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Emotions, welfare and the boundaries of social citizenship

Protection from insecurity is a central promise of social policy, particularly its social protection functions. Yet the arrangements through which such protection is provided can also expose people to uncertainty, humiliation, and exclusion. Access to benefits, housing or emergency assistance conveys messages about whose needs count and what must be demonstrated to deserve support. This thematic issue of *Problemy Polityki Społecznej* examines how such arrangements shape emotional experiences and how emotional expectations and claims enter the organisation of welfare. Its central concern is the relationship between material protection and recognised membership in society.

The issue builds on established research on the emotional life of welfare (Hoggett, 2000) and the practices through which affective citizenship is governed and contested (Fortier, 2016). It connects these perspectives with an understanding of formal and informal welfare as interdependent (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2024). Public authorities, markets, families, and community organisations jointly shape access to protection, often through unequal relationships of dependence and reciprocity. Social citizenship is, therefore, approached through access to resources, recognised standing, and the capacity to make claims, while remaining attentive to differences in legal status.

The contributions examine selected settings in Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland. Housing provides a recurring focus because it connects economic resources with family dependence, expectations of adulthood, and the possibility of planning the future. Studies of Roma experiences and refugee reception extend the inquiry to racialised exclusion and the conditionality of belonging. Together, the cases bring everyday insecurity into conversation with emergency responses. They offer complementary analyses rather than a harmonised comparison of national systems, and their regional setting does not imply a uniform post-socialist trajectory.

The conceptual foundation is laid in the opening article by Ryszard Szarfenberg, The Emotional Constitution of Welfare: A Multi-Level Framework for Social-Affective Citizenship. Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) proposes that welfare institutions and emotional relations of membership are mutually constitutive. Arrangements of provision organise experiences of recognition, dignity and security, while emotional expectations and responses can help legitimate, contest or reshape those arrangements. The framework's multilevel architecture connects formal and informal provision with everyday encounters and potential political feedback. The empirical articles examine different parts of these relationships without claiming to test the framework in its entirety.

The first empirical contribution turns to the lived experience of Roma in Czechia. Drawing on community-based research developed with RomanoNet, Selma Muhič Dizdarevič identifies a cumulative emotional burden associated with racialised scrutiny across everyday and institutional settings. The inclusion of middle-class participants challenges any straightforward reduction of these experiences to poverty. Alongside humiliation and anxiety, respondents describe pride, solidarity, and demands for equality. The article thus brings the tension between formal inclusion and conditional recognition into view while recognising the agency of those experiencing exclusion.

In Slovakia's Trnava region, Lenka Diener turns to housing insecurity among young people who are not in employment, education or training. Drawing on accounts from young people and support professionals, she argues that stable housing enables participation in work and education. Particular vulnerabilities arise where institutional support and family resources are both weak. The analysis also identifies avoidance and the normalisation of uncertainty, directing attention to how exclusion can persist without becoming an articulated collective demand.

This line of inquiry continues in Hungary, where Adrienne Csizmady and Lea Kőszeghy study the country's 'Generation Rent'. Combining survey evidence with interviews with young renters in Budapest, they examine how homeownership serves as a marker of successful adulthood despite unequal opportunities to achieve it. Family wealth becomes a gatekeeper to housing and social recognition, while family assistance can entail dependency and obligation. Renters' accounts also reveal peer support and challenges to the ownership ideal, showing how constrained housing pathways remain sites of interpretation and contestation.

The final two articles examine the political organisation of emotion during crises. Aleksandra Zubrzycka-Czarnecka analyses how the Polish prime minister's speeches during the 2024 floods combined emotional appeals with technical assurances to justify evacuation and reconstruction. Her study examines attempts to reconcile disruptive intervention with recognition of attachment to home and promises of state responsibility. It treats crisis communication as a practice of legitimation, while leaving its reception among affected residents open to further investigation.

Turning to the reception of Ukrainian refugees in Poland, Justyna Nakonieczna-Bartosiewicz examines elite discourse between 2022 and 2025. She reconstructs a changing balance between empathic solidarity, reciprocal fairness, and conditional protection, relating these emotional framings to debates and institutional changes concerning access to welfare. Differences between political actors remain important within this trajectory. The article shows how expectations of contribution and gratitude enter the justification of assistance, making the boundaries of solidarity subject to continuing political negotiation.

Read together, the contributions suggest that welfare arrangements establish expectations about who is entitled to protection and how that entitlement should be demonstrated. Racialised suspicion, ideals of self-reliant adulthood and expectations of reciprocity make recognition uneven and conditional. Emotional experiences register these inequalities and can shape how people adapt to or contest them. The studies also resist a simple division between beneficial and harmful emotions: solidarity can have exclusionary boundaries, while anger can express a legitimate claim to equal

treatment. More empathetic communication cannot substitute for secure entitlements or adequate provision, just as formal access alone does not guarantee dignified treatment.

These findings open questions that require closer connections between different kinds of evidence. Political expressions of empathy do not in themselves establish public trust, and accounts of distress do not by themselves demonstrate withdrawal or mobilisation. Further research must trace how institutional practices are experienced, how people interpret the causes of insecurity, and under what conditions individual grievances become collective claims. Comparative and longitudinal work can examine these relationships without assuming that similar arrangements generate identical emotional or political responses.

One strand of this agenda is being developed through the ongoing project *Emotional Dynamics of Housing Policy in the Visegrad Region: Security as a Social Value* (2026–2027), which focuses on adults aged 25–35 in Warsaw, Prague, Budapest, and Bratislava. The project develops a common comparative protocol for examining housing pathways. It brings young adults' accounts into dialogue with those of actors involved in housing provision and with policy and public discourse. This design supports systematic comparison of where institutional promises of security align with, or diverge from, lived experience, while exploring the implications for collective resilience and social cohesion.

The resulting agenda asks how people can obtain protection, retain dignity, and contest decisions as legitimate members of society. It makes the emotional organisation of welfare a question of institutional accountability, alongside the distribution of resources and the enforceability of rights.

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The emotional constitution of welfare: a multi-level framework for Social-Affective Citizenship

Abstract

The "emotional turn" in the social sciences has highlighted deficiencies in rationalist models of citizenship, yet the institutional analysis of social policy remains largely disconnected from the study of political affect. Existing frameworks struggle to systematically integrate the formal and informal spheres of welfare provision with the lived emotional experiences of belonging and recognition. This article introduces the Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework, a theoretical synthesis that posits the mutual constitution of the social and the affective domains. We develop expanded conceptualisations of Social Citizenship (the Ecosystem Matrix) and Affective Citizenship (four dimensions) by integrating insights on informality, hybrid governance, affective regulation, and the politics of hope. The SAC framework is presented as a four-level dynamic process model, tracing the pathway from the ecosystem of provision, through mechanisms of mediation and affective experience, to political feedback. Furthermore, we demonstrate how this architecture is operationalised by a suite of analytical tools developed in preceding work, which

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provide the necessary diagnostics, microfoundations, and macro-dynamics. A worked example traces a conditional activation regime through the four levels; a separate discussion considers welfare chauvinism as an exclusionary feedback dynamic. The article concludes by establishing a rigorous, multi-level research programme for analysing the emotional constitution of welfare.

Keywords: social policy, emotion, social citizenship, affective citizenship, policy feedback

1. Introduction

The contemporary welfare state is an inherently emotional arena. Encounters with social policy – whether navigating the stringent conditionality of unemployment benefits, relying on informal kinship networks for eldercare, or participating in marketised healthcare systems – generate potent affective experiences: dignity or stigma, security or anxiety, hope or alienation (Ayata, 2022; Soss et al., 2011). Yet, a significant analytical gap persists between the structural analysis of social policy and the experiential analysis of political emotion. Despite the "emotional turn" (Plamper, 2010) – now well established within social policy itself, from the psychosocial analysis of welfare (Hoggett, 2000) and the politics of resentment and fairness (Hoggett et al., 2013) to studies of affective governance (Jupp et al., 2017) and the shame of poverty (Walker, 2014) – and the rise of "affective citizenship" as a critical lens (Fortier, 2010), the institutional mechanisms of welfare provision are often studied independently of the affective dynamics they generate. This disconnect results in an incomplete understanding of how citizenship is governed, experienced, and contested in the 21st century.

The limitations of traditional approaches to Social Citizenship (SC) contribute to this gap. The classic Marshallian paradigm, focused on state-centric redistribution and passive rights reception (Marshall, 1950/1992), is ill-equipped to handle the contemporary landscape. While scholars have updated this paradigm to account for the hybridisation of governance logics – incorporating marketisation and participation (Johansson & Hvinden, 2013) – these approaches often remain overly focused on the formal state. They frequently neglect the crucial insight that social rights are often primarily realised through informal moral economies, kinship networks, and transnational practices, particularly where the state is a minor actor (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2024).

Similarly, the concept of Affective Citizenship (AC), while illuminating the ways states "govern through affect" (Fortier, 2010) and enforce racialised hierarchies (Ayata, 2022), remains fragmented. The literature has tended to foreground disciplinary power and resistance, and the work on solidarity, mutual care, and the persistent "hopes for the state" that drive mobilisation among the marginalised – though present since the concept's origins – has only recently been drawn together (Mookherjee, 2005; Johnson, 2010; Roy et al., 2022). A comprehensive understanding

requires a synthesis that captures the full spectrum of affective dynamics in political membership.

This article addresses these limitations by introducing the Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework. We argue that the "Social" (institutional structures of rights, obligations and welfare) and the "Affective" (emotional experiences of belonging and recognition) are mutually constitutive. All welfare provision, whether formal or informal, bureaucratic or communal, is a form of affective governance that distributes not only resources but also signals about worth, dignity, and inclusion. The SAC framework integrates expanded conceptualisations of both SC and AC into a four-level dynamic process model that traces the pathway from the ecosystem of provision, through the mediation of experience, to affective dynamics and subsequent political feedback.

This article serves as the capstone of a four-part theoretical project aimed at establishing a new research programme on emotions and social policy. The SAC framework provides the organising architecture, which is operationalised by the analytical engine developed in the preceding trilogy. This engine comprises three essential components: the diagnostic tools necessary to analyse the assumptions embedded in policy design and across the policy chain, provided by "Beyond the Rational Calculator" (BRC) (Szarfenberg, 2026a); the microfoundations explaining individual affective processing, supplied by "The Emotional-Causal Policy Actor" (ECPA) (Szarfenberg, 2026c); and the macro-dynamics explaining collective emotional shifts and feedback loops, offered by "The Emotional Life of Policy" (ELP) (Szarfenberg, 2026b). Together, this tetralogy provides a coherent, multi-level system for analysing the emotional constitution of welfare.

The article proceeds as follows. Sections 2 and 3 develop comprehensive, integrated conceptualisations of Affective Citizenship and Social Citizenship, respectively. Section 4 introduces the integrated SAC framework, detailing its core postulates and dynamic architecture. Section 5 demonstrates how the preceding trilogy (BRC, ECPA, ELP) operationalises this architecture. Section 6 concludes by discussing the theoretical significance of the integrated framework and outlining the future research agenda. Initial methodological guidelines for the framework's empirical application are provided in Appendix A.

2. Developing a comprehensive conceptualisation of Affective Citizenship

Two distinct "turns" lie behind this development, and they are worth separating. The emotional turn in history and the social sciences revived emotions as objects of inquiry, most notably through the history of emotions (Plamper, 2010). The affective turn proper emerged from critical and cultural theory: the phrase gained currency with Clough and Halley's edited volume The Affective Turn: Theorising the Social (2007), and the field is usually traced along two genealogies – a Spinoza–Bergson–Deleuze line (Massumi, 1995; 2002) and a Tomkins–Sedgwick line (Sedgwick, 2003) – consolidated by Gregg and Seigworth's The Affect Theory Reader (2010), with contributions from Ahmed, Berlant, Massumi, and Clough. Within citizenship studies,

this scholarship has destabilised the ideal of the modern liberal citizen as a strictly rational actor and highlighted the centrality of affect in the experience, governance, and contestation of political membership (Di Gregorio & Merolli, 2016). In navigating this terrain, we take a deliberate position in the debate over the relationship between affect and emotion. At one pole, Massumi (2002) treats affect as pre-conscious, autonomic intensity that is categorically distinct from qualified, meaning-laden emotion; at the other, Ahmed (2014) treats the distinction between sensation and emotion as only analytic. Acknowledging Leys's (2011) critique of the strong affect/emotion split, we follow Ahmed in treating affect and emotion as irreducibly entangled and intentional – that is, object-directed and meaning-laden. We accordingly employ "affect" as a broad category encompassing categorised emotions (e.g., anger, hope) and subjective feelings that are simultaneously embodied and socially constructed, rather than as a register of pre-conscious intensity set apart from meaning. However, the concept of Affective Citizenship (AC) remains theoretically fragmented, often emphasising either the disciplinary power of the state or the resistive potential of citizens, while sometimes neglecting the complex interplay of hope, solidarity, and expectations of care. To provide a robust foundation for the Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework, this section synthesises recent theoretical advancements into an integrated, multi-dimensional conceptualisation of AC. This synthesis integrates analyses of affective governance (Fortier, 2010), racialised boundary-making (Ayata, 2022), and the politics of hope and solidarity (Roy et al., 2022).

Affective citizenship has a genealogy that predates its recent prominence in citizenship studies. Mookherjee (2005) coined the term, theorising affective citizenship as a normative model of recognition in which autonomy is formed not through a single set of affective bonds but through commitments to multiple, intersecting communities. Johnson (2010) developed it for political membership and the welfare state, supplying the working definition that later scholarship adopts. Isin (2004) and Fortier (2010) gave the concept a governmentality edge – "governing through neurosis" and "governing through affect", respectively – while Ayata (2022) systematised the differential-belonging strand and Di Gregorio and Merolli (2016) consolidated the field. The four dimensions developed below order this lineage rather than describe a fragmented literature for the first time.

We define Affective Citizenship as *the contested domain of political membership constituted by the interplay of emotions, feelings, and embodied experiences. It is a dynamic field where governance is exercised through the imposition of feeling rules; where hierarchies of belonging are maintained through boundary-making; and where contestation and solidarity are mobilised through hope, care, and demands for accountability.* This integrated concept is operationalised through four analytical dimensions: Governance and Regulation, Differentiation and Hierarchy, Contestation and Resistance, and Expectation and Solidarity.

The first dimension examines how the state and other institutions seek to regulate the emotional lives of their subjects. Fortier (2010) conceptualises this as "governing through affect", whereby institutions establish "feeling rules" (Hochschild, 1983) that prescribe the appropriate emotional dispositions of a "good citizen". This governance is not neutral; it establishes what Fortier (2010) terms a "political economy of feelings",

where certain emotions are validated and encouraged (e.g., patriotism, self-reliance), while others are delegitimised or rendered suspicious (e.g., anger, foreign allegiance). At the macro scale, Johnson (2010) names these patterns "emotional regimes": neo-liberal governance encourages citizens to "feel entrepreneurial and self-reliant", a disposition increasingly contested by welfare-liberal regimes in which the citizen is "encouraged to feel protected by government" (Johnson, 2010, p. 502). This governmental use of fear and reassurance also echoes Isin's (2004) "governing through neurosis", warranting the dimension across three sources rather than Fortier alone.

This perspective highlights the "Janus face" of citizenship: it is simultaneously a technology of governance used to define and demarcate populations, and a site of potential contestation (Fortier, 2010). Governance through affect seeks to create compliant subjects, extending into the "psychic life of power" (Butler, 1997; Fortier, 2017) by shaping subjectivities and defining the affective codes of conduct.

