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WELFARE PERCEPTIONS IN TIMES OF CLIMATE CHANGE: THE CASE OF SLOVENIA

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ABSTRACT

Climate change brings direct risks like floods and heatwaves and indirect risks from policy changes, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups. Since welfare systems depend on public support, understanding perceptions is crucial for maintaining public acceptance of climate-related policies. The way the media frames "deserving" and "undeserving" groups shapes public opinion and risk-related narratives. The article considers Slovenian media narratives between September 2023 and September 2024 in two major newspapers to examine portrayals of vulnerability and deservingness. The findings contribute to understanding how media narratives shape solidarity and have implications for designing socially legitimate and inclusive climate and welfare policies.

Keywords: welfare state, climate change, deservingness, vulnerable groups, media

PERCEZIONI SUL WELFARE IN UN CONTESTO DI CAMBIAMENTO CLIMATICO: IL CASO DELLA SLOVENIA

SINTESI

Il cambiamento climatico comporta rischi diretti, come inondazioni e ondate di calore, e rischi indiretti derivanti dai cambiamenti delle politiche, che colpiscono in modo sproporzionato i gruppi vulnerabili. Poiché i sistemi di welfare dipendono dal sostegno pubblico, comprendere le percezioni è essenziale per mantenere l'accettazione pubblica delle politiche climatiche. Il modo in cui i media rappresentano i gruppi "meritevoli" e "non meritevoli" influenza l'opinione pubblica e le narrazioni sui rischi. L'articolo analizza le narrazioni di due principali quotidiani sloveni tra settembre 2023 e settembre 2024, evidenziandone le rappresentazioni di vulnerabilità e merito. I risultati contribuiscono a evidenziare come le narrazioni mediatiche plasmino la solidarietà e abbiano implicazioni nella creazione di politiche climatiche e di welfare socialmente legittime e inclusive.

Parole chiave: stato sociale, cambiamento climatico, merito, gruppi vulnerabili, media

INTRODUCTION[1]

Climate change presents a significant challenge for the welfare state and calls for its reframing (Cucca et al., 2023; Koch et al., 2023; Murphy, 2023; Gengnagel & Zimmermann, 2022). Literature has traditionally focused on other pressing challenges caused by economic pressures and low growth, digitalisation, the demographic shift and ageing of the population, even the recent COVID-19 pandemic. These are often termed as first and second generation risks that the welfare state is traditionally addressing through developing various policies. Hvinden and Shoyen (2022) note that, despite the multiple intersections between climate change and social policy, the research agenda on where these two spheres overlap is quite new and considers the social and welfare implications of the global climate crisis, and only more recently the actual/potential role of social policy to assist with the needed transformation to a net-zero or low-emissions world.

The risks brought by climate change take the form of direct risks, such as heatwaves, floods, droughts and other extreme weather events that influence the well-being of people (e.g., impacting either their wealth by damaging houses, or personal well-being such as health) and often disproportionally affect already vulnerable groups in society with fewer resources to cope (Mandelli et al., 2024; Gough, 2017). While not necessarily new, their intensity, severity and incidence are rising considerably. Addressing such areas of vulnerability adds pressure to the welfare state to help the groups impacted and assure their needs are met. When certain groups in society are disproportionally affected and in a systematically worse position, the perceived social justice in society can become challenged and be seen as double injustice; namely, those contributing less to the problem are affected by it more (Hvinden & Shoyen, 2022; Gough, 2013; 2017; Cucca et al., 2023).

Simultaneously, additional issues arise from 'indirect' risks when implementing policies that seek to tackle climate change, reduce air pollution, and support the transition to a green economy, such as carbon taxes and the low-carbon transition of productive systems, and the transformation of specific industries and emission-intensive sectors (e.g., the extractive sector). Mitigation of ecological transition can have strong social implications such as higher energy prices, transport costs, or job losses in certain sectors or even trigger an economic downturn in whole communities/regions (cf. Mandelli et al., 2024). These direct and indirect risks are termed as third generation social risks, that the welfare state needs to address in the future, adapting its policies and programmes (Mandelli et al., 2024).

