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THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL EQUALITY

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Abstract. Climate change, along with environmental degradation, global inequality and global security issues, is among the four most significant problems of the 21st century. For this reason, it has a decisive position in shaping the continuity of natural life and determining the future of people, at least as much as economic crises, military conflicts, cyber wars and nuclear threats. It is easily seen through its short-term effects that climate change will cause irreparable damage to life on earth in the long term. These short-term effects include loss of life, environmental stress, negative economic effects, water and food crises, social and geopolitical tensions. This study focuses on addressing climate change, which represents the transformation in the society-environment relationship, in the context of environmental sociology. It is aimed to reveal the typical reflection of the changing values and worldview of industrial societies on nature, the relationship of this perception with climate change and the formation of climate change action plans around this perception. The phenomenon of climate change is important in terms of showing the differentiation of the society-environment relationship.

Key words: climate change, global impact, social structure, social policy, resilience.

Introduction. The vast majority of climate researchers accept that the risks of climate change are real and that if efforts to combat them fail or are delayed, greenhouse gases in the atmosphere will increase (Coach, 2012: 2). Greenhouse gases cause environmental degradation that threatens human life and the necessities of life. In this sense, climate change is a long-term, uncertain, and welfare-threatening global and intergenerational social problem. In this sense, it can be defined as a new social problem that is both similar and different from traditional social problems (Gawde et al., 2016: 768–771). Similarly, it has the potential to deeply affect economically, socially and environmentally unequal societies. Therefore, the fight against climate change needs to be structured on the basis of the integration of economic, social and environmental goals and social justice. However, the focal point of the fight against climate change has not yet been determined. Various discussions are being carried out, especially on the approach, and the fight against climate change is being structured with many approaches such as sustainability, energy efficiency and carbon trade (Bates, 2002: 465). However, two approaches other than these approaches are particularly noteworthy. The first of these, social policy, has an important history and aims to ensure social justice for each social group through social arrangements under the actorship of the state. Undoubtedly, these arrangements include safety nets and guarantees regarding the reduction of economic, social and cultural inequalities, the provision of equal opportunities and, ultimately, aim to establish social justice and peace (Gülmez, 2008). Another approach, resilience, generally aims to develop the power and capabilities of resistance in the face of events that shake the dynamics of society's resistance, such as a disaster. Social structure is addressed at personal, social, ecosystemic, urban, etc. levels and is organized through individual and social ini-

tatives. In this context, environmental sustainability for the ecosystem, infrastructural strengthening for a city; It refers to the psychological and economic endurance ability of individuals and society (Cameron, 2011).

The aim of this study is to conduct a discussion emphasizing the place and importance of social justice in the construction of the fight against climate change by addressing social policy and resilience. The fight against climate change has a structure that includes urgency for the solution of many vital social, economic and environmental problems and should be addressed within the framework of a certain principle for national integrity and social benefit. In this context, the most important output of the study is to close the cognitive gap regarding the need for a new approach by discussing the content of the two approaches with the assumption that the most important and necessary principle is social justice.

Literature Review. Casty et al. (2007) applied a survey they developed on global climate change to randomly selected adults in the United States by phone between July 13 and August 10, 2004. In the regression model used in this study, the dependent variable was the risk perception regarding climate change, while the explanatory variables were the knowledge level and personal activities of American citizens. In addition, the participants' trust in scientists was also investigated in this study. The study results showed that the knowledge level, trust in scientists and personal activities were related to each other and that these had an important place in global warming and global climate change. It was determined from the study that participants with a high knowledge level and trust in scientists felt less responsible and less anxious about global warming.

Wise et al (2014) investigated the perceptions of 91 seventh grade students from 3 different schools in the central United States regarding global warming and climate change using qualitative data collection methods. In the study, students responded to the questions by writing and drawing. Then, content analysis was performed by inductively defining the concepts in the students' answers and descriptive statistics were used. The aim here was not to investigate the factors affecting the students' answers but to investigate their perceptions regarding global warming and global climate change. Based on the findings, the study made curriculum recommendations to provide students with more information about global warming, climate change and environmental health in general and to improve NRC (National Science Education Standards) educational standards.

