieth century):**
 - global economic migration,
 - the decolonization of former empires and the emergence of nation-states.
7. **The post-Soviet period (late twentieth century):**
 - the collapse of the Soviet Union and socio-economic transformations,
 - the emergence of national states or processes of ethnic homogenization.

The study of the history of migration movements is fundamental for Bachelor students of sociology because it enables them to perceive migration not as an exceptional or crisis-related phenomenon, but as a universal and continuous socio-historical process that has accompanied humanity throughout its entire historical existence. The significance of migration for the formation of states, cities, labor markets, cultures, and social structures becomes evident, while the relationship between migration and broader historical transformations — modernization, colonialism, industrialization, and globalization — is also revealed.

The study of these issues develops students' historical thinking and sociological imagination. It provides the foundation for a deeper understanding of population mobility and its underlying dynamics.

Topic 3. Contemporary Developments in Migration Processes

Today, migration movements manifest themselves both through the intensified continuation of previously established processes and through quantitatively and qualitatively new forms of human mobility (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2019). These developments include:

- the quantitative growth of global cross-border and internal migration,
- the expansion of economic and labor migration,
- the increase in forced displacement and involuntary mobility,
- the diversification of migration flows,
- the feminization of migration flows,
- the growth of inequalities,
- and the emergence of transnational regimes and forms of everyday life.

It is important for students to understand the contemporary qualitative and quantitative manifestations of migration because they provide insight into the structural transformations of modern societies, trends in social mobility, demographic changes, and new forms of global interconnectedness. Such knowledge enables students to understand migration not merely as the mechanical movement of people, but as a central component of the development, transformation, and social processes of contemporary societies.

Topic 4. Migration within the Paradigm of the Social Sciences

Migration is a complex phenomenon, and its comprehensive study within the framework of a single discipline is impossible. The application, combination, and problem-oriented cooperation of methodological achievements from the social sciences produce analytical tools appropriate to contemporary challenges. Within the framework of the proposed course, it is therefore important to familiarize students with the approaches through which various social-science disciplines study migration in a multidimensional manner.

- **According to the historical approach**, migration processes are studied within the chronological dynamics of their existence (Livi-Bacci, 2012; Manning, 2005). Geographical movements are situated within the long-term transformations of socio-political structures. Migration is thus conditioned by such phenomena as the rise and fall of empires, colonization, the formation of nation-states, and similar processes. Migration is not instantaneous. Causal relationships, dependencies, and historical legacies persist across centuries, producing the migration practices of groups, families, and individuals.

- **Economics** conceptualizes migration within the framework of rational choice theory, where the individual — or the collective of social actors — optimizes social existence through mobility under external constraints (Borjas, 2014). At the macro-level, the migrant becomes a resource within productive-economic relations: labor power and a participant in consumer society. Migration therefore carries out the geographically expedient distribution of labor and consumers within local and global economic structures according to market asymmetries.

- **Political science** situates migration within the context of the exercise, regulation, and governance of political power (Guiraudon & Lahav, 2000). Accordingly, migration becomes a sphere of state sovereignty, institutional governance of socio-political relations, and power relations embedded within geopolitical dynamics (Hollifield, 2004). Political-science conceptualizations of migration focus on migration regimes — political ideologies, strategies, and institutional practices aimed at managing population mobility. Migration becomes a field of political struggle, an instrument of electoral competition, and a mechanism shaping the reproduction of state borders and security, civic belonging, social inclusion, and human rights. Migration is a sphere of state control where economic rationality, state and public security, humanitarian norms, and human rights intersect and often conflict.

- **Social anthropology** seeks to understand processes of meaning-making, symbolic systems, and everyday cognitive and pragmatic practices (Brettell, 2003). Migration is significant here as a lived experience of displacement, belonging, identity, choice, and cultural transition. Ultimately, migration becomes a sphere for the reproduction of meanings and the formation of the migrant's transnational life experience.

- **Demography** regards migration, alongside fertility and mortality, as one of the most important preconditions of population reproduction — traditionally understood as the “mechanical movement” of populations, which, together with fertility and mortality, continuously fills and empties states and regions (Poston Jr. & Micklin, 2005).

These lectures enable students to understand migration as a multidimensional phenomenon studied through diverse interdisciplinary approaches. This develops

students' theoretical thinking and contributes to a comprehensive and critical understanding of migration processes.

Topic 5. “Sociology of Migration” within the Conceptual System of Sociological Knowledge

The purpose of this section is to present to students the place of “Sociology of Migration” within the structure of sociological knowledge. According to Mertonian logic, “Sociology of Migration” is a middle-range or specialized sociological theory (Merton, 1949). Like other theories of this type, it seeks within its own substantive domain to connect social macro-structures with the actions of social subjects.

Unlike generalized interpretative systems, the sociology of migration concentrates on concrete social problems. Students thereby overcome one-dimensional and single-level perceptions of social reality and become capable of understanding how the different levels of social analysis relate to and complement one another.

Topic 6. Migration Theories

Migration requires theorization — the construction of coherent systems of logically interconnected concepts and propositions aimed at explaining the regularities of migration and related processes, identifying the relationships and interconnections between phenomena, and providing the foundation for empirical research as well as for forecasting future developments of the phenomenon (Brettell & Hollifield, 2022).

Migration theories constitute one of the most important components of the course. This extensive series of lectures enables students to understand migration not as a mechanical movement, but as a complex social phenomenon whose origins, trajectories, development, and impacts are structured and patterned. Without theorization, there is always the danger of confusing subjectively familiar situations with objective social reality.

The teaching of migration theories develops analytical pluralism in students and protects them from interpretative reductionism — that is, from inappropriate simplification. It is theory that distinguishes scientific knowledge from everyday understanding.

The abstraction of migration is not an end in itself; rather, it cultivates sociological imagination and scientific modes of reasoning.

Migration theories are decisive for the entire research process. They constitute the foundation for the formalization of research — the formulation of hypotheses, research questions, analytical units and variables, methodological approaches, and research techniques.