The second dimension highlights how affect is mobilised to maintain hierarchies of belonging even when formal legal equality exists. Ayata (2022) emphasises citizenship as an "affective institution" central to regulating racialised boundary-making. As explicit legal discrimination has become less tenable, Ayata argues that racialised boundary-making has shifted more pronouncedly to the affective domain. Fortier's (2017) analysis of anxiety and "citizenisation" complements this, showing how differential belonging is produced through affectively charged status anxieties rather than overt exclusion.

This shift enforces a "differential regime of belonging" (Ayata, 2022, p. 48). The framework distinguishes between those perceived as "true" or "proper" citizens, whose belonging is assumed, and "quasi" or "technical" citizens, whose membership remains conditional despite their legal status. For racialised subjects, belonging requires continuous "affective performance" – demonstrating allegiance, loyalty, and the "right feelings" toward the nation-state (Ayata, 2022, p. 51). This affective regime ensures that integration remains an open-ended process for marginalised groups, reproducing hierarchies through the mobilization of desire and aversion.

Boundary-making is not only racialised but gendered and sexual. Affective citizenship has long sorted the "deserving" from the "undeserving" along intersecting lines of gender, class, religion, and ethnicity (Lister, 2003; Pateman, 1988; Mills, 1997). Sauer (2024) shows how the authoritarian populist right in Germany and Austria mobilises an "affect economy" of fear, anger, and disgust toward women, LGBTIQ people, migrants, and Muslims – while promising belonging and love on a national-ethnic basis – to contest citizenship rights and reshape the welfare state. This extends Ayata's (2022) racialised account of differential belonging to gender and sexuality.

The third dimension focuses on how affect drives political mobilisation against disciplinary norms. Affective governance is never totalising; it is constantly met with what Fortier (2016) terms "unruly feelings" – emotions that clash with established feeling rules. These can range from anger and indignation against injustice to expressions of solidarity that challenge state-defined boundaries.

This dimension encompasses "acts of citizenship" (Isin & Nielsen, 2008), where subjects mobilise affective resources to constitute themselves as citizens and claim the "right to have rights" on their own terms. This includes radical modes of belonging

that refuse the affective and territorial logic of the state (Bagelman, 2016; Vrasti & Dayal, 2016). Affect, in this dimension, is the fuel for mobilisation, transforming individual grievances into collective political action. However, this focus on resistance *against* the state must be complemented by an analysis of the affective bonds that sustain communities and shape their demands *upon* the state.

The fourth dimension consolidates a dispersed but long-standing strand of affective-citizenship scholarship that foregrounds the affective bonds of community and the enduring expectations placed upon the state. This strand runs from Mookherjee's (2005) account of recognition across multiple, intersecting communities, through Johnson's (2010; 2019) analysis of solidarity, security, and the welfare state as an "emotional regime", to the recent intervention of Roy, Coelho, and Szabzon (2022), who argue that studies centred on difference and resistance have comparatively underdeveloped these affective bonds and expectations. Drawing on the "politics of hope" (Appadurai, 2013) among socially excluded populations, this dimension highlights "hopes for the state" (Jansen, 2014) – the persistent expectation for care and accountability.

Furthermore, it highlights the mobilisation of horizontal solidarity and mutual care as fundamental aspects of "feeling like a citizen" (Roy et al., 2022). Crucially, Roy and coworkers reframe what constitutes an "unruly feeling". In a neoliberal context that emphasises individualism and state retrenchment, they argue that demands for collective solidarity and state responsibility are the truly disruptive and unruly political affects.

These four dimensions are not only theoretical. A growing body of policy-grounded scholarship already traces them through concrete institutions and across the very levels this framework formalises. Fortier's (2017) analysis of British "citizenisation", Merolli's (2016) study of integration exams, and de Wilde and Duyvendak's (2016) account of engineered "community spirit" in Dutch neighbourhood policy show governance-through-affect operating in situ; Bassel's (2017) "politics of listening" and her work on citizenship tests tie recognition and voice to a specific naturalisation instrument; and Wiebe's (2016; 2019) "sensing policy" framework follows affective, embodied lived experience from environmental-health policy through to political mobilisation. Integrating such work shows that the SAC levels are empirically tractable, not merely conceptual – and supplies the kind of grounded case the worked example in Section 4 develops.

3. Developing a comprehensive conceptualisation of Social Citizenship

The concept of Social Citizenship, classically formulated by T.H. Marshall (1950/1992), established the right to economic welfare and security as fundamental to full membership in a community. This framework, while foundational, has been criticised for its state-centrism, its assumption of a passive citizen-recipient, and its inability to account for the complexities of globalisation, neoliberal restructuring, and the pervasive role of informality (Dean, 2015; Lister, 2003). A contemporary framework for Social Citizenship (SC) must move beyond these limitations by integrating insights

regarding the hybridisation of welfare governance and the critical role of the informal sphere.

We define Social Citizenship as *encompassing the interdependent institutional and normative arrangements – spanning formal state policies and informal community practices – that regulate access to welfare, security, and the resources necessary for membership in a community. It is realised through diverse logics operating across local, national, and transnational scales.*

In response to the restructuring of welfare states under conditions of economic openness and individualisation, scholars have called for "analytical pluralism" to capture the emerging complexities of citizenship (Johansson & Hvinden, 2013). The contemporary welfare state is no longer solely focused on redistribution; it increasingly emphasises activation, marketisation, and participation.

Johansson and Hvinden (2013) propose a "post-Marshallian" framework, adapted from Miller (2000), which identifies three co-existing logics of organisation within formal welfare systems. The first, the Socio-Liberal Logic, represents the traditional focus on redistribution and mutual rights and obligations. Within this logic, the "active" dimension is increasingly defined by conditionality and the fulfilment of duties, such as participation in activation policies. This contrasts with the Libertarian Logic, which emphasises self-responsibility, autonomy, and choice. This second logic drives the marketisation of welfare and promotes the ideal of the "citizen-consumer" operating within those markets (Johansson & Hvinden, 2013, p. 50). Finally, the Civic Republican Logic shifts the focus toward participation, deliberation, and commitment to the community, promoting institutional arrangements such as co-production, civil dialogue, and participatory governance.

Johansson and Hvinden (2013, p. 51) argue that contemporary social citizenship is a complex hybrid of these models. Their framework allows for analysis of how these logics interact ("opening up between") and the balance between active and passive dimensions within each ("opening up within").

While the hybridity framework captures changes within the formal state, it remains largely state-centric. A critical intervention by Nordensvärd and Ketola (2022, p. 772) challenges this bias, arguing that the Marshallian paradigm fundamentally misunderstands how social rights are realised globally, especially where the state is a "relatively minor player". Nordensvärd and Ketola (2022) argue that formal citizenship often overshadows the crucial role of informal citizenship embedded in local and transnational spaces.

They juxtapose Formal (Modern) citizenship – which is abstract, universalist, and realised through legal bureaucracy – with Informal (Moral) citizenship. The latter is grounded in the concept of "moral economy" (Scott, 1976, cited in Nordensvärd and Ketola, 2024), which describes the informal rights and obligations that communities develop through reciprocal exchanges to mitigate risk. This logic is fundamentally distinct from formal state or market mechanisms; it is embodied, particularistic, and based on deeply held norms of reciprocity within kinship, community, or faith networks. What is also important, Nordensvärd and Ketola reject the evolutionary view that formal citizenship supersedes the informal. They emphasise the interdependence and co-evolution of these spheres, arguing that informal welfare is

not merely "gap-filling" but is integral and constitutive of social citizenship (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2024, p. 774).

A comprehensive framework requires integrating Johansson and Hvinden's (2013) analysis of governance *logics* with Nordensvärd and Ketola's (2022) focus on the *loci* of provision. The synthesis requires recognising that the logics of organisation (Bureaucratic, Market, Community) operate across the entire welfare ecosystem, spanning both formal and informal spheres. This integration yields the Social Citizenship Ecosystem Matrix (Table 1).

Table 1. The Social Citizenship Ecosystem Matrix

Logic of Organisation	Formal Locus (State/ Legalistic)	Informal Locus (Relational/ Moral Economy)
1. Bureaucratic/State (Socio-Liberal Logic)	Formal Welfare Rights; Activation (Johansson & Hvinden, 2013).	Mediated/Clientelist Citizenship; Patron-client relations (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2024).
2. Market/Individual (Libertarian Logic)	Formal Market Citizenship; Welfare consumerism (Johansson & Hvinden, 2013).	Informal Market Exchange; Unregulated labour.
3. Community/Reciprocity (Republican/Moral Economy Logic)	Formal Participatory Governance; Co-production (Johansson & Hvinden, 2013).	Informal Moral Economy; Kinship obligations, reciprocity (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2024).

This integrated matrix provides a robust conceptualisation that bridges the formal/informal divide. It moves beyond a static typology by enabling the analysis of dynamic interdependencies. It facilitates the systematic examination of how, for instance, the retrenchment of the Formal Bureaucratic state increases reliance on the Informal Community (kinship) or Informal Market spheres, or how Formal Market logics colonise informal spaces. By capturing these interactions, the matrix reveals the complex and often contested terrain where contemporary social citizenship is negotiated.

4. The integrated Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework

The preceding sections established comprehensive conceptualisations of Affective Citizenship (AC) and Social Citizenship (SC), highlighting the need to integrate the logics of governance and the loci of provision (SC) with the dynamics of emotional experience and political mobilisation (AC). This section synthesises these components into the Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework. SAC moves beyond additive approaches (acknowledging both structure and emotion) by proposing a dynamic architecture where these domains are mutually constitutive.

The core thesis of SAC is that citizenship is fundamentally constituted at the intersection of institutional structures of welfare provision (Social) and the lived, emotional experiences of belonging and recognition (Affective). SAC argues that all institutional arrangements, whether formal state policies or informal community networks, function as inherently affective regimes that shape political identity, govern behaviour, and drive citizen mobilisation.

This framework rests on three foundational postulates that bridge the structure-experience divide. First is The Postulate of Mutual Constitution, asserting that the "Social" and the "Affective" are inseparable. Institutional designs for rights and welfare are not neutral but are carriers of emotional content (Schneider & Sidney, 2009); conversely, affective experiences are structured by the institutional ecosystems within which citizens are embedded. A welfare design literally carries affect in its rules: a conditionality or sanction regime, for example, encodes suspicion of the claimant into the procedure itself, communicating distrust before any official speaks.

Second is The Postulate of Pervasive Affective Governance. All modes of welfare provision – bureaucratic, market-based, or communal – constitute forms of affective governance (Fortier, 2010). They distribute not only material resources but also powerful signals about worth, dignity, and inclusion, thereby regulating the "feeling rules" (Hochschild, 1983) and emotional regimes (Johnson, 2010; 2019) of the political community. A means-tested benefit, a marketised "citizen-consumer" service, and a kinship-based moral economy each cultivate a distinct affective disposition – the anxious compliant claimant, the empowered chooser, the obligated reciprocator. Treating all three as affective regimes is what allows the framework to compare formal and informal provision on the same axis. This claim aligns with the emerging concept of institutional affect: "institutions are rich sites of affect (…) they mediate affects and are maintained by them" (Churcher et al., 2026, p. 121). On that account, institutions are analysed through the interplay of materialities, actors, and imaginaries, and exhibit a "second life": the informal, normalised affective practices that run counter to an institution's official mission and shape "the differential treatment that socio-economically disadvantaged persons experience in policing, housing, or state bureaucracy" (Churcher et al., 2026, p. 121). SAC specifies this institutional affect for the welfare domain and traces its consequences across the four levels.

Third is The Postulate of Emotional Mediation, which holds that affective experience is a candidate mediating process between institutional design and citizen response. The emotional impact of interacting with welfare structures (e.g., the experience of recognition or stigma) may influence the nature and direction of political mobilisation and feedback (Beichelt, 2022; Roy et al., 2022). Affect is therefore a potentially important, but non-exclusive, explanatory link: the same institutional design can produce divergent political responses depending on the emotional mode it engages, a mechanism specified by the ECPA component in Section 5.

The SAC framework is conceptualised as a dynamic, four-level process model that traces the pathway from the structural terrain of citizenship through affective experience to subsequent political action (see: Figure 1). This model is not linear but cyclical, characterised by continuous feedback.

The analysis begins at Level 1: The Ecosystem of Provision (Social Terrain), utilising the Social Citizenship Ecosystem Matrix (see: Table 1) to map the structural landscape. This defines the specific configuration of formal and informal institutions – organised by bureaucratic, market, and community logics – that citizens navigate. For policy-specific analysis, this includes rules, tools, implementation arrangements, resource distributions, and embedded target-group constructions.

This ecosystem shapes Level 2: Lived Encounters and Relational Appraisals (The Nexus). This is the pivotal stage where the structural ecosystem is translated into lived experience – the nexus where the "Social" generates the "Affective". We identify three key dimensions of relational appraisal that capture the fundamental affective needs of the citizen. First, the experience of Recognition vs. Non-Recognition, which is central to identity formation and social justice (Honneth, 1996) and may contribute to emotional shifts (Beichelt, 2022). Second, Dignity vs. Stigma, reflecting the experience of procedural justice and the symbolic burdens imposed by interactions with institutions (Soss et al., 2011). Third, Security vs. Precarity, capturing the need for "ontological security" and the management of anxiety in the face of risk (Hoggett, 2000). These appraisals may shape the affective valence of the citizen's interaction with the ecosystem. Each dimension is empirically grounded: the stigma of means-tested receipt is documented in research on welfare encounters and administrative burden (Soss et al., 2011; Herd & Moynihan, 2018), and precarity registers the disruption of "ontological security" and the management of anxiety under conditional provision (Hoggett, 2000; Fortier, 2017).

These relational appraisals feed into Level 3: Individual and Collective Affective Dynamics. At the individual level, appraisals may activate an operative Binary, Basic, or Reflexive emotional mode; through social appraisal, emotional contagion, framing, mobilisation, and circulation through networks, experiences may also contribute to a dominant collective mode or climate. The four dimensions of Affective Citizenship operate as cross-cutting analytical lenses across the process rather than as mechanisms confined to Level 3. Their relative salience is an empirical question.

Finally, Level 4 comprises Outcomes and Policy Feedback. It includes individual action (e.g., compliance, withdrawal, or mobilisation) and collective consequences for citizen identity, political orientations, and participation. These outcomes become policy feedback only selectively, through processes that may reinforce, reform, or destabilise the Level 1 configuration.

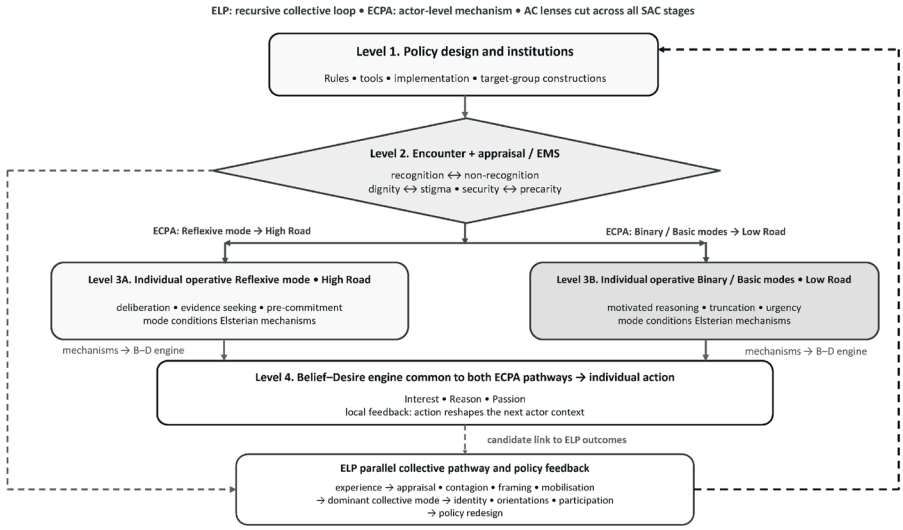
The analytical power of the SAC framework lies in its ability to systematically analyse how specific affective dynamics (Level 3) are generated within different configurations of the social ecosystem (Level 1). Table 2 illustrates this synthesis by mapping key affective dynamics onto the Social Citizenship Ecosystem Matrix. Each cell names the dominant affective dynamic for that ecosystem and its source in the literature; the worked example below traces cell 1 through all four levels.