Irrespective of the European Union's focus on a 'just transition', policies to reduce climate change can unevenly affect specific branches and professions (e.g., due to stricter emissions regulations), as well as particular groups (e.g., by higher prices caused by new energy taxes) and the regressive effects of fiscal measures, rising energy and consumer costs (Sabato et al., 2022; Cucca et al., 2023; Mandelli et al., 2023). The described novel challenges and vulnerabilities in society provide the setting in which the welfare state is expected to implement the just transition goals while reducing the mentioned new social risks. The welfare state's role here can be to apply traditional redistributive measures (such as income transfers) and more social investment-oriented policies like skill development and active labour market policies (Hvinden & Shoyen, 2022; Laruffa & Nullmeier, 2025). Some authors (cf. Cucca et al., 2023) also indicate the need for preventive policies (e.g., within urban planning, education or healthcare).

The described challenges might also mean that it is time for new discussions related to the welfare state on the (socially) just approach to mitigating these risks, also when it comes to established welfare programmes and their target groups. When the vulnerabilities and groups correspond to existing vulnerable groups already targeted by welfare programmes (such as older people or children), solidarity may be extended with less discussion and problematising of the issues, whereas new target groups might bring a novel challenge of how to integrate them with the just distribution perceptions and, in turn, create a potential new cleavage in social solidarity. Pressures like this can therefore trigger tensions with established social priorities (Gough & Meadowcroft, 2011; Ruser, 2023). As Hvinden and Shoyen (2022, 237) state, "it is essential in the debate to be sensitive to the issues of who are the most vulnerable groups and where the most disadvantaged countries and regions in the ecosocial transition are". To that end, one should not only look at the objective positions, but representations of these vulnerabilities and deservingness for welfare help, because "debates about this deservingness of people can never be reduced to objective facts but involve normative and political consideration" (Ruser, 2023, 67).

1 The authors acknowledge financial support from the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency, research project *GreTA – Green Transition Attitudes: Social Risks and Deservingness in context of Climate Change* (No. N5-0352).

THE WELFARE STATE, RISKS, AND DESERVINGNESS

The fact welfare arrangements in different fields are based on different logics of social justice and deservingness (cf. van Oorschot et al., 2022) makes it important to understand how these perceptions are formed in the new field of climate change mitigation within social policy. Such perceptions may be seen as linked with general attitudes to the welfare state and its role in assisting more vulnerable groups in society. Despite significant institutional differences, European support for the welfare state and its (re)distributional activities is relatively broad, with van Oorschot (2006, 23) noting, "Europeans share a common and fundamental deservingness culture". This support is also linked to the relatively universal ranking of groups based on their deservingness – from the most deserving (older or sick people) to less deserving, such as the unemployed, those receiving social assistance through to the least deserving groups like migrants (van Oorschot, 2006; van Oorschot & Roosma, 2017; Laenen & Meuleman, 2017; van Oorschot et al., 2022).

Alongside this widely agreed ranking are institutional welfare frameworks that frame the social justice perceptions and vulnerabilities, and the way the new risks are discussed and potentially addressed is embedded within different welfare-state institutional setups (Laenen & Meuleman, 2017; van Oorschot et al., 2022). Namely, welfare states differ in how they address basic needs, as well as the level of redistribution and moral economies (cf. Esping-Andersen, 1990; Kuitto, 2016; Mau, 2003). The Slovenian welfare regime has often been described as hybrid, featuring characteristics of a social democratic welfare regime with a strong emphasis on equality and universal services, together with a corporatist strong reliance on the social insurance scheme as a basis for addressing various social risks, underscored by values of merit and reciprocity (Kolarič et al., 2009; Filipovič Hrast & Rakar, 2018; 2020). Such an arrangement makes it unclear whether a more merit-based approach or a more universal approach focused on equality will guide efforts to respond to the new vulnerabilities caused by climate change.

The approach taken in this article is to consider these arguments by looking at media debates, which have been shown to frame the welfare deservingness of certain vulnerable groups (Tarkianen, 2023). The literature also shows that individual-level attitudes to deservingness closely interact with how deserving (or undeserving) groups are framed in public discourse, particularly in the media (e.g., Esmark & Schoop, 2017; Lepianka, 2015). The media functions as active partners in constructing and framing deservingness that can impact public support for welfare programmes and work as discursive spheres via which morals and norms are represented and legitimised (Tarkianen, 2023). This accordingly relates to the idea that various actors provide frames, which represent the interpretation scheme that structures the meaning of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Goffman, 1974; Yerkes et al., 2022). The media forms public images, reflects and reinforces notions of risks connected to climate change, associated risk groups, and the policies that should/could be adopted in response to them. Such framing thus reflects and co-produces notions of deservingness while contributing to a possible shift in paradigms of redistribution (cf. Tarkianen, 2023).