Coach (2012) developed an eight-page survey covering environmental concern, awareness and knowledge of climate change and global warming, attitudes towards climate change and global warming, and behaviours related to climate change and global warming using semi-structured qualitative interviews with residents of the south of England. 1,771 surveys were distributed to six areas in and around Portsmouth (a city on the south coast of England) selected by stratified random sampling in September and October 2003. To examine whether different concepts (global warming or climate change) influenced responses, half of the sample were given a climate change survey and the other half were given a global warming survey. Of the 1,771 surveys distributed by post, 589 were returned. Of the surveys returned, 277 (47 per cent) were the "climate change" survey and 312 (53 per cent) were the global warming survey. Qualitative research data were imported into NVivo and coded using a hierarchical coding procedure. SPSS was used to produce descriptive and frequency statistics for all variables (including coded qualitative data) and to perform the chi-square test. The aim here was to determine whether there were significant differences between the two surveys. While the findings from this survey were generally consistent with findings from previous studies on public understanding of climate change/global warming, when examined in context, significant differences were seen in how key terms were understood. The results showed that awareness, impact and knowledge varied significantly across concepts. Similar to previous surveys (Nordhaus, 2018), it was concluded that respondents were more aware of global warming than climate change. Global warming is thought to be caused by humans and is thought to be linked to temperature increase, ozone layer depletion due

to melting icebergs and glaciers, the greenhouse effect and temperature-related effects. Participants associated climate change with natural causes. In addition, the results showed that participants thought that global warming was much more concerning than climate change and that global warming was more important than climate change. Finally, participants took individual or public actions for global warming rather than climate change; they thought that planting a large number of trees could prevent climate change and mitigate global warming.

Stehr et al. (2005) examined the relationships between perceptions of climate change and nuclear energy and their perspectives on other energy sources. In their study, they used the results of a survey conducted by IpsosMORI to 1,491 people aged 15 and over, selected through quota sampling. Participants were interviewed in their homes at 257 sampling points in England, Wales and Scotland between 1 October and 6 November 2005. ANOVA and t-test were used in the analysis of the data. Stehr et al. (2005) proposed three different SEMs to show how concerns about climate change and the environment affect perception factors related to nuclear energy and renewable energy. In the study, it was determined that participants' concerns about the environment and climate change positively affected their perspectives on renewable energy sources and negatively affected their perspectives on nuclear energy sources.

Wang and Guiling (2015) obtained the data in their study from the annual “environment” survey conducted by the Gallup (<http://www.gallup.com/home.aspx>) Organization. They used multivariate statistical analysis in the analysis of the data. According to the findings, in general, Liberals and Democrats express more concerns about global warming than Conservatives and Republicans.

Results. Climate change is characterized by different and unequal social impacts. Accordingly, it is thought that the impact will intensify according to personal, environmental, social and economic inequalities and cause inequalities to deepen. At the same time, the nature and severity of climate change impacts vary significantly in the context of regions, countries or geographies. Indeed, it is the case that agricultural workers and office workers are exposed to different impacts for the same reasons. However, when two regions are compared due to their socio-economic characteristics (for example: agricultural and industrial regions), it is expected that the reasons and severity of the impact will not be the same. In this sense, climate change is a new social problem that societies, economies and geographies face. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change defines climate change as “a change in climate resulting from human activities that directly or indirectly disrupt the composition of the global atmosphere, in addition to the natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods” (UN, 1992). The increase in natural disasters, especially floods and droughts, due to climate change threatens human health. According to a report by the World Health Organization, more than 250,000 deaths are estimated to occur worldwide each year due to climate change. This is particularly true for vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever. In 2015, a record-breaking heat wave in Japan killed 1,200 people. This is one of the significant impacts of climate change. Natural disasters and floods are increasingly forcing people to flee their homes. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 25 million people were displaced in 2019 due to climate change. This brings the concept of “climate refugees” to the fore. A 2018 World Bank report also estimated that up to 140 million people will be displaced by climate change by 2050.

Inequality and human rights violations in societies are exacerbated by the impacts of climate change. Especially in developing countries, economically and socially vulnerable groups are more likely to suffer from natural disasters. For example, in the adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, one of the main priorities was to consider climate change together with the fight against poverty and social justice. Among these goals, taking measures to increase the resilience of poor societies to climate change is also important. Research shows that among people affected by natural disasters, women, children, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities are at greater risk and definitely need additional support to rebuild their lives.

Using the example of Azerbaijan, we examined the experience of developing countries in this regard and how climate change affects social structure. It turned out that climate change also brings with it certain problems, and these problems also encourage migration trends. The following diagram shows these problems in the appropriate order with percentage indicators. Statistical indicators are obtained from the reports of the State Statistics Committee.