Table 2. The SAC synthesis matrix: mapping affective dynamics onto the Social Citizenship ecosystem

SC Ecosystem Cell (Terrain)	Key Affective Dynamics (Illustrative)
1. Formal bureaucratic *(e.g., state benefits, activation)*	Governance: imposition of "feeling rules" (e.g., the compliant recipient) (Fortier, 2010). Differentiation: racialised scrutiny; creation of "technical citizens" (Ayata, 2022). Expectation: "hopes for the state" for dignified treatment (Roy et al., 2022).

2. Informal bureaucratic *(e.g., clientelism, brokers)*	Governance: affective bonds of loyalty and deference to patrons (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2024). Contestation: resentment against favoritism and exclusion.
3. Formal market *(e.g., welfare consumerism)*	Governance: cultivating the affect of the "empowered consumer" (Johansson & Hvinden, 2013). Differentiation: anxiety of choice; alienation of those unable to navigate the market.
4. Informal market *(e.g., unregulated labour)*	Governance: neoliberal affects (self-reliance) as survival strategy. Differentiation: extreme precarity; fear as a disciplinary tool.
5. Formal community *(e.g., co-production)*	Governance: state efforts to engineer "community spirit" (Fortier, 2010). Expectation: hope for genuine influence; potential for cynicism if tokenistic.
6. Informal community *(e.g., kinship, moral economy)*	Governance: "Feeling rules" of the moral economy (obligation, reciprocity) (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2024). Expectation/Solidarity: core locus of mutual care and affective belonging (Roy et al., 2022).

Figure 1. Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC): the recursive policy-to-feedback process



ECPA traces the actor-level path from appraisal and emotional mode through mechanisms and the Belief-Desire engine to individual action; ELP traces the recursive path from policy design to collective formation and policy feedback. Dashed links mark candidate micro-to-collective and action-to-feedback transitions.

This synthesis demonstrates that the SAC framework provides a comprehensive architecture for analysing the emotional life of citizenship across diverse institutional settings. It integrates the structural insights of social policy analysis with the experiential depth of affect theory.

Worked example: a conditional activation regime (Level 1 – Ecosystem). Take an unemployment-assistance scheme organised by a Formal-Bureaucratic logic with strong conditionality – job-search monitoring, means-testing, and sanctions. At Level 2, frequent reporting and the threat of sanction are experienced less as support than as surveillance: the dominant relational appraisals are Stigma rather than Dignity and Precarity rather than Security, with recurrent Non-Recognition (Level 2 – relational appraisals). At Level 3, these appraisals and emotional responses may activate a Binary, Basic, or Reflexive mode and can be analysed through the four AC dimensions: Governance/Regulation is expressed in the "feeling rules" of the deserving, compliant jobseeker (Fortier, 2010); Differentiation/Hierarchy in the suspicion that marks claimants as "technical" rather than full citizens (Ayata, 2022); some respond through Contestation, while others voice a thwarted Expectation – the "hopes for the state" of Roy et al. (2022) (Level 3 – affective dynamics). At Level 4, individual responses include disengagement, non-take-up, voice, or protest; only some become policy feedback after aggregation, representation, and transmission (Schneider & Sidney, 2009). BRC diagnoses the regime's assumptions across the policy chain; ECPA reconstructs how appraisal and operative emotional mode condition mechanisms, the Belief–Desire engine, and individual action; ELP situates these processes in a recursive design-to-feedback loop."

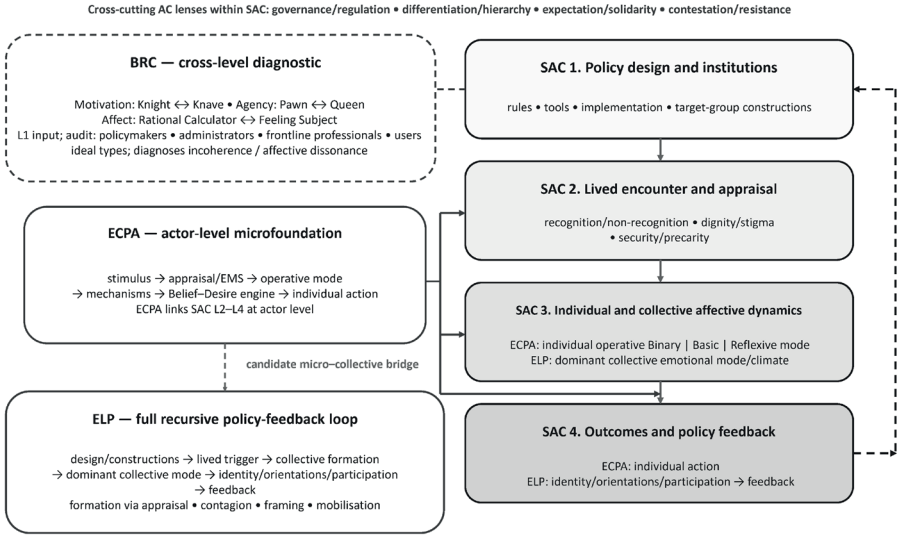
5. Operationalising the SAC architecture: the explanatory engine

The SAC framework (Figure 1) provides the conceptual architecture, defining *what* constitutes Social-Affective Citizenship and mapping its terrain. However, to move from a descriptive framework to an explanatory model, we require mechanisms to explain *how* this architecture operates and *why* specific outcomes emerge. Adopting a mechanism-based approach to explanation (Hedström & Swedberg, 1998), the preceding trilogy of articles (Szarfenberg, 2026a, 2026b, 2026c; all under review) proposes candidate components of an explanatory engine. This trilogy offers the integrated diagnostic tools, rigorous microfoundations, and macro-dynamics for the empirical development and testing of the SAC framework (see: Figure 2).

The first requirement for operationalising SAC is a diagnostic tool capable of deconstructing the assumptions embedded within the Ecosystem of Provision (Level 1). The article "Beyond the Rational Calculator" (BRC) (Szarfenberg, 2026a) provides this tool. BRC argues that social policy theory has neglected the affective dimension of the human subject, relying instead on cognitive or behavioural models.

BRC integrates an affective axis (the continuum from "Rational Calculator" to "Feeling Subject") into Le Grand's (2003) established framework of motivation (Knight/Knave) and agency (Pawn/Queen). This three-dimensional (3D) framework allows for the systematic analysis of the implicit subjectivities assumed by different institutional logics within the SAC ecosystem. For example, Formal Bureaucratic activation policies often assume a Knave/Queen/Calculator subjectivity, while Informal Community moral economies rely on a Knight/Feeling Subject logic (Szarfenberg, 2026a).

Figure 2. Division of analytical labour among BRC, ECPA, and ELP within SAC



BRC is a cross-level diagnostic; ECPA supplies actor-level microfoundations leading to individual action; ELP spans the recursive design-to-feedback loop. Dashed connectors represent diagnostic or candidate relations rather than established causal effects.

The BRC framework is essential for diagnosing "policy incoherence" – the misalignment that occurs when the affective needs of the "Feeling Subject" (e.g., security, recognition) clash with the rationalist assumptions of the provision ecosystem (Level 1). This diagnostic layer is crucial for understanding why certain social arrangements may contribute to affective dissonance (Level 3). Within SAC, BRC is a diagnostic input at Level 1 and a cross-level audit of assumed subjectivities among policymakers, administrators, frontline professionals, and users; it is not itself a causal stage. Its Rational Calculator-Feeling Subject axis should not be conflated with the Binary, Basic, and Reflexive emotional modes used in ECPA and ELP.

The SAC framework postulates that emotion mediates the link between structure and action (Postulate 3). The article "The Emotional-Causal Policy Actor" (ECPA) (Szarfenberg, 2026c) provides the microfoundations explaining how this mediation occurs at the individual level (Levels 2 and 3).

The ECPA model integrates Elster's (2015) causal mechanisms and Belief-Desire architecture with Beichelt's (2022) dynamic model of *Homo Emotionalis* (Binary, Basic, and Reflexive emotional modes). ECPA posits a dual-pathway architecture where an actor's operative emotional mode functions as a conditioning state that influences which causal mechanisms become salient in their response to a policy stimulus (Szarfenberg, 2026c).

When an interaction within the SAC ecosystem (Level 1) is experienced as threatening or stigmatising (Level 2), it may activate a reactive 'Low Road (Binary or Basic modes). This may make mechanisms such as truncation and motivated reasoning

more salient, thereby shaping impulsive or polarised action. Conversely, experiences of recognition and security may support the Reflexive mode and the deliberative 'High Road', making deliberation and evidence-seeking more available. ECPA provides the precise mechanisms linking the affective experience of citizenship (Level 3) to individual behaviour (Level 4). By naming the conditions under which the same policy produces deliberation in one citizen and reactive withdrawal in another, ECPA specifies – rather than merely asserts – the framework's Postulate of Emotional Mediation. Both pathways operate through the same Belief-Desire engine and culminate in individual action; collective aggregation and policy feedback lie outside ECPA's microfoundational core. The actor-level pathway can be applied to policymakers, administrators, frontline professionals, and users, while action locally reshapes the context for later encounters.

Finally, SAC requires a recursive account of how policy design, lived experience, collective formation, action, and feedback are linked. ELP proposes this macro-dynamic account.

ELP integrates policy feedback theory (Schneider & Sidney, 2009) with Beichelt's (2022) *Homo Emotionalis* to construct the Socio-Emotional Policy Feedback Loop.

This five-step model proposes how the design of social policy – particularly its embedded social constructions – may contribute to collective emotional shifts. (1) a policy design encodes a social construction of its recipients; (2) recipients experience it as recognition or non-recognition (Level 2); (3) this experience shifts their operative emotional mode (Level 3); (4) aggregated across many citizens, these shifts move the collective emotional climate toward reflexive engagement or binary antagonism; and (5) the resulting political action (Level 4) reinforces or revises the original policy design. ELP distinguishes movement towards more Reflexive versus more Binary or Basic collective modes; these are changes in emotional complexity and reflexivity, not fixed normative rankings of emotions or political outcomes.

Candidate collective-formation processes include social appraisal, emotional contagion, framing, mobilisation, and circulation through networks.

This mechanism explains the overall system dynamic of the SAC framework. It traces how collective affective experiences (Level 3) lead to shifts in the emotional climate (e.g., from reflexive engagement to binary conflict), producing political outcomes (Level 4) that feed back to reshape the institutional ecosystem (Level 1). ELP proposes the recursive loop that closes the SAC architecture; the micro-to-collective and action-to-feedback links remain candidate mechanisms for empirical testing.

These affective dynamics can also run regressively. Sauer (2024) documents a shift to a "welfare-chauvinist mode," in which social security is granted "only to those who have earned it" – recoded as nationals – and solidarity is reserved for "national equals only" ("care racism"; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017). This is the regressive path of the socio-emotional feedback loop in concrete form: affect mobilised to narrow, rather than widen, the circle of social rights.

Initial methodological guidelines for applying the framework – a five-step research cycle (puzzle → ecosystem mapping → mediation → affective experience → feed-

back) with matched mixed-methods strategies and ethical safeguards – is provided in Appendix A.

6. Discussion and conclusion: a new research programme on emotions and social policy

This article has introduced the Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework, the culmination of a four-part theoretical project designed to establish a new research programme on the interplay of emotions and social policy. This concluding section synthesises the contributions of this framework, discusses the theoretical significance and limitations of the integrated SAC framework, and outlines a future research agenda.

The SAC framework offers a novel architecture for understanding citizenship in the contemporary era. It integrates expanded conceptualisations of Social Citizenship – incorporating hybrid governance logics and the critical role of informality (Johansson & Hvinden, 2013; Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2024) – with a multi-dimensional view of Affective Citizenship – encompassing governance, hierarchy, contestation, and hope (Ayata, 2022; Fortier, 2010; Roy et al., 2022). The resulting four-level dynamic process model (Figure 1) traces the pathway from the institutional ecosystem to affective experience and subsequent political action.

The SAC framework is not a standalone model; it is the organising architecture for the analytical tools developed in the preceding three articles. Together, this tetralogy provides a coherent, multi-level system for analysing the emotional life of social policy. This article provides the overarching conceptual Architecture (SAC). This structure is operationalised by the Diagnostics (BRC) provided in "Beyond the Rational Calculator" (Szarfenberg, 2026a), which offers the tools to deconstruct policy assumptions. The Microfoundations (ECPA) are supplied by "The Emotional-Causal Policy Actor" (Szarfenberg, 2026c), explaining the mechanisms of individual response. Finally, the Macro Dynamics (ELP) are detailed in "The Emotional Life of Policy" (Szarfenberg, 2026b), which explains the socio-emotional feedback loops that reshape the political landscape.

The primary contribution of the SAC framework and its accompanying tetralogy is the systematic bridging of the structure-experience divide. It moves the field beyond merely acknowledging that emotions matter in social policy, providing a structured architecture and specific mechanisms to explain *how*, *why*, and *with what consequences* they matter.

This integration addresses several persistent limitations in the literature. First, it resolves the tension between institutional analysis and political psychology by demonstrating that policy designs are inherently affective regimes (Fortier, 2010) and that emotional responses are causally potent (Beichelt, 2022). Second, by integrating the insights of informal moral economies (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2024) with the analysis of formal governance logics (Johansson & Hvinden, 2013), the framework achieves a global applicability often lacking in state-centric models. The SAC Ecosystem Matrix (Table 1) allows for a nuanced analysis of how formal policies

interact with, rely upon, or disrupt informal affective bonds. Third, the framework provides a sophisticated understanding of the citizen, moving decisively beyond the "Rational Calculator" to the "Feeling Subject" – an actor whose needs for recognition and security are central to their political behaviour.

The ambition of the SAC framework presents inherent challenges. The integration of multiple theoretical traditions (affect theory, causal mechanisms, policy feedback, moral economy) results in significant conceptual complexity. Future work must strive for parsimony to ensure the framework remains analytically tractable and empirically applicable; the worked example of a conditional activation regime (Section 4) offers a heuristic illustration that a single ecosystem can be traced through all four levels. Furthermore, the empirical operationalisation demands sophisticated mixed-methods designs and rigorous attention to the ethical challenges of researching affective experiences (Appendix A).

A further productive tension lies in the framework's normative stance. The SAC framework, particularly through the ECPA and ELP components, provides tools for explaining political polarisation and regressive emotional shifts (e.g., binary antagonism), as in the welfare-chauvinist mode analysed above, where affect is mobilised to narrow rather than widen the circle of social rights (Sauer, 2024). However, the framework itself remains largely analytical. It explains why citizens mobilise through anger or fear, as well as through hope or deliberation. A critical challenge for the research program will be navigating the normative implications of these different emotional modes: Does the framework implicitly prioritise the "High Road" of reflexive deliberation, or does it recognise the democratic necessity of "unruly feelings" and disruptive mobilisation (Fortier, 2016; Roy et al., 2022)?

To address this normative challenge, the research programme can draw on the theory of affective pluralisation proposed by Zieliński and Nowakowski (2025). Their work offers a compelling avenue that reframes the dichotomy between reflexive deliberation and disruptive passion. They argue that the normative goal for a resilient democracy is not to privilege one emotional mode over another, but to cultivate "political emodiversity" – the variety and relative abundance of emotions within the political ecosystem. By this logic, a political culture dominated by any single affect, whether it be anger or even dispassionate rationality, becomes brittle and vulnerable to crises. The normative task, therefore, is to foster conditions that allow for a rich and balanced emotional repertoire, enabling citizens to express a wide spectrum of feelings – from moral indignation and constructive anger to empathy and hope – without collapsing into binary antagonism. This shifts the research focus from promoting a specific *type* of emotional politics to cultivating the *capacity* for emotional complexity and resilience.