In this article, focus is therefore given to the vulnerable groups identified in the media with respect to direct and indirect risks, as well as arguments appearing in the discussions on perceptions of the deservingness of these groups. A basis is thereby provided for determining whether new societal cleavages are possibly forming as a result of the new challenges facing the welfare state to do with climate change and how the deservingness debates and perceptions of fairness and arguments are changing in view of the unparalleled climate challenges and 'greening' of the welfare state.

For that purpose, we analysed media articles in two main daily newspapers in Slovenia (Večer and Delo), identified the vulnerable groups mentioned, and examined the main arguments vis-à-vis the theory of deservingness and the so-called CARIN criteria (van Oorschot, 2006; van Oorschot et al., 2022; Varo, 2024). The theory of deservingness states there are five distinct criteria for selectivity or deservingness. *Control* refers to the extent to which individuals are seen as being personally responsible for their situation. *Attitude* concerns how recipients respond to benefits, including their perceived gratitude and appropriate behaviour. *Reciprocity* involves the extent to which individuals are regarded as having contributed or earned support; and more recently also interpreted as willingness to give something in return. *Identity* relates to the perceived closeness/similarity of the recipients and the broader community as well as different identity groups. Finally, *need* refers to the level of neediness or severity of an individual's deprivation.

METHODOLOGY

Our methodological framework integrates principles of qualitative content analysis, employing thematic analysis as the primary analytical strategy, guided by the logic of saturation and informed by a comparative media analysis protocol.

Consistent with the evolving literature on climate change and welfare states (Hvinden & Shoyen, 2022; Cucca et al., 2023; Mandelli et al., 2024), the analysis was structured around two categories of climate-related risk: direct risks (floods, heatwaves, air pollution) and indirect risks (energy and mobility transitions). Direct risks encompass immediate threats to well-being and infrastructure, with disproportionate effects on vulnerable populations (e.g., the elderly, people with chronic illness). Indirect risks stem from mitigation and adaptation policies which, although necessary, carry redistributive effects that may produce new socio-economic vulnerabilities (e.g., energy-poor households, rural commuters). Including both types of risk allows for a broader understanding of how climate change is challenging the normative foundations of welfare support and deservingness in public discourse. The selection of topics was based on debates taking place in the Slovenian public sphere and political arena and thus reflects the issues that were salient within the chosen time frame. More broadly, public discourse in Slovenia during this period was strongly shaped by concerns about climate-related risks, most likely because of the extensive and devastating floods that affected the country in August 2023.

To capture the dominant narratives and public framings, we selected two major Slovenian daily newspapers – Delo and Večer – given their broad national reach, established journalistic standards, and availability of digital archives. Articles were collected from their online archives covering the period from 1 September 2023 to 1 September 2024, reflecting a full year of published material. Articles were collected using predefined search terms (e.g., "flood*", "heat*", "energy transition", "carbon tax", "electric cars" etc.) linked to pre-determined climate-related topics. Articles unrelated to the national or EU-context without direct implications for Slovenia were excluded. The corpus used for the analysis comprised a total of 275 articles, of which 154 were drawn from the daily newspaper Delo and 121 from Večer.

A theoretical saturation approach was applied. For each topic, we reviewed the 20 most recent articles and the five earliest within the mentioned timeframe. Saturation was reached when no new themes emerged. If not, up to five additional articles were analysed. To provide analytical depth and completeness, we combined the principle of theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and meaning saturation (Hennink et al., 2017). The aim was hence not simply to identify when no new themes appeared, but to additionally achieve a nuanced understanding of key themes like vulnerability, deservingness, and actor framing. The decision to stop sampling was accordingly guided by the conceptual thematic depth achieved in the analysis, and not just by the frequency of themes.

Deductive thematic analysis was employed for the presented research (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hayes, 1997), guided by a structured coding framework. The coding process followed a systematic approach, breaking the data into meaningful units to identify recurring patterns and themes, in line with the methodology outlined by Saldaña (2012). A coding scheme was developed and structured around six categories: (1) type of risk; (2) actors and framings; (3) target groups; (4) deservingness criteria (CARIN – Control, Attitude, Reciprocity, Identity, Need); (5) discussed trade-offs; and (6) future scenarios.