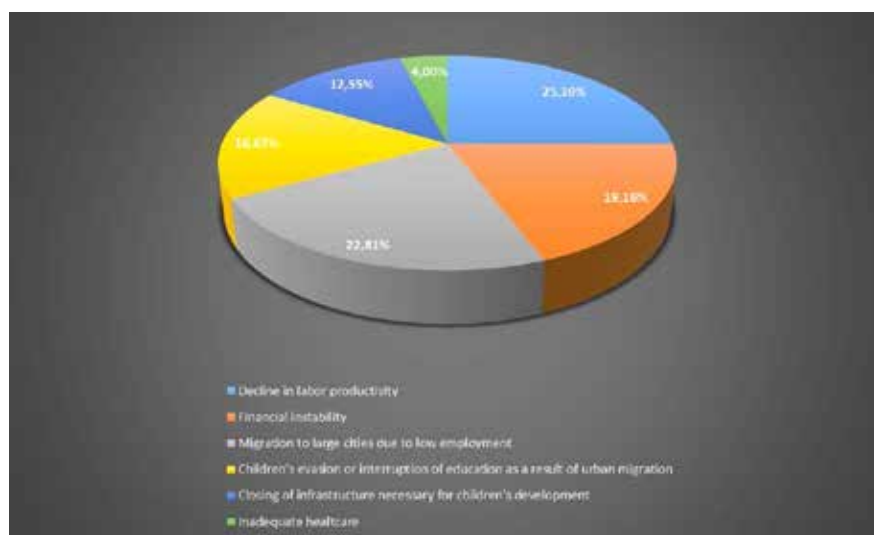


Figure 1. The Social and Economic Effects of Climate Change in Azerbaijan

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2024

Climate change involves social and economic challenges due to its real and tangible effects on precipitation, temperature, seasonal timing, biodiversity and the status of ecosystem services. Current and potential effects can be summarized as land loss, loss or inefficiency of ecosystem services, migrations, deterioration of health, economic transformations and social conflicts. Indeed, the social problems and inequalities caused by the effects and consequences of climate change are determined as two important elements and are examined in this section. The social problems resulting from climate change are largely complex and are both similar and very different from traditional social problems. The similar aspects of climate change with traditional social problems are encountered in the frameworks related to emergence, impact and struggle. In this sense, like traditional problems, climate change is also related to industrialization, urbanization and democratization. In addition, both of them create social conflicts in the distribution of blessings and burdens. Finally, it is possible to struggle under significant economic and political constraints.

Discussion. Accordingly, climate change is global in nature, involves long-term economic and social risks and is considered the most difficult collective problem in human history due to the distributional difficulties it brings among countries, people and generations (Connolly, 2021: 16). When we consider the social effects and consequences of climate change in the context of social impacts and consequences, it is not expected that every region, country or social group will experience equal damage. The reason for this situation can be shown as two elements of climate change that need to be underlined. (Hanna et al., 2016: 117). The most important feature that causes us to see climate change as a new social problem is related to uncertainty. Accordingly, the impact of climate change is less predictable than the impact of other social problems. In other words, while the vulnerabilities of traditional social problems such as unemployment or poverty are directly visible, the problems related to climate change are widespread, indirect and have a largely longer time horizon. Climate change-related risks have been defined as direct and indirect. (Turkesh, 2000: 17). The visible effects of climate

change on ecosystem services and weather directly affect health, employment, housing and economic well-being and therefore the related welfare programs. (Craig, 2002). However, indirect risks are caused by climate change policies that attempt to shift the costs onto society in order to suppress the need for public intervention. The most well-known example is the oft-debated carbon tax that is deemed necessary to combat climate change. In a situation where the entire cost is shifted onto society, it is possible that the most vulnerable segments of society will be adversely affected (Gough et al. 2008: 334). In this sense, while uncertain and unpredictable risks are a serious socio-economic cost item in both cases, the fact that the struggle also involves significant costs and is generally imposed on the most vulnerable segments within social groups raises concerns about social justice (Barker, 2008: 318). Thus, it is necessary not to keep climate change separate from other social problems, but to define it as including all social problems and being prepared for new risks, and to structure the struggle sensitively and to move away from a framework that will create new social problems.