The future research agenda must focus on applying the multi-level architecture and the methodological guidelines to pressing contemporary challenges. A primary objective should be the development of Comparative SAC Regimes, utilising the framework to create new typologies of welfare regimes based not only on their institutional design (Ecosystem of Provision) but also on their dominant affective dynamics and the emotional climates they produce. Another critical area involves analysing Digitalisation and Affective Governance, investigating how the digitalisation

of welfare services (e.g., algorithmic decision-making, digital platforms) reshapes the affective experience of citizenship, potentially influencing stigma and opportunities for recognition. Furthermore, the framework offers significant potential for investigating The Affective Impact of Climate Policy, examining how the institutional design of adaptation and mitigation policies generates affective responses (e.g., eco-anxiety, solidarity, resentment) and how these emotions shape policy feedback and mobilisation. By integrating the analysis of structure, experience, and mechanism, the SAC framework offers the analytical tools necessary to understand the complex, emotionally charged reality of contemporary citizenship, paving the way for a more humane and effective social policy.

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Appendix A. Methodological guidelines for empirical application

The Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework, with its multi-level architecture bridging institutional structures and emotional experiences, demands a rigorous and pluralistic methodological approach. Operationalising SAC requires methods capable of analysing the configuration of the welfare ecosystem, diagnosing its underlying assumptions, capturing the nuanced affective experiences of citizens, and tracing the resulting political feedback. This section outlines a structured research cycle and specific methodological strategies for applying the SAC framework, strongly favouring mixed-methods research designs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

We propose a five-step iterative process for researchers utilising the SAC framework. This cycle integrates the framework's conceptual architecture (Levels 1–4) with its explanatory engine (BRC, ECPA, ELP).

Step 1: Define the Puzzle and Scope the Inquiry. The research begins by identifying a specific empirical puzzle (e.g., low take-up of benefits, high polarisation around a policy reform, mobilisation of informal care networks). This involves defining the key actors (policymakers, administrators, frontline professionals, target populations) and the temporal/geographical scope of the study.

Step 2: Map the Ecosystem of Provision (Level 1) and Diagnose Assumptions (BRC). The researcher must characterise the structural terrain using the Social Citizenship Ecosystem Matrix and diagnose its embedded assumptions. Mapping the Ecosystem involves identifying the dominant logics (Bureaucratic, Market, Community) and the balance between formal and informal loci of provision (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2024; Johansson & Hvinden, 2013). This can be achieved through institutional analysis of formal policies and expert interviews. Furthermore, institutional ethnography or Social Network Analysis (SNA) may be necessary to map informal networks and resource flows, such as remittances. The Diagnostic Application (BRC) utilises the 3D framework (Szarfenberg, 2026a) to deconstruct embedded assumptions. Researchers should employ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of policy documents, parliamentary debates, and administrative guidelines to systematically code assumptions regarding the citizen's Motivation, Agency, and Affect (e.g., "Feeling Subject" vs. "Rational Calculator"), thereby identifying potential "policy incoherence".

BRC can audit assumed subjectivities among policymakers, administrators, frontline professionals, and users; this is diagnostic rather than causal.

Step 3: Analyse Encounters and Relational Appraisals (Level 2). This step analyses how the ecosystem structures the citizen experience and identifies the affective triggers (Recognition, Stigma, Security, Precarity). Analysing the Interface requires examining the contact points between citizens and the ecosystem, focusing on administrative burdens, procedural justice, and the quality of bureaucratic encounters. Methodologically, this relies on in-depth interviews focusing on "critical incidents" or policy encounters, supplemented by ethnographic observation of street-level bureaucracy. Quantitative approaches might include survey measures of perceived procedural justice and stigma, or vignette studies experimentally testing the perceived dignity of different policy designs.

Step 4: Analyse Individual and Collective Affective Dynamics (Level 3). This step analyses individual and possible collective affective dynamics, using the four AC dimensions as cross-cutting lenses. ECPA then traces the actor-level sequence from appraisal and operative mode, through Elsterian mechanisms and the same Belief-Desire engine, to individual action. This step investigates how citizens experience the ecosystem affectively across the four dimensions (Governance, Differentiation, Expectation, Contestation) and the psychological mechanisms involved. Diagnosing Affective Dimensions involves capturing the nuances of "feeling rules" (Fortier, 2010), affective labour (Ayata, 2022), and the "politics of hope" (Roy et al., 2022). This is often best achieved through narrative analysis of interviews and ethnography, although survey scales measuring political emotions (anger, anxiety, hope), perceived discrimination, and solidarity can also be employed. Operationalising ECPA (Microfoundations) utilises the ECPA model (Szarfenberg, 2026c) to analyse how individuals process these experiences and which Emotional Mode (Reflexive, Basic, or Binary) is activated. This involves qualitative coding of interviews to identify "High Road" (deliberative) or "Low Road" (reactive) pathways. Experimentally, researchers can use survey experiments that manipulate policy context (e.g., high threat vs. stability) to observe shifts in emotional modes and behavioural intentions.

Step 5: Trace Feedback and Political Action (Level 4) and Dynamics (ELP). The final step analyses the behavioural and political consequences of the affective experiences and closes the feedback loop. Measuring Outcomes involves analysing political behaviours such as compliance, withdrawal, civic engagement, or protest mobilisation, using methods such as political participation data analysis or protest event analysis. Operationalising ELP (Macro Dynamics) applies the Socio-Emotional Feedback Loop (Szarfenberg, 2026b) to trace how distributed experiences contribute to collective formation and action becomes policy feedback. ELP spans the recursive sequence from policy design and lived experience through contingent collective formation to identity, orientations, participation, and feedback. This requires longitudinal data, such as public opinion surveys or sentiment analysis, to track changes in the emotional climate. Comparative case studies are essential for analysing how movement towards Binary or Basic rather than Reflexive modes has context-dependent consequences for policy feedback. Mixed-methods process tracing may assess evidence for a proposed pathway by examining temporal ordering, observable implications, and rival explanations (Beach & Pedersen, 2013).

The multi-level nature of the SAC framework is best captured through integrated mixed-methods designs. One effective strategy is a Sequential Explanatory Design (Quant → Qual). This begins with quantitative analysis – for example, a survey identifying a correlation between a policy design and high levels of anger – followed by qualitative research, such as interviews or ethnography, to explain the underlying mechanisms (ECPA) and the contextual factors (Ecosystem) driving those patterns. Alternatively, a Convergent Design involves the simultaneous collection of qualitative data on lived experience (Levels 2 & 3) and quantitative data on institutional structures (Level 1) and political outcomes (Level 4). This approach provides a comprehensive, triangulated analysis of a specific SAC regime.

Finally, research on affective citizenship demands rigorous ethical attention. Investigating experiences of stigma, non-recognition, and hierarchy involves engaging with potentially traumatic narratives and vulnerable populations. Researchers should use safeguards appropriate to potentially distressing research, ensure robust confidentiality, and prioritise the well-being of participants, recognising the sensitivity inherent in sharing affective experiences of power and exclusion.

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Emotions, racialisation, and belonging: Roma lived experience and the case for emotionally reflexive policy in the Czech Republic

Abstract

This article examines the emotional dimensions of anti-Roma attitudes in the Czech Republic and argues that these dimensions matter for social policy analysis. Although the Roma are frequently positioned at the centre of welfare debates, little is known about how anti-Roma attitudes are lived emotionally by Roma themselves and what it reveals about policy design, implementation, and evaluation. Drawing on 75 semi-structured interviews conducted through a Community-Based Social Research approach, the article shows that anti-Roma attitudes generate humiliation, anxiety, fear, vigilance, and mistrust across everyday and institutional settings, while family and community ties remain key sources of resilience, dignity, and belonging. The article argues that these findings are relevant to social policy because they show that policy distributes not only resources and obligations but also recognition, stigma, insecurity, and emotional harm. It concludes that social policy analysis should treat Roma as Feeling Subjects and should evaluate policy not merely by formal inclusion goals or activation outcomes, but by its affective consequences.

Keywords: Roma, Czech Republic, welfare, emotions and social policy, antigypsyism

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Understanding emotion in social policy: from social construction to the feeling subject

The study of emotions in public and social policy has undergone a significant transformation. Traditional sociological perspectives often relegated emotions to the individual's personal and private sphere, treating them as irrational impulses subordinate to reason and cognition. This perspective is evident in classical sociological thought, which emphasises the disciplined execution of social roles, underpinned by values and self-control, with emotions considered a disruptive force rather than a constitutive element of social life (Barbalet, 2002). However, contemporary scholarship increasingly recognises that emotions are not merely individual, self-contained experiences, but socially embedded, relational, and essential to understanding human action in political and policy contexts (Barrett, 2017; Hoggett, 2017).

This article contributes to social policy scholarship in three ways. First, it provides micro-level empirical evidence on how Roma in the Czech Republic experience anti-Roma attitudes emotionally, thereby addressing a gap in research that has often focused more on institutional discourse than on affective experience. Second, it advances debates on affective social policy and Social-Affective Citizenship by conceptualising Roma as Feeling Subjects whose emotions mediate the relationship between welfare institutions, public discourse, and political belonging. Third, it shows that policy design is not only distributive and administrative, but also recognitive and affective, with consequences for dignity, trust, and inclusion. More precisely, in this article, we ask how Roma in the Czech Republic experience the emotional consequences of anti-Roma attitudes on a daily bases and across institutional settings, and what this emotional dynamics reveals about the affective dimensions of contemporary social policy. More specifically, it examines which emotions emerge from these experiences, how Roma interpret and manage them, and how this evidence can inform a more emotionally reflexive approach to welfare governance by acknowledging rather than ignoring them and by supporting and building on the identified strengths and positive emotions.

Building upon these insights, interpretive approaches to policy analysis argue for the centrality of emotion in policy processes and outcomes. Durnová (2022) advocates for an interpretive methodology placing particular emphasis on emotions and ethnography, treating social practices as "webs of meaning" (Geertz, 1973, cited in Durnová, 2022, p. 44). This approach illuminates how emotional narratives shape policy debates and the legitimacy of actors within these debates. For example, references to emotions in policy discussions, such as fear, anger, or compassion, can determine whose knowledge is deemed credible, whose interests are prioritised, and which policy problems gain salience (Durnová, 2022, pp. 47–48). Emotions, in this sense, are not peripheral to decision-making, but are deeply embedded in value production, group behaviour, and knowledge creation (Jasper, 2011; Holland, 2007).

Hoggett (2017) emphasises the affective subject in welfare analysis and argues that emotions are integral to social life and that welfare policies must address both physical and emotional needs (Hoggett, pp. 141–144). He critiques approaches that marginalise emotion in favour of cognition, noting that powerful affects, such as anger, fear, and hope, shape solidarity, agency, and collective action (Hoggett, 2017, pp. 143–144).

Emotional needs are thus central to the design and evaluation of social policies, reinforcing the argument that welfare institutions must engage with the full spectrum of human capacities – including their moral, expressive, cognitive, and relational dimensions (Hoggett, 2017, pp. 146–148).

Barbalet similarly emphasises the embeddedness of emotion in social processes, highlighting that emotions are constitutive of social relationships and essential to understanding political behaviour (Barbalet, 1998, pp. 4–7, 33). Emotions shape collective outcomes by mediating interactions, structuring social significance, and guiding political actions. This perspective aligns with Barrett's (2017) recognition that social realities, including stereotypes and group outcomes, are co-constructed through relational processes. In policy terms, this means that welfare, inclusion, and exclusion are experienced affectively, with profound implications for the design and implementation of social interventions.

Szarfenberg (2026) identifies a persistent gap in policy analysis: the lack of systemic frameworks capable of integrating micro-level emotional mechanisms with macro-level institutional feedback. He emphasises that understanding the well-being of welfare subjects requires attention to how emotions are shaped by policy design, implementation, and societal context. This focus on the emotional life of policy foregrounds the Feeling Subject, an individual whose capacity for recognition, care, and emotional security is central to the effectiveness of welfare institutions.

Building on these insights, we situate this article within Szarfenberg's emerging framework of Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC), which posits the mutual constitution of institutional structures of welfare provision and the lived emotional experiences of belonging and recognition. SAC conceptualises all forms of welfare, whether formal or informal, bureaucratic, market-based, or community-based, as modes of affective governance that distribute not only material resources but also signals of worth, dignity, and inclusion. The framework proposes a four-level dynamic model: (1) the ecosystem of provision, mapped through the Social Citizenship Ecosystem Matrix that combines governance logics and formal/informal loci; (2) mechanisms of mediation, such as recognition vs. non-recognition, dignity vs. stigma, and security vs. precarity, through which policy is experienced; (3) the dimensions of affective citizenship, encompassing governance and regulation, differentiation and hierarchy, contestation and resistance, and expectation and solidarity; and (4) feedback and political action, where emotional climates shape political behaviour and, in turn, generate policy reform or retrenchment. Our contribution uses this architecture as a background map, focusing primarily on Levels 2 and 3 by documenting the emotional life of Roma as Feeling Subjects, while also tracing elements of Level 1 (the multi-layered ecosystem of Roma inclusion/exclusion) and Level 4 (the affectively charged demands of the majority population and policymakers).

The three axes framework: motivation, agency, and affect

Szarfenberg's model operationalises this emotional turn through three analytical axes: motivation (Knave–Knight), agency (Pawn–Queen), and affect (Rational Calculator–

Feeling Subject). The motivation axis captures the spectrum between self-interested actors and those driven by pro-social norms. The agency axis reflects the extent to which individuals are empowered to make their own choices or rely on professional or institutional expertise. The affective axis moves beyond cognitive assumptions to foreground individuals' emotional needs, vulnerabilities, and capacities. This tripartite framework offers a nuanced tool for analysing how policy design interacts with the lived experiences of citizens, particularly, marginalised groups such as Roma, who are often *a priori* constructed as passive, undeserving, or non-participatory within welfare systems (Soss et al., 2011).

This conceptualisation resonates with feminist ethics of care (Tronto, 1993) and recognition theory (Honneth, 1995), emphasising relationality, dignity, and interdependence as central to social policy. Trauma-informed approaches extend this framework by highlighting the need to address emotional harm and promote safety for individuals' emotions within institutional interactions (Bowen & Murshid, 2016).

Within the SAC research programme, this three-dimensional model functions as a diagnostic tool for unpacking the implicit subjectivities embedded in different configurations of the welfare ecosystem. Therefore, our empirical analysis below reads public discourse and everyday practices as attempts to impose particular combinations of these subject positions on Roma, and examines how Roma themselves accept, negotiate, or resist these affective attributions.

Social construction of target populations and policy feedback

The emotional dimension of policy is further illuminated through Schneider and Ingram's (1993) theory of the social construction of target populations. Policies embed assumptions about who is deserving or undeserving, powerful or powerless, which in turn shape emotional experiences of inclusion, exclusion, and recognition among target populations. Social policies send affective signals which influence people's sense of belonging, dignity, and agency. The integrated perspective offered by Szarfenberg situates these constructions within a feedback loop, wherein policy design, implementation, and societal reaction co-produce emotional climates that either reinforce or challenge marginalisation.

This framework is particularly relevant to contexts where competing policy logics exist, such as in the Czech Republic regarding Roma communities, where strategic, equality-focused documents coexist with discriminatory administrative practices. The discrepancy between formal policy objectives and their societal enactment produces emotional tension, highlighting the need for emotionally reflective social policy that accounts for the lived experiences of marginalised populations.