The systematic study of theories also develops students' critical cognition. Students come to understand that conceptual frameworks are often normatively charged and may reproduce dominant power discourses. Ultimately, Bachelor-level education aims not merely at producing ready-made specialists, but rather intellectually informed individuals capable of multidimensional reflection on social phenomena.

Thus, these lectures provide students with an extensive theoretical foundation, conceptual literacy, and intellectual flexibility.

Lecture 1. The Origins of Scientific Knowledge on Migration

The study of migration theories begins with the classical thinkers. At the forefront stands K. Marx, according to whom migration is not the result of individual decision-

making, but rather an outcome of capital accumulation and the modern logic of labor exploitation. In his view, the modern era is characterized by the existence of an industrial reserve army (Marx, 1867/1976). Capitalism continuously reproduces a surplus population of workers that moves across state borders in various directions. Migration movements provide masses of cheap labor, regulate the working class, and ultimately serve as an effective mechanism for the continuous reduction of wages. Marx also addresses the subordination of migrant labor (Marx, 1867/1976).

F. Engels points to the mass rural-to-urban migrations produced by industrialization, as well as to overcrowded urban lifestyles, poor and unfavorable housing conditions, and class segregation.

M. Weber did not formulate a comprehensive theory of migration. Nevertheless, migration-related issues can be identified within his ideas concerning the rational division of labor, relations of power, and the reproduction of social positions (Weber, 1978). Migration is associated with rational economic organization. It reproduces status distinctions, while migrants themselves belong to subordinate status groups.

É. Durkheim likewise does not directly address migration. Yet his propositions are visible within migration and related fields. The movements characteristic of the industrial era are embedded within the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity. Movement from the village — from the established homeland — to the city disrupts social ties and established moral regulations, producing a condition of normlessness, namely Durkheimian anomie.

In the history of the social sciences, the first systematic study and generalization of human migration movements belongs to E. Ravenstein (Ravenstein, 1889). We consider it necessary to introduce students to Ravenstein's still-relevant twelve laws of migration. Their formulation represented the first attempt at the theoretical generalization of empirical migration material and observed regularities. Students thereby witness the very formation of migration theory — from observation to regularity, and then to generalization.

From this point onward, migration ceases to appear accidental or situational; it becomes ordered and patterned. E. Ravenstein's work demonstrates that not only migration processes themselves possess long historical duration, but that interpretative systems may likewise endure over time. Several of the twelve laws continue to be reflected in contemporary applied theories, including push-pull theory and neoclassical migration theories.

The lecture series also includes contemporary theories of migration studies. Through acquaintance with them, students acquire knowledge concerning the epistemological and methodological qualities of theories, their practical applicability, analytical limitations, and shortcomings, grounded in contemporary approaches to evaluating theoretical effectiveness (Popper, 2002).

Contemporary Theories of Migration Studies

Lecture 2. Neoclassical Economic Theories of Migration

The lecture series begins with the economic approaches to migration — namely, **neoclassical macro- and micro-level theories**. These approaches provide one of the best introductions to the systematic study of migration and contribute not only to theoretical knowledge, but also to the development of students' analytical capacities.

At the macro-level, migration is understood as the result of objective structures — specifically, the geographically uneven distribution of labor supply and demand (Harris & Todaro, 1970).

At the micro-level, students become acquainted with rational choice and decision-making processes, since migration is interpreted as the result of the actor's comparison between the anticipated benefits and costs of movement (Sjaastad, 1962).

These theories address one of sociology's most important questions: the relationship between structure and agency. While macro-level theory emphasizes the structural differences between sending and receiving regions, the micro-level highlights individual behavior. Migration cannot be reduced either to structure alone or to the individual alone, and overcoming such dualism contributes to the formation of sociological thinking.

The teaching of these theories also has a practical purpose. They are embedded within the foundations of migration-management policies, initiatives, and interventions; consequently, future specialists acquire the knowledge necessary for effective professional activity in the field.

These theories, however, possess important limitations. Macro-level theory is narrowly deterministic: it overestimates economic factors and remains insufficiently attentive to the broader social context. Within micro-level theory, the migrant is necessarily rational — possessing the required information, conducting multidimensional analysis, and making productive choices. Both theories remain largely blind to the diversity of social structures, including relations of power, values, and identity-based constraints, and are unable to explain the continuation of migration even after inequalities in material conditions have been reduced (Massey et al., 1993).

A critical approach therefore reveals the limitations of these theories and guides students toward alternative and more effective theoretical frameworks better suited to social reality.

Lecture 3. Push-Pull Theory

The course next turns to factor-based theories. Students are introduced to **Push-Pull Theory**, one of the most widespread methodologies in contemporary migration studies. The natural complexity of migration is reduced to relatively simple analytical categories and framed within the complementary dichotomy of push and pull factors (Lee, 1966).

Students learn to construct multi-causal explanations, which is fundamentally important for sociological reasoning more generally.

The theory also serves as an educational example of one of the most important components of sociological research — analytical operationalization. The operationalization of migration through the terminology of push and pull factors demonstrates the complex interrelationship between structure and agency.

As a framework underlying policy formation, knowledge of Push-Pull Theory brings students closer to the practical application of the knowledge they acquire.

The lecture also includes a discussion of the theory's limitations, particularly its narrowly factor-based determinism and its insufficient attention to historical and social contexts.

The limitations of previous theories are likewise taken into account. The progression of lectures gradually leads students toward more complex, multifactorial, and consequently more flexible theoretical approaches.

Lecture 4. The New Economics of Labor Migration

The series of economic theories concludes with **O. Stark's New Economics of Labor Migration**. According to this approach, migration decisions are not made at the level of the individual. Rather, the group — specifically the household — is responsible for the initiation, organization, and consequences of migration. Migration is therefore associated with the diversification of income sources, the reduction of risks, and redistribution (Stark, 1991).