The consequences of climate change, although varying in severity, will affect every individual in society. Accordingly, the most important effects and consequences are expected to be seen on housing, health, employment and income. The social effects of climate change occur due to unbalanced forms of social vulnerability. In this sense, it is affected by the status of personal, environmental and social factors. Personal factors are individual characteristics such as disability, gender or age. Environmental factors are the status of the housing in which people live, the status of the environment, geographical features and individual relationships with the environment. Social factors include aspects such as the strength of people's social networks and income levels. These factors determine the extent to which climate change will affect the well-being of society (Alpan, 2014). Among personal factors, gender is subject to significant inequalities regardless of climate change. This situation is expected to deepen with climate change and women are expected to be affected more than men. Women are more disadvantaged than men in terms of gender-related social and economic roles and responsibilities, their positions in the labor market, education, use of technology and social protection. In this context, women's current situation includes many inequalities and causes them to be more vulnerable to environmental disasters. For example, women are intensively employed in sectors directly dependent on ecosystem services such as agriculture. The loss of jobs in the agricultural sector will cause women to become unemployed and poor. It is also seen that women are already excluded from new jobs that will be created in construction, manufacturing and engineering, where they are relatively unemployed (ILO, 2018: 12). Age and disability also create inequalities similar to gender. Elderly or disabled individuals are among the social groups that will be most affected by disasters and extreme weather events caused by climate change. When they encounter such effects, their physical conditions may not be suitable for surviving the disaster they experience. At the same time, since they are more prone to extreme temperatures, air pollution and chronic diseases, they are more quickly and easily affected by climate change. Elderly individuals, in particular, are at greater risk of exposure to heat stress due to the decrease in their capacity to dissipate heat through skin blood flow and sweating. This situation shows that physical inequalities will include more disadvantages with climate change, and their problems in coping with disasters and health will increase (ILO, 2018: 23-24). However, they are also expected to have problems especially in accessing wage income that will provide them with a living. In the current situation, elderly or disabled individuals cannot easily find a job in the labor market or change their profession. In addition, especially elderly individuals cannot easily acquire new skills compared to young people. In this case, it becomes possible for them to be negatively affected by the occupational transformation brought about by climate change and to experience severe poverty. Prejudices against the elderly and disabled may arise from society or the dynamics of the labor market itself, as well as from the lack of educational programs specific to them, and this situation deepens their economic disadvantages even more when the effects of climate change become intense (ILO, 2018: 25). Age-related disadvantages will also affect children.

The fight against climate change is a controversial issue on a global scale. It is stated that a fight in an environmental context would be insufficient; it is necessary to go beyond the technical dimension to address its social, economic and political consequences. Accordingly, in an intervention approach devoid of the principle of social justice, a tendency is observed to transfer the responsibility for combating climate change to individuals. Thus, a political approach in which individuals are responsible for combating climate change carries the danger of producing policies by ignoring existing forms of inequality. However, in a rights-based understanding of justice, pre-existing inequalities and how they affect them are accepted much more clearly, awareness of disadvantages is developed and the fight against climate change is organized with this understanding. However, there is no consensus on the way and method of combating climate change. Various discussions are being carried out, especially on the approach, and the fight against climate change is being designed with many approaches such as sustainability, energy efficiency, carbon trading (Beg et al., 2002: 129). However, a common understanding is needed for the solution of a vital and socially structured global problem such as climate change. Under this heading, two of these understandings will be examined and discussed in the context of social justice.

The emergence of the concept of social policy coincides with the self-regulation of the market economy with laissez-faire capitalism in the 19th century. Social programs such as public health, education, labor law and social insurance emerged with the aim of protecting social justice and peace in the face of new risks and insecurities in the labor market, pressures from unions, social democratic and communist parties and civil movements. However, the institutionalization of many of these programs can be seen since the Second World War (Gough, 2018: 109). After the Second World War, with the increase in welfare state practices, the social state became effective and the content of social policy expanded. Thus, social policy became practices targeting the aim of social justice by encompassing the entire society. In this sense, the tools first developed for similar needs of large crowds were transformed and applied for differentiated needs. Therefore, over time, social policy evolved from practices targeting the workforce in the narrow sense to social policies shaped on the basis of social justice. The broad definition of social policy is as follows: “a science of balance, harmony and peace that aims at social justice, that foresees and creates measures and policies to correct the impartial laws of economics and to eliminate the causes of class struggles within the capitalist social order” (Coach, 2012: 19). Another definition is as follows: “an interdisciplinary science of social justice that examines the policies that should be followed in order to protect individuals and segments that are economically, socially, culturally and otherwise weak, to reduce social injustice and inequalities created and deepened by the laws of the market economy, as well as the measures that should be taken and taken with unilateral and bilateral means, the legal regulations that should be made and made and the variables” (Gulmez, 2008: 3). Climate change deepens social problems such as poverty, inequality and instability, and this impasse is caused by a wide range of effects. However, the wide range of social policy is suitable for covering the wide range of effects of climate change.