The articles were analysed using professional software program for qualitative and mixed-methods data analysis MAXQDA with the unit of coding being a sentence or paragraph, depending on the specificity of the content. Coding was applied systematically across all articles, enabling cross-theme comparisons. The coding was conducted by two researchers who discussed and reconciled coding decisions iteratively (also in broader team meetings) until consensus was reached; therefore, intercoder reliability was ensured through this consensus-based procedure rather than through percentage agreement. The approach balances deductive theoretical insights (CARIN criteria, welfare theory) with inductive sensitivity to new framings and emerging discourses.

MEDIA ANALYSIS OF VULNERABILITIES AND DESERVINGNESS CRITERIA IN SLOVENIA

Identified vulnerable groups

Vulnerable groups in society traditionally perceived as the most deserving of welfare state assistance are older people and sick people. The development of welfare state programmes addressing these risks reflects this view, with the roles of pension and disability insurance being key. How media depict these groups matters, as news framing of welfare recipients as more or less deserving has been shown to directly shape public support for redistribution and social protection (Baumberg Geiger, 2023; Esmark & Schoop, 2017; Larsen & Dejgaard, 2013). The described groups are also regularly mentioned in relation to the direct and indirect risks of climate change in Slovenia.

> *Heat can be especially dangerous for the elderly, but also for children, pregnant women and many patients – especially those with*

> *cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, diabetes, kidney disease, immobile people, and people with mental disorders, NIJZ points out. Caution is also advised for people who experience fever or digestive problems during these days*. (Juvan, 2024)

Traditionally, migrants are regarded as being one of the least deserving groups in the welfare state, a view commonly reflected in literature on welfare chauvinism (van Oorschot, 2006; van Oorschot et al., 2017; Larsen, 2020; Eick & Larsen, 2021). Although the current analysis does not reveal a clear cleavage in this respect, the near-complete absence of explicit references to migrants, except in the context of heat-related risks and the associated notion of climate refugees, suggests the continuation of this exclusionary pattern. This is consistent with research showing that when migrants do appear in climate-related media coverage, they are typically framed in abstract or passive terms, with their deservingness status left ambiguous or implicitly subordinated to that of the native population (Dreher & Voyer, 2015). Experimental evidence further suggests that the perceived cause of displacement matters for public deservingness judgements: climate migrants tend to be seen as more deserving than economic migrants but less so than refugees fleeing persecution (Arias & Blair, 2022; Hedegaard, 2022), indicating that the "climate refugee" label carries only partial moral legitimacy in public perception. When migrants are mentioned in the Slovenian press, it is typically in abstract terms or indirectly through references to the main population affected by serious flooding, as illustrated in the quotes below.

> *Nor is the damage evenly distributed, nor will it be. Some people are more affected than others. And we know who they are – when they arrive at our borders*. (Bojc, 2024)

> *In August, Slovenia found itself in the centre of climate change and got its first climate 'refugees'*. (Prijatelj Videmšek, 2023a)

Employment plays a central role in determining views on deservingness within the welfare state, especially when examining group positions. In the context of climate-related risks, specific vulnerabilities associated with certain professions are acknowledged, notably among workers most exposed to extreme weather events, such as construction workers and farmers. These emerging risk groups show the need for targeted adaptations in welfare state policies and programmes to effectively mitigate the associated impacts.

> *The Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities is working on changes to occupational safety and health and on the first measures to protect workers on construction sites in times of increased temperatures or climate change*. (Malovrh, 2024a)

> *Not only plants, but also agricultural workers are increasingly exposed to more heat stress*. (Prijatelj Videmšek, 2024)

The above-mentioned groups generally correspond well to traditional risk groups. However, we also identified new groups that might become an important target group for the welfare state. These are linked with housing and living characteristics, generally urban and rural population or more specifically homeowners, owners of solar panels, and owners of heat pumps.