In sum, contemporary social policy analysis increasingly recognises that emotions are not peripheral but central to understanding the production, experience, and impact of welfare institutions. Barrett (2017), Hoggett (2017), Barbalet (2002), Bonvin (2008), and Szarfenberg (2026) collectively provide a conceptual toolkit for examining the relational, affective, and structural dimensions of policy.

By applying these frameworks to marginalised populations, such as Roma in the Czech Republic, researchers can illuminate the complex interplay between policy

design, institutional practice, societal recognition, and individual well-being. The emotionally aware, relational, and intersectional approach proposed here seeks to bridge the persistent analytical gap in public policy studies, offering a comprehensive lens for understanding the full spectrum of human capacities and needs within welfare systems by answering the question of what the Roma Feeling Subject experiences emotionally.

This article thus addresses the persistent lack of knowledge about the concrete emotions experienced by Roma people, both in their interactions with social welfare institutions and in their everyday lives. It responds to a critical blind spot in social policy research: the insufficient understanding of how Roma, as a racialised and systematically discriminated minority, experience anti-Roma attitudes in the course of their daily functioning within Czech society. The micro-level perspective of the Feeling Subject requires attention to the content and dynamics of emotional experience. Despite the Roma community being an extensively researched population in the Czech Republic (cf. Albert, 2017; Baršová, 2002; Cahn et al., 2002; Lupták, 2013; Nekorjak et al., 2011; Růžička, 2010; Sirovátka, 2004; Vacková et al., 2011), there remains a conspicuous absence of approaches allowing Roma men and women to articulate – and thereby reclaim – their own emotional and experiential narratives in relation to state policy and the majority society. Some FRA (2022) studies and studies focusing on the Roma Holocaust (Polansky, 1998) or forced sterilisation of Roma women in the past (Stejskalová & Szilvási, 2016) have partially, but not holistically, included contemporary problems and explicit emotional reactions throughout the life trajectories of individual Roma in their everyday life.

We propose that learning about Roma emotions is essential to understanding how social policy is formulated and enacted in a context where the majority's perceptions of Roma are often structured by hostility, prejudice, and moral hierarchies.

At the first level, policymakers formulate and advocate for social policies that mirror and reinforce the prejudices of the majority. Trlifajová & Pospíšil (2023) demonstrate how parliamentary debates from 2014 to 2021 in the Czech Chamber of Deputies on the minimum income scheme became instrumental in constructing an ethnic hierarchy targeting Roma citizens. These policy debates do not merely reflect discriminatory sentiment but actively institutionalise it within the welfare state's architecture.

State administrators operate in a state of tension between international and national frameworks at the second level. They are simultaneously tasked with implementing anti-discrimination principles – such as those mandated by European Court of Human Rights judgments, EU directives and framework strategies, OSCE-ODIHR commitments, or international treaties monitored by the UN – and with responding to the demands of domestic political parties that often pursue exclusionary objectives. The Czech Parliament's delayed adoption of the EU Race Equality Directive exemplifies this ambivalence.[2] On the one hand, international human rights

[2] The Czech Republic was the very last of the 2004 accession countries to transpose this provision into its legislation (in 2009). The transposition was politicised as infringing sovereignty, although existing laws have already covered this ground in the Czech legal system, and the EU

commitments require that antidiscrimination provisions be integrated into public policy; on the other hand, elected politicians at the national and local levels sometimes advocate measures that directly contravene these principles, such as municipal bans preventing social welfare recipients from residing in certain areas.[3] These contradictory dynamics create a mixed message for the Roma community: they are simultaneously promised protection and subjected to exclusion. The resulting institutional ambivalence also profoundly affects social workers, both in public agencies and civil society organisations, who must navigate conflicting discourses, mandates, and expectations in their everyday practice.

At the third level, we encounter the majority population, whose collective moral and political demands often centre on disciplining, punishing, and marginalising Roma. Within the theoretical framework developed in this article, the Roma are perceived through an inherently contradictory affective lens. They are depicted simultaneously as *pawns* – subjects without agency – and as *failed rational calculators*, allegedly incapable of long-term reasoning, self-control, or responsible planning. Simultaneously, they are also cast as *hyper-rational manipulators* who allegedly strategically exploit the welfare system for personal gain while contributing nothing to it, thereby threatening the moral economy of the "hardworking", taxpaying majority. These depictions are accompanied by the recurring trope of the "overly emotional" Roma, portrayed as impulsive, irrational, and lacking self-regulation. Such affective stereotypes underscore the need to investigate how Roma themselves experience and articulate their emotional realities. This article, therefore, poses the following questions: What are the actual feelings of Roma individuals living within this web of contradictions? Are their emotional responses – as anti-Roma discourses suggest – uncontrolled impulses, or do they represent complex, affective reactions to systemic exclusion and humiliation? And what could collective knowledge on emotions mean for policies applied to Roma in the Czech Republic?

Methodological and terminological concerns

To address these questions, we conducted community-based research involving 75 members of Roma communities in the Czech Republic. The study employed a combination of convenience and snowball sampling over the course of one year (2024) and applied thematic analysis to examine how anti-Roma attitudes shape participants' lived experiences. Although the research did not focus exclusively on emotional life, participants were invited to reflect on their experiences and their affective responses to them. In this article, we specifically highlight these emotional dimensions. Furthermore, the study was not designed to measure the impact of social policy on the participants' emotions specifically, even though interactions with schools, employment offices, social benefits departments, and health facilities certainly provide

Directive only strengthened them. The law in question is the Race Equality Directive 2000/43/EC, while the legislation transposing it into Czech law is called the Antidiscrimination Act.

[3] The provision of the Administrative Law regulating the ban was introduced in 2013 and abolished in 2016.

insight into the impacts of these policies on Roma. However, the article focuses on the emotions detected in the study and their implications for a broader understanding of the necessity of broadening policy design, implementation, and evaluation to encompass emotional impact.

Community-Based Research Studies (CBRS) have proven particularly valuable in projects conducted with rather than on marginalised groups, especially those with limited public voice or political influence. CBRS aligns with broader efforts to democratise social science by integrating research, education, and activism, and it serves as a methodological alternative to more hierarchical "command-and-control" paradigms (Root, 2007). In the context of the Czech Republic's Roma communities, this approach helps to avoid what Root (2007, p. 565) calls "vampire projects" through which information is extracted from vulnerable populations without meaningful reciprocity. The reciprocity in this case resulted in meaningful output, presented in the form of a research report by RomanoNet (see below) and by the researcher at press conferences and directly to the Office of the Government. During these activities, there was a sense of shared ownership.

Methodologically, the study also contributes to the tradition of public sociology (Burawoy, 2005), more specifically organic public sociology, in that it was developed through dialogue with a community partner and sought to produce socially relevant knowledge under conditions of long-standing mistrust and asymmetrical power relations. At the same time, the analytic component of the study remained the sole responsibility of the researcher. While CBRS has limitations, including concerns over neutrality, validity, and credibility, its participatory ethos and contextual sensitivity make it particularly suitable for research within settings characterised by power asymmetries and historical mistrust.

Accordingly, this study was developed in collaboration with RomanoNet, a Roma umbrella organisation with deep roots in the community. RomanoNet participated in all project phases, from design and data collection to validation of findings, except for the researcher's analysis. The researcher's positionality was explicitly discussed with RomanoNet and acknowledged as integral to the research process. Following Muhammad et al. (2015), reflexivity on positionality involves examining how the researcher's own social identity, defined by factors such as race, gender, class, and migration background, shapes power relations and interpretive frames. In this case, the researcher's migrant (non-Roma) background placed her simultaneously as an insider (sharing specific vulnerabilities with Roma related to experiencing discrimination from Czech society in general) and an outsider (somebody not personally affected by anti-Roma attitudes). This dual position proved advantageous for navigating access to the community and building trust within it. The involvement of Roma interviewers, recruited and trained in cooperation with RomanoNet, which also provided their remuneration, was crucial in facilitating open, emotionally charged discussions with participants. These discussions would have been difficult, if not impossible, for a non-Roma researcher to initiate independently due to their outsider status. RomanoNet participated in the design of the broader research project, in facilitating access to participants, in recruiting and supporting Roma interviewers, and in validating the broader relevance of the findings. Nevertheless, it did not participate

in coding the interviews, generating coding categories, or carrying out the analysis presented in this article.

The coding process was inductive and based on the author's repeated close reading of the interview transcripts. The themes discussed in this article were not predetermined by an analytical template; rather, they emerged from the interview material itself, including the recurring presence of humiliation, fear, shame, stress, resilience, pride, and strategies of emotional adaptation in participants' accounts. The researcher aimed to generate as broad a range of codes as possible to capture the diversity of participants' experiences, while allowing codes to reach saturation when they recurred across multiple responses. For the sake of analytic consistency and confidentiality, all coding and interpretation for this article were conducted by the author alone.

Participants were recruited in collaboration with RomanoNet. Recruitment criteria were established in consultation with the researcher to ensure the following: participants did not live in socially excluded localities; they resided in various districts across the Czech Republic; gender balance should be kept as much as possible; different subcommunities within the Roma community were included,[4] alongside LGBT+ Roma; and a range of educational levels, employment statuses, and age groups were represented. An initial core team working with the researcher compiled a list of potential participants, which was jointly approved. The core team also identified interviewers, who were instrumental in reaching out to communities and recruiting participants.

The CBRS approach also shaped the study's substantive focus. A guiding question of the study concerned seeking members of the Roma middle class for participation, an underrepresented segment of this group that is often overlooked in Czech academic research, policy discourse, and media narratives, which tend to concentrate on the most deprived Roma communities in socially excluded localities. Preliminary consultations with Roma activists (Kostić and Muhič Dizdarevič, 2024) highlighted the importance of incorporating this dimension, which informed specific sampling and question design choices in the semi-structured interviews.

The final sample reflected broad diversity across age, gender, education, and employment status, covering participants from eight of the fourteen regions of the Czech Republic.

[4] According to available estimates (Vláda České republiky, 2014), the Roma population in the Czech Republic is composed primarily of Roma who migrated from Slovakia after the Second World War. A smaller group consists of Czech Roma who survived the Holocaust, alongside a distinct subgroup of Olach Roma who moved to the Czech lands from Romania during the 19th century. The core team at RomanoNet initially proposed recruiting participants according to their affiliation with these different subcommunities. However, this strategy was ultimately abandoned, as it would have required disproportionate effort to achieve the target sample size. Instead, the team adhered to the remaining recruitment criteria outlined above for sample formation.

Table 1. The sample according to the selected parameters

Category	Subcategory	Number
Gender	Men	25
	Women	47
	Undeclared	3
Gender total		n=75
Age	21–30	18
	41–50	11
	31–40	8
	51–60	6
	61–70	5
	18–20	4
	71+	2
Age total		n=54
Education	Primary school	18
	Secondary school	9
	University	7
	Secondary with school-leaving exam	7
	Apprenticeship	4
	Post-secondary vocational school	1
	Conservatoire	1
Education total		n=47
Work status	Employed	24
	Unemployed	10
	Retired	7
	University student	2
	Entrepreneur	2
	On maternity/parental leave	2
	Finishing high school	1
	On sick leave	1
Work status total		n=49
District	Prague	11
	Central Bohemian	9
	Liberec	8
	Moravian-Silesian	7
	Pardubice	7
	Ústí nad Labem	5
	Pilsen	5
	South Moravian	4
District total		n=56

The terminological choice for referring to anti-Roma hostility required careful consideration. The official term used by Czech, EU, and UN institutions is *antigypsyism* (Czech: *anticiganismus*). However, in Czech and several other Slavic languages, the word *Cigán* (Gypsy) carries strongly pejorative connotations, functioning as a racial slur rather than a neutral descriptor. Interviews with Roma intellectuals conducted by the researcher (Muhič, 2024) revealed a growing preference for the term *anti-Roma racism*, which better captures the structural and racialised nature of the phenomenon. In response, this study adopts the expression *anti-Roma attitudes* as a compromise, maintaining institutional relevance (i.e., avoiding the use of the term "racism", which is not found in governmental strategies) while respecting community sensitivities. Importantly, anti-Roma attitudes in the Czech Republic operate through visual identification based on skin colour, rendering it a form of discrimination that is inescapable and embodied. The experiences of light-skinned Roma participants throughout our study, and the relative privilege this appearance sometimes confers, raise further questions about the adequacy of existing terminology (Sokolová, 2008) and support the use of anti-Roma racism as the most adequate terminology choice.

Limitations and ethical notes

The study's CBRS design and purposive sample afford depth rather than statistical representativeness; conclusions should, therefore, be read as interpretive-analytic contributions that illuminate mechanisms and experiences, rather than as claims about prevalence in the population. The ethical imperatives of reciprocity and community partnership that guided the project remain central to any translation of the findings into academic, public, and policy fields.

In ethical terms, informed consent was obtained verbally from all participants and audio-recorded at the start of each interview. Written consent was not used, partly because of the need to avoid introducing unnecessary formality and mistrust into interviews dealing with sensitive experiences, and partly because the project was developed in a community-based setting outside a formal university-led grant structure requiring institutional ethics review. Instead, ethical safeguards were secured through anonymisation, ongoing communication with the community partner, careful handling of sensitive material, and the principle of reciprocity built into the project design. Interviews were audiorecorded and subsequently uploaded to restrictedaccess cloud service managed by RomanoNet. A RomanoNet employee transcribed the interviews, after which the original audio files were deleted. During analysis, any data that could potentially identify participants was removed to ensure anonymity. Interviewers entered into a contract with RomanoNet that included provisions on data security and nondisclosure.

Emotional landscapes of inclusion and exclusion among Roma in the Czech Republic

1. Narratives of shame, anxiety, fear, and trauma

In the 2021 Czech census, 21,691 people identified as Roma, including 4,458 who listed Romani as their sole national identity and 17,233 who identified as Romani in combination with Czech or Moravian nationality, a clear increase from the 13,150 people who identified as Romani in the 2011 census when combined ethnicity was not allowed; however, these official figures still represent only a fraction of the Roma population, because ethnic self-identification is voluntary and many Roma avoid declaring their heritage because of historical stigmatisation, fear, and distrust of how government institutions may use the data (Ryšavý, 2022; Czech Statistical Office, 2021). The Roma are thus commonly estimated to constitute about 2% of the Czech population (approximately 200 000; OSCE, 2012). The rise in responses related to self-identification after the Czech census allowed the declaration of a combined ethnicity further indicates that self-identification is shaped by how safe, meaningful, and institutionally trusted the census context appears to respondents. More broadly, the enumeration of Roma populations across Europe remains deeply politicised, as census figures, expert estimates, and policy categories are all affected by institutional and political pressures (Kovats, 2025).

The Roma community is relevant to social policy from two primary perspectives. On the one hand, as the country's most significant minority, Roma are considered the principal target of Czech social inclusion policies, exemplified by institutions such as the Agency for Social Inclusion,[5] which self-identifies as "an instrument of the Czech Government" and operates exclusively in socially excluded localities predominantly inhabited by Roma. On the other hand, a central trope in anti-Roma discourse posits that Roma consciously, systematically exploit social benefits (Weinerová, 2014). Despite the prominence of this issue in political debate, there remains surprisingly little knowledge regarding how Roma experience life within Czech society and how these persistent societal representations influence their emotions and emotional strategies.[6]

In this study, the Roma interviewers were trained to prompt participants about the feelings they experience in a wide range of contexts, including their childhood, schooling, employment, interactions with the courts, social benefit offices, medical institutions, housing, social media networks, public spaces, and transportation, among others. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their emotions rather than to merely recount their experiences through follow-up questions. This approach facilitates a nuanced exploration of emotional landscapes.

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[5] In an unexpected move, the new Czech government, consisting of a coalition of populist and extreme right parties, abolished the Agency and is currently planning to move the agenda of Roma inclusion/participation under the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. The complexity of the new situation is beyond the scope of this article.