Ultimately, while climate change is devastating to humans economically, socially and environmentally, social policy exists to protect humans from destruction or to eliminate traces of destruction. In this sense, the mitigation (energy, transportation, forest, trade, etc.) and adaptation (education, health, housing, social security, employment, etc.) policies and programs needed to combat climate change are the main focus of social policy. In particular, existing social protection tools formed with a holistic and social perspective are the most fundamental point of climate change adaptation policies. The scope and public function of social security are the guarantee of protection regardless of gender, age, class, religion, race or ethnicity. Indeed, integrating the effects and consequences of climate change into social protection policies and programs is defined as the most important task for governments in both combating climate change and creating social policies. Social policy makes a difference in two important aspects compared to other approaches in structuring the fight against climate change.

Firstly, social policy has a long history of experience with localized applications for traditional social problems, global discourses and policies based on scientific data. It is possible to say that this experience is needed, especially considering the uncertain effects and consequences of climate change (Caney, 2010: 72). In this way, the first intervention to the socio-economic conditions and basic needs that are expected to be directly affected by increasing temperatures can be guaranteed (Gough, 2008: 328-329). Secondly, the state is the main actor in social policy. Social policy is an important step in reducing poverty, risks and vulnerability, and continues to protect it with the communication environment it creates, and it also includes real persons and institutions that can be held accountable (ILO, 2021: 135–138). In the fight against climate change, where the state is the main actor, a management approach that includes all stakeholders and all institutions becomes possible. Thus, the existence of an active state where rights are determined, protected and fully utilized will ensure that social policies are created for the most vulnerable individuals and will establish a fair distribution (Gough et al., 2008: 327). One of the most important discussion topics in combating climate change is how resources should be distributed among current and future social risks (Stehr, 2005). In this sense, social policies provide fair distribution by reducing the connection between the living standards of the most vulnerable social groups and their incomes due to work to some extent. However, it is possible to minimize the economic, social and cultural transformation costs necessitated by climate change through social policies. In this way, environmental, social and economic transformation and global integration will be less costly and less time-consuming than expected (Gough et al., 2018: 328).

Situation in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is taking the fight against the impacts of climate change seriously. The declaration of 2024 as the “Year of Solidarity for a Green World” is an important step towards our country’s progress towards environmental protection and sustainable development. With this initiative, Azerbaijan aims to increase environmental education in its territory, expand methods of combating climate change, and ensure environmental protection. Azerbaijan’s hosting of COP29 will also contribute to the adoption of important decisions at the international level on the fight against climate change. New steps related to human rights and environmental protection are expected to be discussed at this event. Azerbaijan is taking a number of important steps both nationally and internationally in the fight against climate change. It is aimed to provide 30 percent of total energy production from renewable sources by 2030. In particular, the declaration of the Karabakh and East Zangezur regions as green energy zones has paved the way for the development of solar and wind energy projects. The initiative to create the first carbon market in Azerbaijan serves to reduce carbon emissions and direct companies to more environmentally responsible activities. By increasing forest areas, serious steps are being taken in Azerbaijan to achieve the goal of protecting the ecosystem and absorbing carbon that affects the climate. “Smart” villages and cities – sustainable agriculture and environmentally friendly infrastructure are being developed in Karabakh within the framework of the “Green Shusha, Green World” initiative. “Smart” village and city projects are aimed at the efficient use of resources and environmental protection. (A Framework for Developing Smart Villages in Azerbaijan, 2021) COP29 preparations – Azerbaijan's hosting of COP29 will support the adoption of new solutions and relevant commitments on climate change within the framework of international cooperation. Within the framework of this event, Azerbaijan plans to strengthen its leading position in the fight against climate change. The measures taken are aimed at ensuring the ecological security and sustainable development of Azerbaijan, making the country an exemplary partner in the fight against climate change at the international level.

International law has developed various instruments to protect human rights in the fight against climate change. The UN Paris Climate Agreement (2015) aims to limit global warming to 1.5°C and provides financial and technological support to the societies most affected by the effects of climate change. The UN Human Rights Council, in its resolution adopted in 2008, emphasized that climate change is related to human rights and that this should be discussed.