> *Transport poverty is particularly severe in peri-urban and rural areas as a result of the rising energy prices, lack of affordable transport options and higher costs associated with longer distance travel*. (Kotar, 2024)

> *Traffic emissions are a major source of NO2, which means that densely populated urban areas, especially in high-income countries, are often exposed to the highest levels of NO2 exposure and health impacts*. (Malovrh, 2024b)

> *Climate change can be felt more intensely in cities than elsewhere. In most European cities, people rank heat among the most important risks. Temperatures in cities can be as much as 10 or 15 degrees Celsius higher than in the surrounding area. On the other hand, more frequent and heavy rainfall can cause flooding in urban areas. 10.6% of urban areas in Europe have a high risk of flooding. (*Tavčar, 2024a)

Certain groups, such as homeowners, may be quite vulnerable to climate-related events like floods, as well as rising energy costs, an issue increasingly tied to the broader energy transition. These challenges are further compounded by disparities in access to infrastructure investments, such as solar systems or heat pumps. Emerging vulnerabilities of this type may contribute to the emergence of new social cleavages, adding strain to the welfare state. Existing research already reveals this dynamic, highlighting that the lower-middle class often bears a disproportionate share of the costs associated with decarbonisation (cf. Mandelli et al., 2024).

Costs are rising, but most households will pay less for their grid charges, while the owners of solar systems and heat pumps will pay more. (Tavčar, 2023a)

In addition to the financial savings, home solar PV systems provide a sense of energy independence and resilience. By generating their own electricity, homeowners are less vulnerable to fluctuations in energy prices and disruptions in the centralised electricity grid. (R. N., 2024)

They say the result of the new system will therefore be positive for heat pump users as, according to analyses, the cost of electricity would even decrease slightly compared to the current regime. However, it will be up to the user to monitor consumption and to cause as few peaks as possible, especially at times of peak load on the grid. (Gavez Volčjak, 2024)

One characteristic of the media debate is that it often describes risks as being associated with the general population as a whole (people generally, households, consumers, citizens etc.), and thus does not distinguish how these risks actually affect different groups in diverse ways and in turn not acknowledging the risk accumulation and multiplying of the vulnerabilities of particular groups. This was perhaps most evident in the relatively low frequency in the media articles of the most vulnerable groups in society such as poor people and poor households, the homeless, or ethnic minorities like Roma. They were identified in a few articles where their extra vulnerability to either extreme events (and inability to, e.g., insure themselves against them) or increasing costs (e.g., in energy or transport) was described, however often only in the sense of listing them together with other groups and without any in-depth discussion of particular vulnerabilities.

"Climate policies will make fossil energy sources more and more expensive, and the most vulnerable households do not have the means to switch to renewable energy and invest in energy efficiency, so they need to be helped as a priority", said Andrej Gnezda, Director of the Climate Policy Directorate. (Prijatelj Videmšek, 2023b)

There is no one-size-fits-all model. What works in one country will not necessarily work in Slovenia. It is possible to subsidise [insurance]

Table 1: Main target groups in relation to specific risks identified in the media.

Climate-related risks	Main target groups
Heat	The population as a whole, people generally, the elderly, children, certain workers (e.g., outdoor, construction, police), people living in cities, patients (i.e., those with vulnerable health), climate refugees/migrants, people living in coastal areas, the poor.
Air pollution	People generally, EU citizens, children, people living in cities, patients, the elderly, cyclists, cities/communities, the poor.
Floods	Communities, people whose home was lost to or damaged by floods, working in agriculture (farmers, fishermen), the poor, businesses.
Energy transition	Society as a whole, businesses, consumers, specific households (such as owners of solar PV systems, owners of heat pumps, users of electrical appliances), future generations, workers.
Mobility transition	The general population, citizens of Slovenia, passengers, the elderly, students, cyclists, employed/workers, users of public transport services, residents of rural areas, people with cognitive, sensory and/or physical disabilities, vulnerable groups (the poor, Roma).

premiums for the most vulnerable. Among the 680,000 households living in houses, about 85,000 are below the poverty line and cannot afford insurance. (Tomažič, 2024)

Irena Kozar, from the Joint Environmental Protection Service at the Maribor Joint Municipal Administration […] *also warns of the dangers of burning waste, which households also use to save energy. "We know that energy poverty is considerable", she notes, recalling the subsidy that can be received by households in need*. (Juvan, 2023)

Deservingness arguments in relation to climate risks

What interests us in this paper is not merely the groups mentioned in the media but also the way their vulnerabilities and deservingness for welfare state help are discussed. We based our analysis on the CARIN criteria described in the theoretical section, which have recently been applied to climate-related contexts to assess how publics and media evaluate who deserves protection from externally caused risks (Aksit & Laenen, 2025; Crabtree & Wehde, 2022).