[6] For more on who collects data on Roma communities and how in the Czech Republic, see: Rákoczyová et al., 2024.

The figurative experience of being Roma in Czech society can be conceptualised as a "toll" imposed across sectors, contexts, and life stages. Inspired by the concept of the Black tax in the United States (Kahrl, 2024), albeit in a different context regarding labour, land, and property dispossession, this framework highlights the additional social, financial, and emotional burden imposed on Roma due to their ethnic and racialised identity. Our findings reveal that Roma frequently perceive themselves as under constant surveillance by both the majority population and institutional actors. Anti-Roma attitudes permeate all domains of everyday life. Situations that members of the majority navigate based on their unique, individual circumstances often become fraught or paralyzing for Roma because their involvement in those situations is interpreted through collective stereotypes, prejudice, disparagement, or even violence. While some participants indicated they have had limited encounters with anti-Roma attitudes, or that they have just a tenuous sense of belonging to the Roma community, many participants reported living within a structural network of social relations that systematically constrains their life opportunities and negatively, profoundly affects their emotional well-being.

Anti-Roma attitudes towards those perceived as Roma manifest early in the lives of Roma during periods of heightened vulnerability and limited social experience. Romani children often fail to comprehend why non-Romani classmates, parents of their peers, teachers, or other non-Romani social actors reject, bully, or isolate them. The persistence of similar experiences across age groups is prominent, as if the traumatic dynamics of early Romani socialisation in the Czech Republic have remained constant transgenerationally. Consequently, Romani children often begin life with a disadvantage, carrying an "inner wound" that must be navigated throughout their development, and often the realisation of their Roma identity starts with a trauma. One participant (man, 40) recalled: *I realised that I was a Roma in that kindergarten… That's actually the defining moment when you realise that you are someone else. When someone tells you that you are a Gypsy, that you are black.* This kind of moment is analytically important because it shows how emotional injury is not incidental, but part of early socialisation into a racialised order. Participants indicated that their adolescence was largely defined by strategies for confronting anti-Roma attitudes and processing earlier traumatic experiences.

The presence of anti-Roma attitudes necessitates continuous vigilance on the part of the Roma, who experience heightened scrutiny across all spheres-schools, workplaces, public transport, offices, healthcare settings, and social environments-prompting persistent uncertainty. Questions such as "Will I be allowed into the bar?" or "Will someone verbally or physically attack me?" dominate Roma social interactions with non-Roma. The constant disruption of everyday life is reflected in this 47-year-old woman's experience, *Because my sister is lighter, has lighter skin, she doesn't look much like a Roma woman, she was admitted to the disco, and I wasn't. They didn't want any club cards from her, but they wanted a club card from me. So, they didn't let me into the disco. Even though I said that she was my sister, my sister stood with me, and in the end, they threw us both out.* Service denials based on Roma identity were quite common and contributed to overall insecurity and deprivation.

The recurring theme in the research was that the missteps by Romani individuals are frequently generalised and attributed to the entire community by non-Roma through the process of collective guilt, rendering everyday engagement exhausting and emotionally taxing.

Healthcare interactions exacerbate these stressors. Participants reported concerns about receiving adequate medical attention, with some having been accused by healthcare personnel of feigning illness to avoid work. Hostility from non-Roma in waiting rooms and medical offices was common. Transgenerational trauma, including memories of the forced sterilisation of Roma women carried out from the 1970s into the 2000s (Cahn, 2015, 2019; Sadílková, 2019; Rowlands et al., 2025), further compounds emotional vulnerability. It resurfaces in family conversations, such as here:

> *Then I heard a story from my grandmother and grandfather about my grandfather's sister. In the past Roma women used to get their ovaries tied. That happened to my aunt. She had an abortion before and her ovaries were tied without her knowledge. She only found out about it after about 20 or 30 years, while she was trying to get pregnant and she still couldn't figure out why. She thought that after the abortion, she couldn't have children, as it sometimes happens. But then she went to the doctor, and they found out that she didn't have ovaries, that they had been taken from her without her knowledge* (woman, no age declared).

The stories told about the past in the Roma family had multiple meanings: carrying on the family legacy, warning about retraumatisation related to current dangers, and building resilience.

In administrative contexts (Employment Offices and Social Services Departments), the Roma Participants reported frequently encountering mistrust and paternalism, including officials who refused to provide information, questioned their credentials, or prevented them from completing forms independently. Navigating everyday spaces necessitates careful planning to ensure safety and access, according to the participants. The surveillance is constant and reaches everywhere, and is carried out by non-Roma citizens, institutions, private companies' employees, as a 41-year-old man confirms, *In shops, parks, sports fields, hotels. They are constantly looking at me, checking if I am doing something inappropriate. If I am behaving as I should. During recreation, other guests often watch [me] to see if I am behaving as is proper and acceptable. If I am not making a mess, if I am not loud, and so on…* In retail and leisure contexts, Roma routinely experience surveillance, bag checks, or outright bans from establishments based on their appearance, illustrating the broader "social spasm" triggered by their presence. A recurring symbol of this dynamic mentioned by participants is non-Romani women's protection of their handbags in public, a gesture used to signal and enact exclusion through clutching their bags in the presence of Roma.

Roma work experiences often involve being assigned the most demanding and least valued positions, accompanied by overt discrimination, such as verbal insults or social exclusion. Interactions with law enforcement and judicial institutions exacerbate

Roma insecurity, as automatic distrust and systemic barriers impede their access to justice.

Educational settings reproduce Romani marginalisation. Roma students often receive no instruction about the history of their communities, and when Roma are addressed, they are framed as negative examples, reinforcing stereotypes of theft, laziness, and uncleanliness. Apart from familial and community support, Roma children frequently lack other advocates. Even academic achievement does not guarantee equitable opportunities; as one participant noted, *Education does not guarantee a good life [in the Czech Republic] if you are Roma* (man, 40).[7]

Across life domains, Roma report needing to exert greater effort than their majority peers to counteract prejudice. These additional "costs" extend into private relationships, including friendships, romantic partnerships, and family interactions, particularly when Czech partners' families resist acceptance of Roma individuals. Participants described ongoing stress and anticipation of discriminatory encounters, with almost every interaction presenting a potential source of anti-Roma attitudes. This chronic stress contributes to fear, anxiety, depression, insecurity, and exposure to microaggressions, including humiliation, shame, and devaluation. A 30-year-old woman remembers her initial experience of socialising, blending with shame:

> *I remember when I was in kindergarten, because I was fair-skinned, they didn't know I was Romani. And when my mother came to pick me up, the children in kindergarten would say things like: 'Look, she has a Gypsy mother, she's a Gypsy'. Even small children. And I was always terribly ashamed in kindergarten, when I didn't understand, I was always ashamed when my mother came, so I was afraid that maybe they would say that my mother had come, they would call me Gypsy and make fun of me.*

A participant described the majority's arrogance and humiliation as his worst experience, feeling he was perceived as an "inferior person" because of his ethnicity:

> *For me, the worst feeling is when they make you feel inferior. That you are not a good enough person like the other person. That you can't handle it, that you are simply inferior. Humiliation. Because it doesn't hurt physically, but psychologically, and that is worse. That the person has less self-confidence then, they are afraid. So, for me, this is the worst thing, that the person makes you feel inferior. That he is actually above you. That you are simply some kind of monkey or an animal* (man, 28).

Participants said Roma families often pre-emptively prepare their children for anti-Roma threats, transmitting intergenerational trauma from their own early schooling and awareness of historical injustices, ranging from the Holocaust of the Roma and Sinti to more contemporary experiences of verbal and physical threats motivated by prejudice. Anti-Roma attitudes extend into private and digital life. Social media frequently hosts overtly anti-Roma content, sometimes targeting children, with

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[7] For more on discrimination of Roma students in the Czech education system, see: Balabánová (1995; 1999).

impunity for such content often justified as "freedom of speech". This environment contributes to Roma social isolation and, in some cases, prompts Roma to try to assimilate. Participants reported altering their appearance (e.g., using blue contact lenses) or denying their ethnic identity to prevent discrimination (claiming to be or sometimes being advised to say they were African-American, Latino, Spanish, Italian or even Arab, which testifies to the hierarchy of identities in the Czech Republic), with some distancing themselves from the Roma community, sometimes even severing ties or not participating in community life. It is noteworthy how one participant perceived changes in societal attitudes when she used blue eye contact lenses:

> *I adapted to the white community, so I can get along with them now. But when I was younger, I wondered what it would be like if I were born white. If it would be better for me. And then, when I could wear makeup, I tried to wear lighter shades. And then, when I was 17 or 18, I even tried blue contact lenses, and people around me perceived me completely differently when I had those blue contacts* (woman, 34).

Participants explicitly described how these experiences shaped their life trajectories, often limiting their achievements and imposing psychological burdens. While some identified adaptive outcomes, these were responses to discrimination, not freely chosen: individuals had to "armour themselves", cultivate resilience, and navigate extraordinary obstacles. Notably, one participant described the necessity of "putting on a mask" while engaging with the majority of society. This mask functions as a protective adaptation in both work and daily life; although this participant wished to remove the mask, social pressures rendered its use unavoidable, resulting in dissonance with this person's self-conception and identity. In his words:

> *It affected me so much that I actually had to put on a mask, that I had to behave in a certain way in front of Czech children. And I had to endure stupid jokes, remarks when they said the word Roma wrong, they said 'Gypsies'. I had to grit my teeth, actually survive it somehow, you just had to manage it. So, I put on a mask, and basically, what I did was make fun of myself so that they couldn't make fun of me. And when I'm making fun of myself, it's not so funny anymore. I always wear a mask when I'm in the white community. I can't get rid of it, I always have it. I have that mask and quite often I can't switch it back. I can't throw away that mask. I wear it so often. I wear it to work every day…* (man, 28).

Support primarily comes from family and community networks rather than institutional actors such as social workers or psychologists. Roma and pro-Roma non-governmental organisations provide some aid to Roma, but participants reported inefficiencies, delays, and limited accessibility of their services. Criticisms included organisational opacity, slow responsiveness, and insufficient alignment with the everyday needs of ordinary Roma.

Viewed through the Social Citizenship Ecosystem Matrix, these narratives show Roma moving across multiple cells of the welfare ecosystem. Encounters with employment offices, social benefits departments, and courts belong primarily to the

formal bureaucratic sphere, where Roma report intense experiences of surveillance, mistrust, and humiliation. Experiences in shops, leisure spaces, and segments of the labour market illustrate the formal and informal market spheres, where Roma face a combination of consumer exclusion, precarious work, and affective discipline through fear. By contrast, family networks, Roma community gatherings, and mutualaid practices exemplify the informal community sphere, where obligations of reciprocity and care generate emotional resources of pride, dignity, and safety that partially counterbalance institutional harms. Mapping these experiences across the ecosystem cells makes visible how formal retrenchment and stigma in one part of the welfare system increase dependency on informal moral economies in another, thereby deepening the emotional toll of citizenship for Roma.

2. Narratives of resilience, pride, and solidarity

Despite the persistent pressures of anti-Roma attitudes, Roma communities demonstrate remarkable strength, creativity, and determination in managing the social and emotional burdens imposed by everyday discrimination, exclusion, and attacks. While some participants expressed resignation – believing one must adapt to the majority's prejudice and that: *If one wants to live in the Czech Republic, one must accept anti-Roma attitudes* (woman, 35) – such views were relatively rare. Far more frequently, participants articulated pride, defiance, and an enduring commitment to overcoming obstacles, motivated not only by personal aspiration but also by a sense of responsibility toward their children and the wider Roma community.

Although institutional and majority-society support for Roma remains limited, participants highlighted moments of solidarity from individual members of the majority population. Non-Roma teachers, colleagues, and friends were occasionally described as figures who recognised the potential of Roma individuals, offered encouragement, and provided protection against open hostility. While such gestures were exceptional, they carried profound emotional significance. Still, the family and the broader Roma community emerged as the central pillars of emotional and social resilience. Families were described as transmitting pride in Roma identity and culture, sources of joy, beauty, and belonging, which counterbalanced external rejection. Some participants emphasised the Roma tradition in which elders age within the community rather than in institutional care, identifying it as a symbol of dignity and continuity. Family and community networks thus represent forms of Roma social capital, where shared gatherings and mutual support help individuals cope with traumatic experiences and sustain psychological well-being. These gatherings often follow incidents of anti-Roma aggression, functioning as both recovery spaces and reaffirmations of Roma collective identity. A 41-year-old participant describes experience in the following manner:

> *When manifestations of antigypsyism appear in my life or in the lives of those closest to me, we deal with it together as the immediate family, or possibly with the extended family. But more or less as a certain form, as a support group, where by simply sharing*

those experiences, we help each other to actually experience that experience in a healthy way and to analyse it in some way, to use it in some way for our own growth.

Children were also repeatedly mentioned as a key source of motivation and hope for transformation, and their education and confidence viewed as collective investments in the future.

Several participants emphasised the importance of active Roma participation in political and public life. They argued Roma should occupy decision-making positions to advocate for their communities and influence structural change. Some highlighted the importance of developing Roma entrepreneurship to challenge stereotypes and show Roma are also capable providers of services and goods. Such initiatives were not merely described as survival strategies, but rather as deliberate efforts toward empowerment, self-determination, and recognition.

The Roma community's strength was also evident in its cultural and symbolic contributions to social coexistence. Participants frequently stressed the fact that Roma culture, especially music, carries a universal message of equality and transcends ethnic boundaries. In this sense, Roma identity was not only a marker of difference, but also a conduit for values of tolerance and humanity which extend beyond the Roma community itself. This was particularly stressed by a 51-year-old woman, who said, *I think I can very quickly assess a threat, a risk, and I can quickly assess the people around me. At the same time, I also have great compassion for people who are going through various similar things, I have a deep understanding for it…*

Participants also expressed solidarity with the anti-racist segment of Czech society, recognising that these allies often face exclusion and hostility from the majority. Some contrasted the Czech context with foreign examples of more inclusive, multicultural environments. One participant described the feeling of belonging while abroad: *When I entered the main street in Berlin, I thought to myself that I was at home here, because in such a society a Roma person blends in* (man, 28).

Although scepticism was also present, one participant admitted that she had abandoned attempts to collaborate with the majority, focusing solely on intra-community development, while another concluded that a non-racist society was "science fiction"; many participants expressed cautious optimism. They identified positive developments such as the increasing presence of Roma teaching assistants in schools and the growing public awareness of Roma issues.

Some participants proposed that adult Roma should visit Roma children in the schools to share their experiences of overcoming discrimination, thus offering encouragement and showing Roma children that they are not alone in their struggles. Such acts of testimony were seen as both educational and transformative, bridging intergenerational experience with future aspirations.

Across responses, the conviction prevailed that anti-Roma attitudes must be confronted directly, not endured, and that their structural foundations must be recognised and dismantled. Racism was thus conceptualised not as an aggregate of individual prejudices, but as a systemic mechanism of exclusion that can only be changed through collective resistance and societal transformation. A 46-year-old woman expresses the attitude of necessity to fight against racism one's whole life when she says:

> *They [Roma] must not give in. They must not give in and they must fight. Unfortunately, it is for life, but unfortunately, they must fight. If they can, let them fight. I repeat what I said: just don't give in, fight together against it. Show the good things. Yes, don't give in, fight. Just go after your dream. Even if someone – those people, those white people, those gadje – discourages you, they must not give up. I simply have the ability; I will pursue my own. I have the right to it; I will pursue my own. We will not let anyone discourage us either. I say that Gypsies are smart, they just have to want more* (woman, 46).