Azerbaijan is taking important steps at the global level to combat climate change and protect human rights. It is important to develop adaptation strategies against climate change at the local level, strengthen laws aimed at protecting the environment, and ensure social justice. Azerbaijan contributes more to international cooperation by supporting climate policy at the global level. This ensures the protection of both the environment and human rights. The interrelationship between climate change and human rights requires serious measures at the global and local levels. Azerbaijan's hosting of COP29 allows for increased steps to be taken in this area and strengthening international cooperation. (In solidarity for the green World, 2024) The protection of human rights and the fight against climate change are essential for sustainable development and social justice. To this end, closer cooperation between Azerbaijan and the countries of the world in the future will contribute to the protection of both the environment and human rights.

Conclusion. Climate change is becoming a growing threat to current and future generations. Impacts such as constantly rising average temperatures, extreme weather events, and rising sea levels are causing life-threatening consequences. Combating these consequences becomes difficult due to the uncertainty, complexity, and unpredictability inherent in climate change. In addition, although policies to combat climate change aim to reduce these threats, they carry the risk of increasing social inequalities and public costs for current generations. In this sense, determining whether policy instruments will trigger significant social problems and their capacity to provide the necessary change and transformation for climate change impacts should form the focal point of the struggle. In this context, the fight against climate change needs to be structured on the basis of an understanding that will include all social problems and encompass the entire society. Social justice undertakes to ensure justice in the distribution of blessings and burdens by envisioning a rights-based approach in solving social problems. Thus, it is suitable as the fundamental principle of problems that include many social problems such as climate change and threaten the existence of societies. However, social justice has positive discrimination arguments for the vulnerable and relatively more vulnerable segments of society. Since the discrimination in question does not include excluding other groups, it ultimately allows for the elimination of inequalities and the establishment of justice. In addition, the effects of climate change, which include uncertainties and have high destructive power, require policies that encourage strong norms and attitudes such as solidarity, social harmony, trust and belonging. Therefore, the fight against climate change needs to be structured on the basis of social justice. The fight against climate change is structured with different principles and approaches in the literature; it is discussed with many different concepts such as economic, social and ecological. Two of these approaches, social policy and resilience, were examined and discussed in this study in the context of establishing social justice. This discussion is important in questioning the need for a new approach today and tomorrow, where the fight against climate change is structured. It is concretely difficult to determine how the fight against climate change will affect social inequalities under both approaches. However, it can be said that it is possible to determine an approach that will serve the principle of social justice by intersecting the basic dynamics of the two approaches with the dynamics of climate change. In this context, three important points that need to be underlined as a result of the study are revealed. First, there is an important difference between the two approaches regarding experience. Social policy is the first-hand addressee of every social problem that has emerged since the industrial revolution. However, resilience is a concept used in the field of social sciences since the 70s and specifically targets environmental sustainability. In this sense, it includes the infrastructural improvements and social supports that social policy currently includes. Accordingly, social policy can provide the social resilience promised by resilience with tools such as education, health services, social security, assurances, etc. In this process, it is seen that the society is fully covered since it is possible to adjust the number and/or density of tools according to the degree of need of the societies. Secondly, the difference in the implementation tools in the two approaches is striking. Resilience is realized through

individual and social initiatives. In the resilience approach, there is a unity of implementation even if public regulations exist, and individuality in terms of institutions. Social policy is under government guarantee with legal regulations and there is support from civil society organizations. Public guarantee is a factor that increases psychological well-being as well as economic and social trust. In addition, since it contributes to the sustainability of societies, it makes it more possible to combat the uncertain structure of climate change. Finally, the two approaches are evaluated in the context of their contents covering the fight against climate change. Resilience underlines the responsibility of the system as a whole and indicates the necessity of transformation. Especially with the understanding of flexibility it contains, it is seen as an important advantage that policies can be changed more easily against the uncertainty of climate change. However, moving away from the meaning attributed to economic growth and the normative content of policies causes doubts about ensuring social justice. However, the current state of social policy needs to be updated and even expanded. However, it is thought that the experience of social policy, its executive tool based on public interventions, its strict adherence to universal norms and its political relationship with normative institutions contain significant potential. In this sense, it can be said that the responsibility, stability and legitimacy required to combat climate change are present in the essence of social policy and that it provides confidence in ensuring the establishment of social justice according to resilience. As a result, social policy and resilience present a climate change combat scenario from two different perspectives.

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