Students become acquainted with sociological categories and analytical units previously absent from earlier approaches, including social risk, group dynamics, social relations, and related concepts. The lecture provides a broader analytical lens through which migration is transformed from a strategy aimed at increasing individual income into a long-term strategy for family survival. At the center of attention lies the adaptive distribution of economic responsibilities. Remittances are understood as forms of financial credit and future-oriented investment.

Students thereby engage with survival practices at the household level and, through them, become familiar with the broader concept of development. From a methodological perspective, the inclusion of this theory within the lecture series is highly appropriate. It is distinguished by its strong empirical applicability and by its potential for further theoretical enrichment.

The limitations of the theory are nevertheless evident. It overestimates the rationality of the group — the household and the family (Parreñas, 2001). The family is presented as homogeneous, while the assumption that inequalities and conflictual divisions exist within it remains secondary, despite the fact that such divisions reduce the likelihood of purposeful and collectively rational choices. The individual subjectivity of family members disappears. The family itself appears as a narrowly functional apparatus in which the value-normative foundations of self-reproduction are absent.

This methodological weakness is deepened by the theory's gender neutrality, according to which the family appears effectively genderless, despite the obvious gendered dynamics of family relations. At the same time, the family is neither the ultimate determinant nor the sole beneficiary of migration decisions, mobility, and related practices. Migrants belong to powerful extra-familial social networks that may even prevent migration movements considered beneficial for the household.

Macro-structural constraints also remain invisible, including migration policies and border regimes within societies. A number of research-related challenges persist as well: the operationalization of conceptual components is particularly complex and difficult to overcome.

Lecture 5. the Theory of Cumulative Causation

We now turn to theories in which migration becomes self-reproducing. One such framework is the theory of **Cumulative Causation**, according to which an initial migration movement, once emerging within a particular structural context, transforms the social environment of the sending society and thereby increases the probability of future migration movements (Massey, 1990).

Students come to understand that migration is not merely a reaction to a single factor such as poverty. Migration produces new social structures, relations, symbolic

systems, perceptions, and practices that themselves generate demand for further migration and the continuation of existing flows.

Population mobility becomes normative. Migration generates aspirational standards within communities. It therefore becomes understandable why migration inertia persists even when the original conditions that produced migration belong to the past, while migration flows themselves remain continuously active. The theory effectively demonstrates the interrelationship between local social structures and the agency of social actors.

At the same time, the theory overestimates the self-reproductive character of migration, implying that migration should mechanically reproduce itself indefinitely. It struggles to explain return migration and the refusal of other community members to migrate.

The theory also underestimates structural constraints within societies. The migrant appears faceless: the class-based, identity-based, and gendered selectivity of migration escapes the researcher's attention. Finally, one of the principal limitations of the theory concerns the origins of the initial movement itself — namely, where the first step that generated subsequent developments actually came from.

Lecture 5. Migration Network Theory

Contemporary scientific knowledge and analytical tools concerning migration remain incomplete without **Migration Network Theory**. According to this perspective, migration movements occur through the ties connecting current migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants between sending and receiving societies (Massey et al., 1998).

Migration is therefore not solely the result of structural inequalities, but is primarily conditioned and shaped by complex networks of social agency. These networks make migration barriers and restrictions more permeable by reducing the costs of movement, the risks associated with migration and settlement, and the uncertainty of the future.

Migration flows are not aggregates of isolated, mutually disconnected, accidental acts. Rather, they tend toward becoming self-reproducing structures prepared for the continuous incorporation of new members, the normalization of migration itself, and the gradual independence of the process from its original causes and conditions.

Migration represents the transnational formalization of social capital. Members incorporated into migration networks gain access to social resources, legitimized goods, and advantages; consequently, inclusion within such networks becomes desirable. At the same time, the structural character of social inequality also becomes visible, because migration networks, while promising advantages to new members, ultimately function as mechanisms of social filtering.

Network Theory additionally enriches explanations concerning the preference for particular migration destinations. Migrants move not merely according to the geographical imbalance of desirable goods, but rather follow the logic and opportunities generated by the network itself.0 the division between the macro- and micro-levels of scientific understanding. Through multidimensional migration networks, micro-level agency becomes connected to macro-level structures.

The theory is also open to the participation of other social sciences. Through **anthropology**, one may explore the meanings of kinship and other social ties;

economics becomes responsible for questions of market incorporation; and **political science** addresses relations of power and regimes of admission.

The theory furthermore enables students to understand the failures of restrictive and prohibitive migration policies: once migration networks have formed, they often remain relatively indifferent toward formal restrictions.

Future specialists must nevertheless become familiar with the limitations of Network Theory. The theory overestimates microsocial ties, while macro-structural constraints — including migration policies, labor-market characteristics, and geopolitical contexts — remain secondary. It explains the continuity of migration rather than its origins.

At the same time, the agency of the subject tends to disappear. The migrant becomes a passive participant within the social network, deprived of personal strategies and ambitions. Social capital itself may appear romanticized and interpreted exclusively in positive terms, despite the fact that it functions not only as a mechanism of social integration, but also as a source of dependency and exclusion.

Ultimately, students acquire a critical analytical perspective through which they become capable of identifying hidden mechanisms, unintended consequences, and long-term social effects.

Lecture 6. Dual Labor Market Theory

We now turn to structural theories. The first is **Dual Labor Market Theory**. This perspective seeks the explanation of human mobility not in individual decisions or in the push contexts of sending societies, but rather in the structural logic of advanced capitalist economies themselves. The labor market of the receiving society is dual in character: it consists of a primary sector distinguished by stable employment, high wages, and guarantees, and a secondary sector characterized by precisely the opposite conditions. Migrants are incorporated predominantly into this secondary segment. Movement from the secondary to the primary sector remains unlikely, since receiving societies are marked by continuous structural inequality (Piore, 1979).

The lecture introduces students to the idea of the structural heterogeneity of society and explains the origins of social inequality through concepts that are relatively accessible analytically. Students thereby become capable of interpreting social phenomena through macro-structural terminology.

The theory is critical in character and exposes the undesirable contradictions and shortcomings of contemporary capitalism and market relations.