When asked what kind of society they wished to live in, Roma participants repeatedly articulated a single, consistent aspiration: equality. Equality before the law, and in access to education, employment, and housing. Equality that rejects collective guilt, stereotypes, and prejudice, the very elements rendering Roma lives more exhausting, frustrating, and at times, dangerous in the Czech Republic. Especially remembering the 90s in the aftermath of the Velvet Revolution, when attacks on Rome began, sometimes ending in racially motivated murders, elicited fear in some participants.[8] However, the pursuit of equality encapsulates the Roma community's vision of belonging and their refusal to be defined solely by trauma, but rather to be defined by pride, and the resilience to endure and transform not only themselves but also the Czech majority. To connect these two sections, we present our findings in the table below.

Table 2. Key emotional patterns across institutional domains

Institutional domain	Dominant emotional pattern	The main mechanism described in the interviews	Coping mechanism/ Positive emotions
Childhood and schooling	Shame, fear, early trauma	Racial naming, bullying, exclusion, and the early realisation of being treated as an Other	Family support, hiding identity, masking, self-deprecating humour, academic overachievement
Public space and leisure	Hyper-vigilance, anxiety, humiliation	Surveillance, bag checks, denial of entry, and constant anticipation of hostile treatment	Group solidarity, avoidance of specific places, vigilance and preplanning, emotional support from peers
Employment	Stress, insecurity, lowered self-worth	Precarious work, devaluation of labour, and discriminatory treatment in hiring and the workplace	Masking (identity performance), entrepreneurship, resiliencebuilding (armouring), family/ community support

[8] For an overview of racially motivated violence in the Czech Republic after 1989, see online media Romea's article from 2007. Available at: https://romea.cz/cz/domaci/rasove-motivovane-nasili-v-cr-po-roce-1989.

Healthcare	Fear, mistrust, vulnerability, retraumatisation	Accusations of malingering, hostile treatment, and concern about adequate care	Intrafamily storytelling (processing trauma), avoidance of certain providers, reliance on community knowledge
Social benefits and welfare offices	Paternalism, frustration, humiliation	Mistrust, refusal to provide information, and lack of autonomy in administrative encounters	Behaving in a way that does not attract suspicion, selfadvocacy, mutual aid within the family
Justice and policing	Insecurity, distrust, anticipation of unfairness	Automatic suspicion, weak access to protection, and fear of unequal treatment	Community support, resignation (selective withdrawal), documentation of incidents
Digital and media environments	Stress, anger, isolation	Exposure to anti-Roma content, public humiliation, and normalisation of hostility	Avoidance/withdrawal from online spaces, fighting for the Roma cause, solidarity with antiracist allies
Family and intimate life	Stress, protection, solidarity	Managing discrimination in friendships, partnerships, and family relations	Mutual support as a “support group”, transmission of pride in Roma identity and culture, collective processing of trauma after antiRoma incidents, hope invested in children’s education, and confidence as collective investments, intergenerational storytelling (warning, resilience, legacy)
Roma community and kin networks	Pride, support, resilience	Collective coping, shared interpretation of discrimination, and mutual aid	Shared gatherings as recovery space, reaffirmation of collective identity and pride, mutual aid and reciprocity (social capital), political engagement, Roma entrepreneurship, cultural expression, elder care within the community

Discussion: connecting micro-level affect to policy

The empirical material establishes three linked claims that are consequential for policy scholarship and practice. Read through the lens of SocialAffective Citizenship, these three claims can be understood as mapping the four levels of the SAC framework.

The first claim – that affect matters analytically and politically – corresponds to SAC's postulate of emotional mediation, according to which the emotional impact of welfare encounters is the primary causal link between institutional design and citizen response. The interviews reveal that emotional states – such as humiliation, fear, pride, and solidarity – are not merely subjective reactions but are deeply embedded in institutional interactions and public discourse. The Feeling Subject is not only an abstract category – it is an empirically accessible phenomenon shaped by schooling, bureaucratic encounters, labour markets and public rhetoric. Policies produce affective climates, those climates in turn shape political demands and individual capacities. Hence, any policy evaluation that ignores emotion risks misdiagnosing both causes and remedies.

The second claim – on affective incoherence – captures a form of policy incoherence in BRC terms, where Roma are addressed as rational calculators, pawns, or overly emotional subjects in different parts of the ecosystem, generating pervasive affective dissonance and eroding trust. Strategic documents and international commitments that formally endorse inclusion coexist with parliamentary rhetoric, municipal ordinances and administrative practices that stigmatise Roma. This bipolar messaging – simultaneously promising protection and enabling exclusion – creates emotional ambivalence and erodes trust in state institutions. The result is a fragile policy environment in which formal rights are present on paper but attenuated in lived practice.

The third claim – on the complexity and misrecognition of Roma emotional agency – speaks to the dimensions of affective citizenship, highlighting that Roma mobilise anger, pride, and solidarity to contest their positioning within racialised hierarchies and to articulate alternative expectations of care from the state and the wider society. Dominant public discourse constructs Roma as either irrationally emotional or cynically manipulative; empirical evidence shows neither caricature is adequate. Roma feelings are responsive to structural exclusion and moral denigration; their strategies – masking, political engagement, entrepreneurship, and cultural assertion – are forms of emotional and political labour that deserve recognition rather than dismissal.

Together, these findings show that Roma are not merely objects of policy but social-affective citizens whose emotions participate in the feedback loops that stabilise or destabilise the current welfare regime.

Conclusion – towards an emotionally reflexive social policy for Roma in the Czech Republic

This article has sought to fill a persistent lacuna in social policy scholarship by supplying micro-level empirical evidence about the affective life of Roma subjects in

the Czech Republic and by setting those data in dialogue with recent conceptual work on emotion, recognition, and policy design (Barrett, 2017; Bonvin, 2008; Hoggett, 2017; Szarfenberg, 2026). Two central conclusions follow from the evidence and argument presented.

First, microdata matter: emotional experience is not an epiphenomenal phenomenon. The 75 semi-structured interviews conducted under Community-Based Research Design supply rich, grounded evidence that anti-Roma attitudes are experienced by Roma as an enduring, systemic "toll" – a cumulative social, financial, and emotional burden that shapes their trajectories from childhood onwards. Participants report pervasive surveillance, routine microaggressions, retraumatising institutional encounters (in healthcare, employment, education, and policing), and everyday strategies of concealment or modification (the "mask") which register as clear psychosocial harms. These findings corroborate the theoretical claim that policies and social constructions co-produce affective climates (Schneider & Ingram, 1993) and underscore the analytical point repeatedly emphasised by interpretive and affective scholars: emotions are constitutive of political life and policy outcomes, not merely consequences of them (Durnová, 2022; Barbalet, 2002; Hoggett, 2017). In practical terms, detailed qualitative evidence about feelings – not only shame, fear, and humiliation, but also pride and solidarity – provides essential diagnostic information to policy designers seeking to address exclusion. Without this micro-level knowledge, interventions risk treating Roma solely as "targets" of technical measures (surveys, benefit formulas), while overlooking the relational and recognitive dimensions that determine whether policies will compound harms or contain them (Honneth, 1995; Tronto, 1993). Consequently, social policy should be evaluated not only by formal inclusion goals or activation outcomes, but also by its affective consequences for Roma as Feeling Subjects.

Second, humanisation and an emotionally integrative model of social policy are both normative aims and practicable design criteria. The interviews reveal that Roma are variously constructed in public discourse and policy as pawns, failed calculators, cynical exploiters, or overly emotional "Others" – mutually contradictory constructions which sustain exclusion, taken together. Rehumanisation of Roma, a necessary attempt considering prevalence of anti-Roma attitudes in Czech majority, therefore, requires the threefold reorientation of social policy: (1) to recognise Roma as Feeling Subjects who have ordinary emotional needs for dignity, safety, and recognition (Hoggett, 2017); (2) to design institutional mechanisms providing containment of harms and relational safety (trauma-informed practice; Bowen & Murshid, 2016); and (3) to align assumptions about Roma agency and motivation in policy with practices which empower Roma co-definition and co-implementation (the capability-friendly approach outlined by Bonvin, 2008). This article proposes that an emotionally integrative model must be explicitly intersectional (Soss et al., 2011; Szarfenberg, 2026): it should recognise that affective stigmas are racialised and emotional harms are mediated by factors such as class, skin tone, and region.

We propose scaling the present micro-data approach: the CBRS produced valuable nuance (including attention to Roma middle-class experiences); comparable qualitative work with Roma should be extended geographically and longitudinally to examine

how affective states evolve and how interventions change emotional climates (Root, 2007; Burawoy, 2004; Muhammad et al., 2015). We also propose developing mixed-methods evaluations that explicitly measure emotional outcomes (recognition, perceived dignity, fear, and humiliation) alongside conventional economic indicators; these should become outcome metrics for welfare policy changes. This is especially significant because Roma marginalisation is not confined to the Czech Republic; rather, it forms part of a broader pattern of exclusion visible across the Visegrad 4 countries in Central Europe. In Hungary, Roma have been described as rendered "invisible" in social, family, and workfare policy discourses, where structural inequality is displaced into individualised and moralised framings of need and responsibility (Vidra & Virágh, 2025). In Slovakia, research on school segregation shows how institutional separation continues to shape Roma children's educational trajectories and future aspirations, demonstrating the persistence of exclusion across generations (Messing, 2017). At the same time, Kusá (2002, p. 152) demonstrates how international publicity about Slovak Roma poverty leads to attempts to conceal it from public view. In Poland, scholarship on Roma marginalisation similarly documents enduring social exclusion and discrimination, including disadvantages in housing, employment, and access to services (Faracik et al., 2012). Taken together, these cases indicate that the emotional and institutional dynamics identified in this article are not unique to the Czech Republic but reflect a broader regional pattern of Roma exclusion, strengthening the case for emotionally reflexive social policy.

From a SocialAffective Citizenship perspective, the model of emotionally integrative social policy outlined here can be understood as an attempt to reconfigure the Czech welfare state's emotional constitution. By recognising Roma as Feeling Subjects within a multi-layered ecosystem of formal and informal provision, and by foregrounding the mechanisms of recognition, dignity, and security that mediate their encounters with institutions, we show how Roma citizenship is currently organised around affective regimes of suspicion, stigma, and precarity. At the same time, the narratives of pride, solidarity, and hope demonstrate the presence of alternative affective logics rooted in informal community networks and horizontal forms of care. An emotionally integrative policy is therefore not only about adjusting benefits or programmes; it is about transforming the affective signals that welfare institutions send, aligning them with expectations of recognition and shared ownership of society, and thereby moving towards a Roma-inclusive SAC regime.

Closing reflections: why emotion-sensitive policy?

An emotionally reflexive social policy would not supplant material redistribution but would complement and amplify it. Policies that provide incomes while sustaining reputational denigration, institutional suspicion, or affective abandonment will fail to secure the social inclusion they promise. By foregrounding the voices, feelings, and strategies of Romani people, this article supplies the micro-evidence necessary to move from schematic policy typologies to person-centred, emotionally literate practice. Such a shift is both an ethical imperative, recognising Roma citizens as full subjects of

dignity, and an instrumental necessity, because affective climates shape whether policy commitments become lived realities (Szarfenberg, 2026; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). If Czech social policy aspires to inclusion and participation (as per Strategy of Roma equality, inclusion and participation 2021–2030[9]), it must take feelings seriously: to humanise the Roma subject, to repair relational harms, and to design institutions which hold society together, contain harms, and recognise common ownership of society. In addition, the case of Roma, as a marginalised community, demonstrates how neglecting the consequences of policies in the emotional realm further pushes said policies for all citizens towards what has been called real capitalism (Lupták, 2013, p. 8) in the Czech Republic, following the policies up to the 1989 revolution called real socialism. This concept refers to what Wacquant defined as neoliberalism, understood as "market conforming state crafting" (Wacquant, 2012, p. 71). Thus, demonstrating the roles emotions play in the case of Roma could serve as a starting point for redefining or achieving a deeper understanding of the contemporary welfare state's role.

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Home as an affective field: connections between housing insecurity, political empathy, and NEET youth

Abstract

This study examines housing insecurity among young people classified as NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training) in the Trnava region in Slovakia, placing their experiences in the context of post-socialist housing transformations. Drawing on the Social Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework, we interpret the Slovak housing system as an ecosystem of formal and informal, state, market, and community arrangements that simultaneously distribute material resources and affective signals of recognition, dignity, and security. Based on 108 qualitative interviews with NEETs and professionals, the analysis shows that unstable housing, uncertain income, and the absence of social support are key mechanisms that reproduce social exclusion. A typology of existential and housing deprivation identifies the most vulnerable subgroups. The study examines concepts such as affective governance and political empathy and demonstrates how current housing policy creates an affective regime that often selectively favours groups that meet expected social norms, while NEET youth are largely excluded from the focus of policy. The findings show that stable and dignified housing is a prerequisite for meaningful participation in work, education, and independent adult life, and call for the integration of political empathy and supported housing into housing policy as tools to strengthen the social affective citizenship of NEET youth. By linking

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housing sociology with the Social-Affective Citizenship framework, the study addresses an underexplored gap in NEET research: the role of housing insecurity not only as material deprivation, but also as a mechanism of affective exclusion and selective political recognition in post-socialist welfare systems.

Keywords: NEET youth, housing insecurity, social-affective citizenship, social exclusion, political empathy

1. Introduction: housing insecurity, NEET youth and social-affective citizenship

The situation of young people classified as NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training) represents a complex form of social vulnerability shaped by economic exclusion, weak institutional attachment, and limited opportunities for independent living. While existing research has primarily focused on labour-market disengagement, educational discontinuity, and psychosocial risks, significantly less attention has been paid to housing. This is an important omission, as housing constitutes a fundamental condition for social integration and the transition to adulthood. In this article, housing insecurity is understood as a spectrum of unstable, temporary, or unaffordable living arrangements that constrain life chances and reinforce social exclusion.

This study builds on insights from the sociology of housing, which has long emphasised that housing is not merely a physical space but a key domain through which social inequalities are produced and reproduced (Musil, 2005; Boelhouwer, 1993). In post-socialist contexts, however, housing systems are shaped by a distinctive historical trajectory. Under the Czechoslovak socialist regime, housing was treated as a state-organised social good, provided through centralised planning, and large-scale public construction. This legacy continues to influence both institutional arrangements and societal expectations. After 1989, the transition to a market-based system led to large-scale privatisation, reduced public housing provision, and a shift of responsibility from the state to individuals, disrupting earlier research traditions and policy frameworks (Musil, 1993). The sustained scholarly attention to the socialist period is therefore not only historical but reflects the need to understand the structural origins of current housing inequalities and institutional configurations.

Despite this context, limited research examines housing insecurity as a central mechanism shaping NEET trajectories, particularly in post-socialist countries such as Slovakia. Existing studies tend to treat housing as secondary to employment or education, overlooking how the absence of stable housing can itself prevent entry into both domains. This article addresses this gap by analysing housing insecurity as both a structural condition and an experiential process that shapes social exclusion.

To capture these dynamics, the study draws on the Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework (Szarfenberg, 2026), which conceptualises welfare systems as arenas that distribute not only material resources but also recognition, dignity, and political empathy. From this perspective, housing policy is understood not only as a technical

field of allocation but also as a mechanism that defines which social groups are recognised as deserving of support.

The article addresses the following research questions:

- How does housing insecurity influence the life trajectories and social exclusion of young NEETs in Slovakia?
- How do housing systems function as mechanisms of recognition, dignity, and political empathy within the Social-Affective Citizenship framework?

The main argument is that housing insecurity is not a secondary outcome of NEET status, but a central mechanism that reproduces marginalisation. By linking housing sociology with the Social-Affective Citizenship framework, the study shows that housing systems simultaneously allocate material resources and shape affective hierarchies of belonging, within which young NEETs remain largely excluded.