The main criterion associated with all the direct and indirect risks observed was **need**. As concerns both direct and indirect risks, need was a clear criterion described in the articles in the sense of being affected more by climate change or green transition policies. Nevertheless, within this general criterion, there was no nuance concerning the extent of such needs. For instance, people affected by flood were all seen as equally vulnerable, even though it is most likely there were variations in the extent of the damage or the resources available to cope with the impacts of the natural disaster.

And as if this fact were not terrifying enough, we are now receiving daily information that in areas where people suffered enormous damage and lost a lot, some even (almost) everything, during last year's floods, the state has still not managed to repair last year's damage. What's more, in some places the repair processes have not even commenced. The embankments have not been built. The riverbeds have not been cleaned. The houses affected by last year's floods have not yet been repaired. And they are already flooding again. (Vuk Godina, 2024)

Workers are exposed to accidents in the heat, to sickness, and there is no awareness that this must be taken care of. (Kutin, 2024)

[…] *many elderly people who do not have their own means of transport cannot even go to the shops or do other urgent errands without public transport*. (Tavčar, 2023b)

The criterion of **control** was more pronounced in direct risks, which is not surprising. Here, the issue of control over vulnerabilities is clearer since as individuals we have little control over the extreme weather events and are therefore clearly more deserving. In comparison, with indirect risks, the issue of control is less clear, and is therefore a less important criterion not mentioned as much in the examined articles.

For me, the working population is very important – people who cannot go anywhere, who have to stay in one place because they have no choice. (Kutin, 2024)

It was definitely the floods that stood out among negative events. That is why the damages paid out were four times higher than the average for the last 15 years. The watercourses overflowed their banks very quickly, so the residents were unable to take quick action to protect their properties. They were not able to move their cars or secure their houses. That is why the damage was quite high. (Tomažič, 2024)

Yet, with respect to the control criterion, a specific aspect seems apparent, one that is perhaps more evident relative to third-generation social risks than first- and second-generation social risks. Namely, the risks faced are less individual than established ones (old age, maternity, illness, work life balance, care needs etc.) since their production is collective, and their effect is also often more experienced collectively. This is linked to the distinction between old social risks that were individually unpredictable but collectively predictable and visible as they affected an easily defined segment of the population, while the social risks associated with climate change are collective, less observable, and more unpredictable (Gough et al., 2008; Hirvilammi et al., 2023; Mandelli et al., 2024). As Johansson et al. (2016) argue, deservingness frameworks developed for first- and second-generation social risks were designed with individually attributable causes in mind and do not straightforwardly accommodate risks whose production is inherently collective. In the understanding of such risks, individual control (or lack thereof) is combined with the collective responsibility for the production of these risks. Consequently, lack of control on the individual

level is mediated in perceptions by the presence of collective responsibility for the creation and mitigation of risks and thus the perception of (collective) control.

> *We have taken away the space from the river and as a consequence the river flooded during heavy rainfall*. (Verovnik, 2024)

> *We are harming the environment and our health with inadequate heating and outdated combustion appliances, and the chimney sweeping system we have set up, and thus the control of combustion appliances or users, is virtually powerless*. (Malovrh, 2023)

> *There is a lot of daily commuting, especially to Ljubljana; on one hand, public transport is being neglected, forcing people to drive themselves, which requires new roads, new roads mean more traffic, and the vicious circle goes round and round*. (Boncelj, 2023)

> *This collective control and hence responsibility for the creation and mitigation of the risks was in some cases refined to target only specific groups that are the most responsible, such as high polluters and the rich: "The richest five percent of people are responsible for 37 percent of the increase in emissions* […]". (Tavčar, 2024b)

While control appeared as an important criterion with more direct risks, it was less prominent while indirect risks were being debated. **Attitude** and **reciprocity** were more pronounced here, with the link between the two criteria being evident since reciprocal activity mostly encompasses more environmental-friendly behaviour (e.g., cycling). In attitude self-help actions, resilience in the face of extreme weather events as well as protective and preventive actions are put forward, such as personal investments in houses after extreme floods.