Several methodological limitations nevertheless remain evident. The focus is directed almost exclusively toward the macrostructures of receiving societies, while analogous structures within sending societies disappear from view. Likewise, the migrant's agency — personal life experience and future aspirations — falls outside the methodological focus.

Lecture 7. World-Systems Analysis

The final structural theory is I. Wallerstein's methodological framework of World-Systems Analysis. Migration is understood as a historically conditioned macro-process resulting from the expansion of capitalism from core societies toward the periphery, where local traditional economies, social structures, and relations become destabilized.

The geography of migration reproduces the hierarchy of the capitalist world-system itself. Alongside various resources, local populations — labor power — flow toward core societies, continuously reproducing forms of dependency originating in the colonial period and difficult to overcome. The lecture presents migration as a derivative of global structures and interrelations (Wallerstein, 2004).

Students critically analyze the landscape of global dependencies and worldwide inequalities characteristic of modernity, avoiding voluntaristic, individual-centered, and narrowly factor-based explanations.

Sociological knowledge is historical in essence. World-systems analysis seeks the structural logic of global society through retrospective analysis spanning centuries. Within this analytical lens, migration develops students' tools for understanding reality not only synchronically, but also diachronically.

Among the limitations of the theory is its macro-structural determinism: rigid capitalist structures occupy a central place. Community ties and transnational migration networks remain secondary. The migrant's agency and prospects for shaping one's own life are overshadowed. States themselves — which must ensure security and govern borders — are insufficiently conceptualized.

The theory is also methodologically problematic. Its principal conceptual components are difficult to operationalize empirically. Furthermore, the broad typological diversity of migration flows disappears from view, including return migration and even Wallerstein's own intermediate category of the semi-periphery, which for decades has itself attracted migrants.

Lecture 8. Massey's Synthetic Theory of Migration

The lecture series on migration theories concludes with D. Massey's Synthetic Theory of Migration, introduced in the late 1990s. Taking into account the shortcomings of the previously discussed frameworks — particularly their lack of practical comprehensiveness — Massey concluded that contemporary migration cannot be understood through a single theoretical approach.

Strictly speaking, this is not a theory in the classical sense, but rather a meta-theoretical research framework that brings together under one conceptual umbrella a number of theories, each effective within its own methodological domain.

The theoretical framework situates migration within temporal dynamics, where it develops as a result of structural contradictions and gradually transforms, through normalization, into a self-organizing system independent of its original causal factors.

The analytical framework incorporates:

- Neoclassical macro- and micro-economic theories,
- the New Economics of Labor Migration,
- Cumulative Causation Theory,
- Migration Network Theory,
- Dual Labor Market Theory,
- and I. Wallerstein's World-Systems Theory.

Its analytical focus encompasses three levels of social existence:

- the structural level (macro-level),
- the institutional level (meso-level),
- and the personal level (micro-level).

Consequently, it overcomes the contradictions between separate theories, where there is always the danger of opposing conceptual frameworks to empirical reality or endlessly continuing the search for a supposedly adequate alternative (Massey et al., 1998).

Students thereby acquire sociological imagination, whose significance extends far beyond migration studies themselves. Migration policies frequently fail and remain far removed from fulfilling their declared missions. This is often the consequence of the dominance of narrow theoretical approaches. Massey's framework provides students with a critical perspective for evaluating policy and with the skills necessary for interventions that genuinely take social reality into account.

Topic 8. Social Inclusion in Migration Processes

This section presents theories through which students become acquainted with interpretations of social order, stability, and membership. Among social actors, migrants are those who maintain the most direct relationship with questions of social inclusion in both receiving and sending societies. Accordingly, the lectures introduce a number of theories and approaches aimed at explaining migrant inclusion.

Lecture 1. Theory of Linear Assimilation

We begin with the foundations — namely, the Chicago School of Sociology and its leading figure, R. E. Park's **theory of Linear Assimilation**. This constitutes one of the foundational approaches in the sociology of migration and one of the first empirical attempts to explain social inclusion within intergroup relations. According to Park, newcomers move toward adaptive assimilation into the receiving society, while cultural, social, and behavioral differences gradually disappear over time (Park, 1928).

Migration is therefore not merely a physical relocation, but a process realized through intergroup relations and institutional adaptation. Migration and the subsequent existence of migrants are situated within a broad social context involving urban lifestyles, inter- and intragroup relations, modernization, and the reproduction of social order.

Among the limitations of the theory is its teleological understanding of assimilation, despite the fact that migration processes are in reality multidirectional, unpredictable, contradictory, discontinuous, and reversible. Contrary to the promises of the theory, it is difficult to speak of complete and final assimilation when migrant minorities frequently demonstrate strong cultural resilience.

Through mechanisms of discrimination, the receiving society itself likewise displays resistance that obstructs the newcomer's entry into full social participation.

Through this theory, students become acquainted with the foundations of the sociological understanding of migration and enter into one of the most important problems of contemporary sociology — social inclusion — by confronting the question of what exists beyond mere physical movement. This multidimensional explanatory framework transforms students into critical thinkers and provides the foundation for the effective understanding of other theories concerned with the problem.

Lecture 2. M. Gordon's Classical Assimilation Theory

Scientific understanding is further enriched through a more systematic and influential theory of assimilation — namely, **M. Gordon's Classical Assimilation Theory**, also known as the **Seven-Stage Model of Assimilation**. Gordon rejects the

one-dimensional and one-directional character of previous approaches and argues that the process is multidirectional, temporally uneven, and realized through seven dimensions: **culture, structure, marital status, identity, attitude, behavior, and civic** (Gordon, 1964).

At the same time, the normative character of the theory is also criticized, since it assumes that the “normal” trajectory is the movement of minorities toward the culture of the majority. The theory remains insufficiently attentive to the structural barriers within receiving societies that make movement toward this presumed norm impossible.

On the other hand, global interconnectedness facilitates migrants’ existence in new environments, reduces the imperative of assimilation, and enables migrants’ social existence within dual — transnational — forms of belonging (Vertovec, 2009).

Lecture 3. Neo-Assimilation Theory

The increasing complexity of migration processes and the expansion of empirical data have generated new demands for theories explaining inclusion and assimilation. **R. Alba and V. Nee** propose **Neo-Assimilation Theory**. This approach accepts the long-term convergence of migrants toward the receiving society, yet rejects the linearity of earlier models. Assimilation is not linear, but probabilistic and context-dependent.

The methodological innovation of the theory lies in its attention to social barriers. The receiving society itself is dynamic and constantly changing: over time, it accepts cultural forms that had previously been rejected.

In contrast to one-sided assimilation, the adaptive transformation of the receiving society is also acknowledged. Within macrostructures, priority is given to social institutions that either support or obstruct migrants’ social membership (Alba & Nee, 2003).

The authors likewise do not disregard the agency of the subject. Within external structural constraints, migrants possess purposeful strategies, the capacity for rational orientation, and adaptive behavior.

For students, the theory is significant as an attempt to render the classical approach more flexible. It moves beyond the understanding of migration as mere physical movement and incorporates structural barriers into the analytical toolkit.

Lecture 4. Segmented Assimilation Theory

The narrow dimensionality and one-directionality of assimilation theories are overcome by **A. Portes** within the framework of **Segmented Assimilation Theory**.

Assimilation within societies is neither one-dimensional, uniform, nor irreversible. Rather, it is conditioned by the specific characteristics of the receiving society and displays a diversity of trajectories dependent upon migrants’ belonging, the institutional structures of the receiving society, dominant ideologies, and the logic of resource redistribution.

Newcomers face three principal trajectories: **upward assimilation**, through which they become part of the receiving society’s middle class; **downward assimilation**, through which they are incorporated into the underclass of the receiving society; and **selective acculturation**, through which migrants preserve their identity and group

belonging selectively while simultaneously occupying competitive social positions (Portes & Zhou, 1993).

Assimilation is intergenerational. The experience of the first generation is insufficient for comprehensive social membership, and the theory therefore directs attention toward subsequent generations.

The urban environment occupies an important place within this interpretation. The morphological hierarchy of the modern city is an undeniable participant in the social reproduction of migrants.

Among the limitations of the theory is its strong orientation toward Western social contexts. Migrant agency remains secondary. Hybrid identities, circular movements, and transnational practices — all of which reduce the imperative for migrants to identify fully with the receiving society — receive insufficient attention.

Students should become familiar with this theory because it challenges simplified approaches and engages one of sociology's most important categories: inequality. It analyzes inequality multi-dimensionally, through the prism of class, group, and spatial variables. Students thereby come to recognize the participation of the receiving society's social institutions in processes of inclusion. Ultimately, students learn to perceive society structurally and within a broader systemic panorama.

Lecture 5. Acculturation Theory

As early as the late 1970s, **J. Berry** proposed **Acculturation Theory**, whose purpose is to understand how migrants adapt to a new environment. The migrant's acculturation strategy emerges from a fundamental dilemma: what is preferable — preserving one's own culture or becoming an identical part of the receiving society?

Accordingly, four possible trajectories emerge from this dilemma:

- assimilation, in which one's own culture is fully neutralized;
- integration, in which one's own culture is preserved while broad participation in the social relations of the receiving society is also evident;
- separation, in which the migrant preserves their own culture while refusing local participation;
- and marginalization, in which the migrant abandons their own culture while simultaneously lacking meaningful and effective relations with the receiving society.

J. Berry's methodology distinguishes cultural assimilation — acculturation — from inclusion (integration), presupposes adaptive strategies, emphasizes agency, and is applicable to a variety of societies, not solely Western ones (Berry, 1997).

The cognitive model possesses a psychological foundation and prioritizes personal choices and attitudes, while macro-structures and social inequalities remain secondary. Although the transformation of the displaced subject is evident within the model, the reciprocal movement of the receiving society remains insufficiently clear.

For students, the theory is important because it cultivates a multidimensional mode of thinking applicable not only to studies of inclusion, while also providing a relatively simple yet coherent analytical toolkit. Ultimately, the migrant's multi-subjectivity becomes central.

Lecture 6. Communication and Intercultural Adaptation Theory

Within the framework of **Communication and Intercultural Adaptation Theory**, Y. Y. Kim explains migrants' adaptation and inclusion within unfamiliar environments. According to the author, intercultural adaptation is a process realized through continuous interaction, constant stress, and learning. Ultimately, the migrant acquires functional and psychological compatibility with the new cultural environment.

Inclusion is not linear and unfolds across three levels. The migrant passes through stages of

- stress,
- adaptation (learning), and eventually
- growth (development), where effective communication becomes central.

According to Y. Kim, adaptation is bilateral: it requires an open receiving society, access to social networks, and inclusiveness.

Adaptation in its turn encompasses three dimensions of human existence:

- psychological,
- social, and
- structural (Kim, 2001).

The theory is normative in character: it defines an end goal and presupposes movement toward a logical form of assimilation. It is strongly person-centered, while structural constraints remain secondary.

Through this theory, students understand that adaptation is dynamic and multidimensional. The migrant's agency and lived experience become central within the analytical framework. The theory also helps students develop competencies in qualitative research.

Lecture 7. R. Penninx's Theory of Multidimensional Integration

The lectures continue with contemporary theories, particularly **R. Penninx's Theory of Multidimensional Integration**.

Integration, through which immigrants become members of the receiving society, occurs across interconnected dimensions that concern both migrants and the receiving society itself. The author rejects the notion that integration is essentially cultural assimilation. Integration is relational, dynamic, and context-dependent. Migrants' adaptation is impossible without a response from the receiving society.

Comprehensive integration requires the simultaneous presence of three foundations:

- the legal-political dimension (civic status, political rights, and participation),
- the socio-economic dimension (the existence and accessibility of social goods),
- and the cultural dimension (values, norms, beliefs, identities, and practices).