> *For people to be willing to pay the costs of environmental action, whether material or by way of changed lifestyle, they need to believe that others will do the same so that the majority of their fellow citizens will not be 'free riders' who contribute nothing but simply want the benefits of others' sacrifices*. (Malnar, 2024)

> *In the light of these findings, the researchers suggest that policymakers should think about environmental action within a logic of collective action, emphasising environmentalism as a social norm, penalising free-riding, and rewarding participation by individuals and organisations*. (Malnar, 2024)

> *However, the Slovenian Energy Agency believes that such households are likely to possess sufficient information about their consumption and are also equipped with new technologies to manage their energy use. The use of some appliances can be postponed to a more favourable time period*. (Tavčar, 2023c)

> *In practice, this means that cycling is on average seven times less polluting than bus travel and an impressive 18 times less polluting than driving. That means bike-sharing users have managed to save 24.9 tonnes of CO2 compared to car transport. This achievement not only promotes sustainable mobility but also highlights the enormous impact of every individual's decision to choose a more environmentally friendly mode of transport*. (ŠTR, 2024)

Still, changing lifestyle practices is not always evaluated as simply positive because financial incentives can also be seen as unjust by targeting the middle class and further burdening public finances:

> *This is also strongly financially incentivised, and the owners of electric vehicles do not pay special taxes for the energy they use, quite the opposite. They benefit from various incentives that are a burden on public finances or at least do not contribute to them*. (Kordež, 2023)

Identity as a criterion was almost absent from the discussions in the media. Specific local identities were sometimes mentioned as being more deserving due to a history of vulnerability, such as people from Šoštanj, a region marked by mining industry and coal plants, or people living in affected and in future more vulnerable regions (e.g., subject to landslides, floods). As already mentioned, migrants and climate refugees were hardly discussed; namely, areas where one would expect the identity criterion to be most prominent.

> *We, the residents of Šoštanj, want our environment, deeply injured by the consequences of mining and the discharges of TEŠ, to be slowly restored, thereby creating opportunities for the development of recreation and tourism*. (Petek, 2024)

This quote shows that local identity-based deservingness claims are rooted in historical injustice and place-based vulnerability, rather than in broader solidarity with other groups facing climate

risks. The fact that such claims remain exceptional in the coverage indicates a broader tendency in Slovenian media to address climate risks in generalised, need-based terms, leaving identity-specific vulnerabilities, whether based on place, occupation, or migrant status, largely unarticulated.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we analysed debates concerning climate change and the ways climate-related risks are portrayed in Slovenian media, which groups are mentioned as being more vulnerable to such risks, and whether they are seen as deserving (of the welfare state's assistance). These deservingness principles indicate the principles of welfare state justice, i.e., rules and values according to which redistribution occurs, and vulnerabilities are addressed (Yerkes et al., 2022; van Oorschot et al., 2017).

The analysis of the examined media articles reveals the basic justice principle was of universality linked to equality, illustrated by the general focus on the population as a whole or larger segments of it, such as urban and rural dwellers, homeowners (in a homeowning nation), as well as the relatively general criterion of need that was used, with hardly any focus on the most vulnerable groups. This is in harmony with the present focus of the welfare state in Slovenia and the relatively universalistic approach inherent to several programmes and services (healthcare, childcare, education etc.). The discussions in the articles had a general focus that did not describe specific needs or the potential for risks to accumulate, as debated in scientific literature (cf. Gough, 2013; Hvinden & Shoyen, 2022). Instead, the focus was on vulnerabilities linked to climate change in quite a general way where all affected seem equally deserving of help. This may also be partly explained by the deservingness arguments based on the control criterion since the media framing was largely based on the lack of control people have in the face of climate risks. Such a focus might also reflect certain characteristics of climate risks, which are collective, less observable and more unpredictable than the more collectively predictable old social risk (Gough et al., 2008; Hirvilammi et al., 2023; Mandelli et al., 2024).

In addition, there is evidence of the importance of merit and status preservation in the media frames, consistent with the conservative-corporativist elements of the Slovenian welfare state. This was shown in the attention paid to several specific employment groups, as well as, for instance, the indiscriminate focus on homeowners or owners of solar panels that saw no discussion of the potentially higher social standing of such groups, but concentrated on returning their investment and thus retaining their position in society. Further, the environmental attitude was seen as an important criterion for deservingness, linked to the relevant attitudinal criteria in old social risks, such as obedience, and willingness to work, as well as the criterion of reciprocity as having contributed with a more ecofriendly lifestyle. Nonetheless, individuals' ability to change their lifestyles into more environmentally friendly lifestyles is rarely debated.