Integration is multi-actor in nature. The relevant actors include migrants with their life strategies, resources, and goals; the receiving population with its pro-migrant and anti-migrant attitudes; and social institutions with their established rules and regulations (Penninx, 2005).

The theory is descriptive and remains relatively weak in explaining causal relationships. It lacks a sufficiently developed conceptualization of power relations and inequalities, which are crucial within migration processes. As a result, the concept of integration itself requires additional clarification.

The theory provides students with the possibility of analyzing integration from the micro-level of personal experience to the institutional and macro-structural levels. It can readily be transformed into an empirical analytical tool and effectively contribute to the formulation of migration-related policies.

Lecture 8. Conceptual Framework of Integration

The next framework introduced is the **conceptual model** of integration developed by A. Ager and A. Strang. It is among the most policy-oriented and clearly operationalizable theoretical models for explaining the integration of migrants and refugees.

Integration is multidimensional, reflecting migrants' connections with and participation in the receiving society. The process of integration becomes visible through employment, the availability of decent housing conditions, access to education and healthcare, as well as intra-group, intergroup, and institutional relations.

The theory proposes an operational model based on analyzable indicators that links migrant agency with the macrostructures of the receiving society. For the same reason, however, the conceptual framework tends to oversimplify social processes and remains insufficiently attentive to contextual complexities (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Lecture 9. Multiculturalism

W. Kymlicka introduces the idea of **Multiculturalism**. This is a normative political theory and a sociological concept concerned with the possibility of mutual recognition, equality, and social coexistence among different ethnic, religious, cultural, and identity groups within heterogeneous receiving societies. (Kymlicka, 1995)

Understanding multiculturalism as a defining characteristic of contemporary societies, this approach advocates for the recognition of minorities, the preservation of cultural identity, and institutional accommodation. Unlike cultural assimilation and other integration theories, it rejects the imperative that individuals must abandon their own cultural forms in order to become members of the receiving society. In other words, integration should occur without cultural cleansing.

Multiculturalism affirms the legitimacy of cultural, linguistic, and religious differences.

According to the theory, social equality is secured not only through formal legislation, but also through symbolic practices. Contemporary society therefore consists not of a single dominant culture, but of cultural communities with equal opportunities. Consequently, migrants, while preserving their distinctiveness, become full members of the receiving society alongside others (Kymlicka, 1995).

Multiculturalism has nevertheless been criticized. It may neglect shared values and collective identity and, instead of promoting social solidarity, may lead toward separation. The overemphasis on ethnicity obscures class belonging and the structural inequalities of society.

The imperative of separate group identity strengthens the internal application of traditional and conservative values within groups and gives rise to conflicts, for example around gender identity and the independent agency of the social subject. Finally, multiculturalism often remains little more than political rhetoric.

This contradictory diversity nevertheless constitutes an alternative to theories that advocate sameness. With a rich conceptual vocabulary, W. Kymlicka addresses the question of inequalities. Students already familiar with classical perspectives and theories are thereby encouraged to reconsider a fundamental question: what ultimately is contemporary society when, at the conceptual level, it becomes possible to move away from the rigid demand for social homogeneity?

Lecture 10. Transnationalism

Transnationalism, which emerged in the 1990s in response to nation-centered approaches, is among the most influential theoretical frameworks in contemporary migration studies. It refers to a process and phenomenon through which migrants' social, economic, political, and cultural ties and belongings are simultaneously formed and maintained within both receiving and sending societies.

Transnationalism categorically rejects the notion of migrants' one-dimensional incorporation into the receiving society. According to the theory, migrants are simultaneously members of several states, geographically separated communities, institutions, groups, and economic, political, and social structures and relations: they are both "here" and "there" at the same time. Transnationalism produces hybrid identities and Life itself becomes de-territorialized (Vertovec, 2009).

It should nevertheless be noted that not all migrants are transnational. Transnational practices may be obstructed by macro-structural constraints such as legal restrictions, border regimes, and migration policies. The theory does not sufficiently address the impossibility of transnational ties, the refusal of such ties, or the fact that, in many cases, integration into the receiving society and becoming its member remain dominant priorities.

The theory should be presented at the Bachelor level because, through its flexibility, it challenges the methodological frameworks of localized integration and incorporates into the analytical focus such contexts of social existence as the global interconnectedness of societies.

Transnationalism brings together under a single methodological framework the three levels of social existence — micro, meso, and macro. As a result, students' attention is directed toward complex sociological questions: What is society? What is belonging? What is identity when stable state borders no longer remain sufficient conceptual foundations?

Topic 11. Emigration and the Sending Society

In its own migration biography, Armenia has historically functioned primarily as a country of emigration. It is therefore appropriate within the framework of the lecture to describe the mutual influence and interrelationship between migratory outflows, the "society of exit," and local communities (Bayadyan et al., 2019; Mkrtchyan, 2016; Tumanyan & Karapetyan, 2023).

The chronological typologization of contemporary migration flows from Armenia presents the causal foundations, qualitative and quantitative structure, geography, and socio-economic and political preconditions and contexts of migration processes developing since the late 1980s and especially throughout the 1990s.

Particular attention is devoted to the consequences of emigration, which are distributed across several major spheres of social life, including:

- **Demographic consequences.** In the absence of adequate population replacement, mass emigration leads to population decline and the depopulation of particular settlements (Preston et al., 2001). In addition, the gender and age structure of the population changes. In communities of outmigration, elderly people and women with children remain behind, while men of active working age leave.

- **Economic consequences.** Within sending societies, the economic consequences of emigration are often viewed as an alternative to economic loss and the absence of opportunities. Emigration reduces social tensions arising from competition over scarce social goods, neutralizes its unpredictable consequences, and remittances become the sole means of subsistence for relatives remaining at home (de Haas, 2010). Money sent by migrants constitutes a significant portion of the gross national product of certain societies and may revitalize local economies.

At the same time, the economic consequences of emigration are not free from negative effects. As a result of brain drain, societies lose their educated population, highly qualified labor becomes scarce, and dependence on remittances emerges as an almost unavoidable condition (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012).

- **Socio-structural consequences.** At the meso-level of social organization, structural, role-related, and functional transformations of communities and families become apparent. A decline in community solidarity is evident (Castles et al., 2019; de Haas, 2010; Massey et al., 1993). In certain cases, intra-familial responsibilities become feminized, shifted toward younger generations, or conversely concentrated among the elderly. Due to the decline or absence of pupils, national schools enter into a condition of functional crisis, while healthcare institutions lose critically important personnel. The situation is further intensified through the normalization of emigration as a life strategy.

- **Cultural consequences.** Through transnational ties and return migration, emigration introduces new and often contradictory values and ideologies from receiving societies into traditional communities, producing corresponding everyday practices (Hall, 1990; Vermishyan, Vartikyan, Gevorgyan, Michikyan, & Ghalamdryan, 2022; Vertovec, 2009; Berry, 1997; Levitt, 2001). Migrants themselves, as well as their family members, become inclined toward reconsidering identity. Narratives of belonging are characterized by uncertainty.

- **Political consequences.** It is often said of migrants that they “vote with their feet.” Emigration challenges the legitimacy of the sending society, its system of political reproduction, and its governing practices (Hirschman, 1970). Through the very act of migration, migrants reject — or at least reconsider — the logic of political participation within their homeland. In some cases, migrants also carry external political perspectives and influences that are not always aligned with those prevailing in the country of origin.

The teaching of these issues enables students to understand the complexity and diversity of the structural transformations occurring within sending societies. Through the critical study of social relations, students compare explanatory concepts, recognize their limitations, and, through synthesis, develop an understanding of the constantly changing reality of the sending society.

It should also be noted that migration policy is most commonly known as an ideological and practical system aimed at overcoming contradictions and conflicts within receiving societies. In this respect, considerably less attention has been devoted to sending societies and local communities. The knowledge acquired through this course opens pathways for future specialists not only toward flexible and objective academic perspectives, but also toward effective public governance.

Methodology of Teaching

The contemporary teaching of Sociology of Migration at the Bachelor level increasingly requires a transition from traditional lecture-centered instruction toward participatory, interactive, and student-oriented pedagogical approaches. The course should not be limited to the transmission of theoretical information concerning migration processes. Rather, it should function as an analytical and reflective space in which students develop the ability to critically interpret migration as a multidimensional social phenomenon connected with inequality, labor relations, globalization, identity formation, integration, and social transformation.

Within this framework, the role of the lecturer extends beyond the simple delivery of knowledge. The lecturer increasingly acts as a moderator of discussion, facilitator of critical thinking, organizer of collaborative learning, and mentor guiding students through sociological interpretation. Effective teaching requires the creation of an intellectually open and democratic educational environment in which students are encouraged to formulate arguments, participate in discussion, and develop independent analytical perspectives (Bain, 2004).

Modern teaching practices emphasize active student participation as a central condition of effective learning. Lectures should therefore incorporate interactive elements rather than rely exclusively on monological presentation (Bean, 2011). Analytical questions, short discussions, interpretation of current migration events, and commentary on visual and statistical materials significantly increase student engagement. Seminars occupy a particularly important role, providing students with opportunities to engage in analytical dialogue, compare perspectives, formulate arguments, and collectively interpret migration-related phenomena such as migration crises, integration challenges, refugee movements, and public representations of migrants (Macrine & Berray, 2024).

Collaborative learning techniques, including group discussions, case-study analysis, and student presentations, further strengthen communicative competencies and sociological reasoning (Barkley et al., 2014). Presentations devoted to migration theories, empirical cases, or comparative migration trends encourage students to move beyond memorization toward analytical interpretation and independent argumentation.

Contemporary teaching additionally benefits from the active use of visual, digital, and empirical tools (Pedersen, 2010). Migration maps, demographic graphics, documentary materials, media texts, and digital migration databases improve students' comprehension of complex migration processes and facilitate analytical discussion. The analysis of media discourse and public representations of migration allows students to critically examine stereotypes, political rhetoric, and symbolic constructions surrounding migrants and migration.

Even at the undergraduate level, migration sociology should include elementary empirical activities such as short interviews, observation tasks, and analysis of migration statistics. These assignments connect sociological theory with empirical inquiry and contribute to the development of methodological thinking and analytical competencies.

Assessment approaches should correspond to these participatory pedagogical principles. Evaluation should focus not only on theoretical knowledge but also on analytical reasoning, sociological interpretation, active participation, and the ability to apply concepts to empirical realities. Effective assessment models therefore combine seminar participation, analytical essays, presentations, case-study analysis, and empirical mini-research.

Course Delivery: Technical Considerations and Requirements

Needless to say, the proposed course Sociology of Migration covers a broad and multifaceted field of inquiry. At the undergraduate level, its primary objective is to provide a comprehensive yet concise sociological understanding of human migration and the diverse social, cultural, economic, political, and demographic contexts within which migration processes unfold. Given the breadth and complexity of the subject matter, the following organizational and technical structure for course delivery is considered appropriate:

	Distribution of Workload (%)	Weeks	Sessions /Contact Hours
Lectures: Employing contemporary pedagogical approaches, the course introduces students to the multidimensional nature of migration and its diverse manifestations, while positioning migration within the broader methodological and conceptual framework of sociological analysis.	60	10	40
Seminars and Discussions: These sessions are designed to foster students' capacity for critical engagement with migration processes, strengthen their ability to apply sociological theories to empirical realities, develop skills in the interpretation of migration-related data, and encourage active participation in evidence-based academic discussions.	40	6	24
	100	16	64

Assessment Framework:

Considering the multidisciplinary nature and extensive scope of the course, together with the academic workload of undergraduate students, it is essential to adopt a balanced, transparent, and comprehensive assessment system. Such an approach should adequately evaluate students' knowledge, analytical capacities, engagement, and practical application of sociological concepts. Accordingly, the following assessment framework is proposed:

Assessment Component:	Contribution to Final Grade (%)
Participation in Lectures, Seminars	10 %
Periodic Assignments	20 %
Individual Research Project	20 %
Midterm Assessment I	15 %
Midterm Assessment II	15 %
Final Examination	20 %

Target Audience of the Course

The course is intended for undergraduate students of **sociology, social work, political science, international relations, geography, anthropology, history, economics**, and other social and humanitarian disciplines. It will be particularly useful for those interested in understanding the causes, dynamics, and consequences of migration in contemporary societies. The course does not require prior specialized knowledge in migration studies. It is designed to offer a broad sociological perspective on human mobility while fostering critical thinking, analytical skills, and the ability to engage with migration-related issues in an informed and evidence-based manner.