This finding therefore indicates that also for third-generation social risks similar social justice principles are used while discussing vulnerabilities and deservingness as for the first- and second-generation social risks. Still, there is a lack of recognition of the cumulative nature of risks and vulnerabilities. The findings presented in this paper are subject to several limitations. First, the selected media outlets might represent only selected views on the problem, and although they were chosen for their wide reach and point of reference in Slovenia, there could be other media outlets with different frames for the observed problems. Specifically, here we are referring more to the digital mediascape, social media, and others that importantly shape our reality. The findings are also limited by the inclusion of specific risks related to climate change, noting that other relevant risks were excluded from the analysis and may reveal different frames for understanding vulnerabilities and the related deservingness criteria and, in turn, different perceptions of social justice. Also, specific time period in which the risks were studied influences the results, as specific time events (such as extensive floods) or policies adopted influence the narratives within the media. Therefore, longer time periods of research in the future might reveal how robust are the findings on deservingness and vulnerability to climate change.

Moreover, our findings are based on the Slovenian context and hence cannot be generalised to other countries. However, the indicated link between the current welfare frameworks and the discussions on vulnerabilities and deservingness related to climate change might imply that a similar link exists in other countries. Notwithstanding these limitations, our findings still provide insights into media framings of particular vulnerable social groups and their deservingness and indicate the welfare state's potential for more path-dependent responses to the third-generation social risks. They are necessary for understanding the positions and support for various policies addressing climate change and helping those impacted by it, as well as conflicting perspectives in public and

media debates. The findings also reveal the need to test this based not only on wider media analysis, but especially on general public opinion. In their study, Otto and Gugushvili (2020) already pointed to a newly emerging eco-social divide, with people showing low (simultaneous) support for social as well as climate policies. In any case, the precise trade-off between the policies and the intersection of groups as well as deservingness arguments while tackling the social risks of climate change are areas warranting further research.

The temporal perspective is also vital for understanding the results given that the third-generation social risks are relatively new, and the welfare state's responses to these risks have only recently been developed, and thus we are only in the early stages of society recognising these risks and formulating responses. The observed attitudinal landscape therefore might be changing quickly, and the deservingness criteria and social justice principles in this respect could be less stable than for the traditional first- and second-generation social risks.

POGLEDI NA BLAGINJO V ČASU PODNEBNIH SPREMEMB: PRIMER SLOVENIJE

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POVZETEK

Podnebne spremembe povzročajo neposredna tveganja, kot so poplave, vročinski valovi in onesnaženost zraka, ter posredna tveganja, ki izhajajo iz politik prehoda na trajnostne vire energije in oblike mobilnosti. Ta tveganja se lahko združujejo in nesorazmerno vplivajo na že ranljive družbene skupine. Ker politike države blaginje temeljijo na javni podpori, je ključno razumeti spreminjajoče se percepcije ranljivosti, družbenih razlik, pravičnosti ter solidarnosti. Medijske razprave odražajo spremembe v dojemanju blaginje in prednostnih skupin, ki si zaslužijo pomoč, oblikujejo javno mnenje ter krepijo ali spreminjajo obstoječa pojmovanja tveganj in ranljivosti. V članku analiziramo medijske objave v dveh osrednjih slovenskih dnevnikih v obdobju od septembra 2023 do septembra 2024. Osredotočamo se na prikaz neposrednih tveganj (poplave, vročinski valovi, onesnaženost zraka) ter posrednih tveganj (energetski in mobilnostni prehod), pri čemer preučujemo, katere skupine so predstavljene kot ranljive in ali se jih obravnava kot upravičene do pomoči socialne države. Rezultati analize ponujajo vpogled v medijsko reprezentacijo ranljivih skupin in njihove upravičenosti do podpore ter razkrivajo prisotnost univerzalističnega pristopa in pristopa, ki temelji na zaslugah, skladno z obstoječimi načeli socialne pravičnosti v slovenski državi blaginje. Ugotovitve poglabljajo razumevanje, kako medijske naracije soustvarjajo solidarnost, ter imajo pomembne implikacije za oblikovanje družbeno legitimnih in vključujočih podnebnih in socialnih politik.

Ključne besede: država blaginje, podnebne spremembe, zaslužnost, ranljive skupine, mediji

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