Conclusion

The sociology of migration has become one of the most important and analytically productive domains of contemporary sociological knowledge. In the conditions of globalization, expanding human mobility, forced displacement, transnational interconnectedness, demographic transformations, and growing social inequalities, migration can no longer be understood as a secondary or peripheral phenomenon. It constitutes one of the principal mechanisms through which contemporary societies reproduce themselves, transform their institutional structures, redefine identities, reorganize labor relations, and renegotiate the boundaries of political, cultural, and symbolic belonging.

Migration is simultaneously a demographic, economic, political, cultural, spatial, and existential process. It reshapes cities, labor markets, family structures, educational systems, welfare institutions, political regimes, and everyday social relations. It influences the reproduction of social hierarchies and inequalities while also generating new forms of solidarity, hybridity, mobility, and social imagination. Consequently, migration sociology occupies a unique position within the social sciences because it enables the simultaneous analysis of multiple dimensions of social existence — from global macrostructures to intimate everyday experiences.

The course “Sociology of Migration” therefore possesses not merely disciplinary significance, but broader epistemological, pedagogical, and civic importance. It introduces students to one of the most dynamic and contradictory realities of the contemporary world while simultaneously training them to think sociologically. Through migration, students learn to connect biographies with history, individual decisions with structural constraints, local experiences with global transformations, and everyday practices with systems of power and inequality. In this sense, the discipline becomes one of the most effective environments for developing sociological imagination, critical reflexivity, and multidimensional analytical thinking.

The theoretical diversity incorporated into the course demonstrates that migration cannot be adequately explained through simplified, mono-causal, or reductionist approaches. Economic asymmetries, political regimes, colonial legacies, labor-market structures, social networks, institutional barriers, cultural identities, symbolic boundaries, and transnational relations all participate in the production and reproduction of migration processes. Each theoretical perspective illuminates a particular dimension of migration while simultaneously revealing the limitations of isolated explanatory systems. The comparative and critical study of theories therefore cultivates intellectual flexibility and protects students from deterministic interpretations and ideological simplifications.

The course is especially important because it introduces students to the problem of social inclusion — one of the defining questions of contemporary societies. Theories of assimilation, integration, acculturation, multiculturalism, and transnationalism reveal the complexity of coexistence within socially, culturally, ethnically, and politically heterogeneous environments. Migration thus appears not simply as a physical movement across borders, but as a profound transformation of the meanings of citizenship, identity, solidarity, participation, and social membership. In this respect, migration sociology also contributes to broader sociological debates concerning democracy, social cohesion, recognition, justice, and inequality.

Particular significance belongs to the study of emigration and sending societies. In countries such as Armenia, migration is deeply embedded within the logic of post-Soviet transformation, demographic decline, economic restructuring, labor precarity, regional inequalities, and political uncertainty. Emigration affects not only population size, but also the structural organization of communities, the redistribution of social roles, intergenerational relations, local economies, educational and healthcare institutions, political legitimacy, and cultural narratives of belonging. Migration thereby becomes one of the central mechanisms through which the future trajectories of society itself are shaped. The inclusion of these issues within the course enables students to understand migration not exclusively from the perspective of receiving societies, but also through the realities and contradictions of societies of exit.

At the pedagogical level, the course reflects the broader transformation of contemporary higher education. Modern teaching methodologies increasingly move beyond traditional lecture-centered models toward participatory, dialogical, and student-oriented forms of learning. The sociology of migration is especially suited to such pedagogical innovation because migration itself is multidimensional, controversial, emotionally charged, and empirically visible within contemporary public life.

The effective teaching of migration sociology therefore requires the combination of theoretical instruction with analytical discussion, collaborative learning, empirical interpretation, case-study analysis, visual and digital materials, and research-oriented educational practices. Seminar discussions, group work, presentations, migration-related media analysis, empirical mini-research, interviews, and interpretation of statistical data transform students from passive recipients of information into active participants in sociological inquiry. Such pedagogical approaches cultivate analytical autonomy, methodological literacy, communicative competence, and the ability to critically evaluate public discourses surrounding migration.

The discipline additionally contributes to the formation of democratic academic culture and critical public consciousness. Migration studies expose students to social diversity and challenge ethnocentric assumptions, xenophobic narratives, methodological nationalism, and politically instrumentalized representations of migrants. Through sociological analysis, students become capable of distinguishing empirical reality from ideological simplification and moral panic. Migration sociology therefore possesses not only academic value, but also broader ethical and civic significance.

Ultimately, the sociology of migration demonstrates that contemporary societies can no longer be adequately conceptualized through static territorial frameworks, homogeneous national identities, or isolated social systems. Human mobility destabilizes rigid social boundaries while simultaneously producing new forms of belonging, exclusion, integration, and inequality. Migration transforms not only populations and spaces, but also the conceptual foundations through which societies understand themselves.

For this reason, the inclusion of “Sociology of Migration” within Bachelor-level sociological education is not simply justified but fundamentally necessary. The discipline equips future sociologists and social-science specialists with the theoretical knowledge, methodological competencies, analytical flexibility, and critical imagination required for understanding the contradictions, uncertainties, and transformations of the contemporary world. At the same time, it prepares students for meaningful academic, professional, institutional, and civic engagement within increasingly interconnected, mobile, and socially complex societies.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethics Statement

The author confirms that this study was conducted in accordance with the Journal's Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.

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