2. Housing insecurity as a mechanism of social-affective marginalisation of NEET youth

In addition to studying the spatial and cultural aspects of housing, its sociology also focuses on the socio-economic conditions that determine access to accommodation. A central concept within this framework is housing insecurity. It refers to a spectrum of unstable, temporary, or economically unsustainable forms of housing that may lead to homelessness. It represents a key mechanism of social vulnerability, as structural factors such as rising costs, declining affordability, and market pressures contribute to both chronic housing precarity and its most extreme manifestation – homelessness (Herring, 2023). When public policies focus only on visible homelessness, they overlook a broader population living in hidden housing insecurity. Central and Eastern Europe remains somewhat isolated from global discussions on international housing research and urban studies debates. Recent reviews of studies in the field of housing sociology emphasise the importance of integrating post-socialist housing research into international discourse (Kočková & Ferenčuhová, 2025). In this context, young people in NEET status constitute a particularly relevant population for examining housing insecurity. Their limited attachment to the labour market, unstable income, and often restricted access to welfare resources increase their vulnerability to precarious housing conditions. While not all young people classified as NEET experience housing insecurity, their socio-economic position places them at elevated risk of housing precarity and, in some cases, homelessness.

Across the European Union, young people classified as NEET represent a significant policy concern, although their prevalence varies considerably across countries. According to Eurostat data, approximately 11.0% of young people aged 15–29 in the EU were in NEET status in 2025 (Eurostat, 2026). Rates ranged from around 19% in Romania to 5–6% in countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden. In Slovakia, the share of NEET youth (approximately 11.1%) remains close to the EU average. However, the risk of NEET status is disproportionately concentrated among low-skilled young people and those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

Although overall trends have remained relatively stable in recent years, the persistence of NEET status points to enduring structural vulnerabilities linked to unequal access to education, employment, and housing. Comparative data place Slovakia in an intermediate position within Central and Eastern Europe, with higher NEET rates than Slovenia (7.6%), Czechia (8.0%), Poland (9.2%), and Hungary (10.6%) (Eurostat, 2026). A substantial proportion of Slovak youth, therefore, continues to face elevated risks of social exclusion, labour market marginalisation, and economic insecurity associated with NEET status.

This is where the sociology of housing naturally intersects with the issue of NEETs. Young people who are not in education, employment, or training are a group which often faces a disproportionately high risk of housing insecurity. The absence of stable income and incomplete or interrupted education limit their opportunities to enter the housing market. For many NEETs, this prolongs their dependence on their families, delays their independence, and creates conditions for potential conflicts, relationship tensions, and psychological stress (O'Higgins & Brockie, 2024). Where family support is lacking or disrupted, young NEETs enter informal and precarious forms of housing. They often move between short-term rentals, stay temporarily at friends' houses, or live in overcrowded and unsuitable conditions. These forms of housing precarity can develop into chronic housing insecurity and even extreme forms of homelessness, which are often insufficiently addressed by public policies.

For that reason, housing insecurity among NEETs is not merely a consequence of disadvantage, but a mechanism that reproduces marginalisation (Poulimas et al., 2024; Bobek et al., 2020). Limited income, labour market exclusion, lack of skills, and rising housing costs restrict young people's opportunities. These challenges are further reinforced by insufficient social housing provision, limited transitional housing capacity, and weak preventive measures, which hinder pathways to stable housing.

3. Social-Affective Citizenship, housing, and NEET Youth

The Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework (Szarfenberg, 2026) offers a useful bridge between the sociology of housing and the analysis of NEET youth. In this perspective, the housing system is conceptualised as an ecosystem of housing provision that combines bureaucratic, market, and community logics in both formal and informal arenas. In the Slovak case, extensive privatisation and the dominance of owner-occupation have strengthened the role of market mechanisms, while fragmented municipal competences and underinvestment have weakened the universalistic ambitions of formal social housing. At the same time, families, kinship networks, non-governmental organisations, and faith-based initiatives have taken on a growing share of responsibility for housing those who are excluded from the formal system.

Within this ecosystem, young people with NEET status occupy a particularly precarious position. Their access to the formal bureaucratic sphere is often limited by low or unstable income, lack of formal documentation, or institutional invisibility. As a result, they are effectively priced out of the commodified housing market. Their housing security frequently depends on informal support networks, family support,

couch-surfing or residing informally with peers, or on time-limited project-based forms of supported housing provided by NGOs. These patterns illustrate how the lines between formal and informal, public and private, are redrawn in ways that stratify access to full social-affective citizenship.

The SAC framework further emphasises that institutional arrangements are mediated through emotional experiences of recognition or non-recognition, dignity or stigma, security or precarity. The encounters with housing offices, shelters, and social services communicate to young NEETs whether they are seen as legitimate members of the community and as subjects deserving of investment, or as marginal and undeserving. In the following sections, we therefore read the empirical material with particular attention to these mediating mechanisms. We ask how the housing trajectories of young NEET youth in the Trnava region reflect the workings of institutionally embedded affective relations, understood within the SAC framework as the emotional and moral dimensions of governance. We further examine how selective political empathy, meaning the tendency of policy actors to extend recognition and resources only to those deemed sufficiently deserving, contributes to the reproduction of their social and housing exclusion. The SAC framework is operationalised in this study through four interrelated dimensions that guide the interpretation of housing insecurity among NEET youth, connecting institutional structures, lived experience, and policy discourse to examine housing not only as material provision, but also as a domain of recognition, dignity, security, and political inclusion. The following section situates these theoretical perspectives within the Slovak housing context, with particular attention to post-socialist transformations shaping current housing inequalities.

Table 1. Analytical dimensions of SAC in this study

SAC dimension	Analytical focus	Empirical indicators in this study
Recognition	How institutions perceive and categorise NEET youth	Eligibility barriers, institutional invisibility
Dignity	Housing as moral worth and social respect	Shame, stigma, precariousness
Security	Material and emotional housing stability	Temporary accommodation, instability, supported housing
Political empathy	Inclusion/exclusion in policy priorities	Selective support, deservingness, policy neglect

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Szarfenberg's Social-Affective Citizenship framework (2026).

4. Structural barriers, marketisation, and housing vulnerability in Slovakia

Building on the framework outlined above, the Slovak housing system represents a post-socialist case where structural transformations and affective dimensions of

housing intersect in specific ways. As in other post-socialist countries, Slovakia has undergone fundamental changes in the area of housing and housing research since 1989 (Andráško, 2018; Ouředníček et al., 2015; Musil, 2005). The transformation of housing from a guaranteed social right to a commodity based on market principles means that the responsibility for securing housing has shifted primarily to individuals, with structural housing problems often interpreted as personal failures. Privatisation, changes in ownership regimes, and market prices have revived socio-economic inequalities that were largely suppressed under socialism (Tsenkova & Polanska, 2014). The Amnesty International report (2024) maps these processes in detail and shows how privatisation, underinvestment, and fragmented management of public housing create inequality and deepen housing insecurity.

Housing management is fragmented and decentralised, with municipalities setting different eligibility rules, creating local barriers, and unequal access. At the same time, privatisation and insufficient investment have drastically reduced the number of public rental apartments. Rental housing is not common in Slovakia. In 2020, 92.3% of all housing was privately owned and only 7.7% was rental housing, of which 6.1% was commercially rented and 1.6% was rent-controlled housing (Amnesty International, 2024). These changes have intensified inequality and housing insecurity, particularly for low-income households.

The lack of public housing in Slovakia creates a structural affordability crisis that deepens poverty and increases housing insecurity. Housing costs consume an exceptionally high proportion of household income, averaging 27%, and account for almost half of the income of the poorest households (OECD, 2023). This cost burden often forces low-income families to make difficult compromises between housing and basic needs, illustrating how market-oriented housing systems reproduce material deprivation. State support mechanisms do little to address these inequalities. The main tool, housing allowance, is closely linked to the income assessment system and excludes many low-income households whose incomes are just above the poverty line. Even for those who are eligible for the allowance, it is insufficient to meet the income criteria required for access to municipal housing. These gaps in social policy show how institutional design contributes to the persistence of housing insecurity and limits ways out of poverty.

Although housing policy in Slovakia is formally neutral, it often creates a mechanism that systematically excludes the most vulnerable groups and reproduces socio-economic inequality. The merit-based logic underlying transitional housing views access to housing as something that individuals must earn, rather than a social right. Administrative barriers often reinforce this effect. Complex administrative application processes and strict deadlines create significant barriers for people with limited resources or health limitations, contributing to the widespread underutilisation of eligible entitlements. Together, these institutional mechanisms reproduce inequality in housing and limit access to stable housing for the most vulnerable (Hlinčíková, 2024). In Slovakia, the housing problem of Roma households is also significant. Local government housing policies often lead to the concentration of Roma households in specific, lower-quality residential areas, contributing to their continuing social disadvantage. These patterns of housing allocation and limited tenancy security

illustrate how institutional measures can unintentionally reinforce ethnic and spatial inequalities.

In Slovakia, mainly due to the lack of public rental housing, social services providing emergency or temporary accommodation have become a long-term substitute for permanent housing, rather than serving as a short-term solution to crisis situations. From a sociological perspective, this shows that institutional mechanisms can unknowingly reproduce housing insecurity rather than eliminating it. This system of temporary housing often keeps people in a cycle of repeated use of these facilities. The most vulnerable social groups, therefore, become dependent on services, with no real possibility of moving into stable, permanent housing. At the same time, however, much of the support for vulnerable groups does not come from state institutions, but is transferred mainly to non-governmental organisations. It is often the third sector that takes over many of the activities that the state is unable to provide and comes up with innovative forms of social housing (Murray Svidroňová et al., 2017). These organisations thus play a key role in mitigating the negative consequences of inadequate public housing policy and paving the way for more inclusive and stable housing solutions. In contrast, Housing First programmes provide immediate permanent housing combined with individualised social support, viewing housing as a human right and a prerequisite for social inclusion (Škobla et al., 2016). The Housing First model rests on the principle that housing should not be earned through demonstrated compliance or sobriety, but provided unconditionally as a stable foundation which allows for addressing other issues such as employment, mental health, and social reintegration. This approach was originally developed for people experiencing long-term street homelessness, often those whom mainstream services had effectively given up on, classifying them as unlikely to change. Its application has since expanded to include younger vulnerable populations, including those leaving institutional care. Pilot projects in Slovakia's two largest cities, Bratislava and Košice, show that this approach stabilises households and reduces dependence on shelters; nevertheless, its scope is still limited and is not yet fully embedded in national policy (Pongrácz et al., 2021).

These structural features can also be understood within a broader European social policy perspective. Research suggests that post-socialist countries such as Slovakia operate within a "familiarised" model of youth support, where young people are expected to rely primarily on family rather than direct state provision (Lauri et al., 2025). In such contexts, access to housing and social security is strongly shaped by family resources, reinforcing inequalities among young people. For NEET youth, this reliance is often not voluntary but a necessity, highlighting how housing insecurity is embedded in broader welfare arrangements and contributes to uneven transitions into adulthood. Housing insecurity is closely linked to labour market exclusion. Existing research further shows that the integration of vulnerable groups such as NEET youth is shaped not only by structural barriers but also by employer attitudes and institutional practices (Bosman et al., 2025). For young people facing unstable housing, these dynamics reinforce difficulties in accessing employment, as basic survival needs take precedence over labour market participation. This highlights how housing and employment function as interdependent domains of social exclusion.

5. Methodology: capturing housing, emotion and social-affective citizenship

The analysis is based on qualitative research focused on young people in the Trnava region in Slovakia classified as NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training), including individuals not registered with employment offices. This is a relatively difficult-to-reach population, not in the sense of hidden or illicit groups, but due to weak institutional attachment, low registration with employment services, and reliance on informal support networks. The data were collected as part of a broader analysis of NEET issues conducted by a team of experts from Trnava University between May and July 2024.

The research was carried out in the Trnava region in western Slovakia, located near the capital city of Bratislava. The region combines urban centres with smaller towns and rural areas, making it a relevant setting for examining diverse housing conditions and youth trajectories. At the same time, the region reflects broader national patterns of limited public housing, reliance on family support, and the presence of vulnerable youth groups, which makes it a suitable case for analysing the relationship between housing insecurity and NEET status.

From this broader dataset, the present analysis focuses specifically on housing, as housing instability emerges as a central factor shaping social exclusion, limiting life opportunities, and contributing to risky trajectories among young inactive NEETs. Qualitative data illustrate how precarious income, dependence on social benefits, and insecure or inadequate housing intersect to reinforce cycles of disadvantage. A total of 108 respondents participated in the study: 92 young NEETs (aged 18–29) and 16 professionals with direct experience working with NEET youth in the Trnava region. The sample of 92 NEET respondents included both men and women aged 18–29 with diverse socio-economic and life situations. Reasons for NEET status varied and included long-term unemployment, early school leaving, health-related limitations, caregiving responsibilities, and transitions from institutional or foster care. Respondents also differed significantly in their housing situations, ranging from living with parents or relatives, to renting accommodation, informal shared housing and, in some cases, temporary or unstable housing, including homelessness. This diversity allowed the study to capture multiple forms of housing insecurity and their relationship to social exclusion among NEET youth. Professional respondents included social workers, NGO staff, coordinators of low-threshold centres, and community workers with first-hand experience in supporting NEET youth. Professional respondents were selected based on their direct and sustained professional involvement with NEET youth, including at least one year of practical involvement in social services, community work, or housing-related support, ensuring that the study captured both frontline perspectives and institutional insights.

Data were collected through three complementary methods: semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, and focus groups. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 50 NEET respondents and all 16 professional respondents, ensuring systematic coverage of key topics while allowing flexibility to explore individual

experiences. In-depth interviews were carried out with 18 NEET respondents to examine particularly complex life trajectories in greater detail. Additionally, four focus groups were conducted with NEET respondents, each involving 4–6 respondents to capture collective experiences, peer dynamics, and shared patterns of exclusion. Focus group respondents reflected similar socio-demographic characteristics, with a mix of genders, employment histories, and housing situations, allowing for the exploration of shared experiences as well as peer dynamics. This combination enabled the research to capture both individual perspectives and shared social patterns. Separate interview guides were developed for NEET respondents and for professionals. Interviews with NEET youth focused on housing trajectories, income insecurity, family support, and institutional experiences, while interviews with professionals examined structural barriers, service provision, and policy limitations.

Respondents were recruited using targeted snowball sampling, a strategy suitable for accessing hidden populations with low institutional visibility. Respondents did not receive financial compensation; however, participation was voluntary and motivated by interest in sharing personal experiences and contributing to research on youth disadvantage. The average duration of interview with NEET respondents was approximately 45–60 minutes, while interviews with professionals lasted around 60–90 minutes. Focus group discussions typically lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

The interviews were audio-recorded, fully transcribed, and analysed using the qualitative software ATLAS.ti. Coding was iterative, with categories refined through repeated comparison across interviews. Thematic coding proceeded in two phases. In the initial open coding phase, a broad range of recurring themes was identified across both NEET and professional interviews, including housing instability, precarious income, family dependence, institutional barriers, documentation problems, emotional insecurity, and experiences with support services. In the subsequent focused coding phase, themes were clustered into broader analytical categories relating to housing trajectories, structural exclusion, and institutional recognition. Coding also enabled systematic comparison between the experiential narratives of NEET respondents and the structural perspective of professionals, allowing the analysis to distinguish between lived precarity and institutional framing of vulnerability. Although the initial coding remained inductive, the interpretative phase was theoretically guided by the four dimensions of SAC recognition, dignity, security, and political empathy. The typology of existential and housing deprivation (Section 5.2) was constructed inductively from patterns identified across NEET and professional interviews. Types were validated using internal consistency checks applied across the dataset and further assessed through peer debriefing within the research team to ensure analytical coherence.

All respondents provided informed consent prior to participation and were informed about the aims of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Given the vulnerability of many respondents, particular care was taken to ensure anonymity, confidentiality, and the ethical handling of sensitive narratives related to housing insecurity, family instability, and social exclusion. Interviews were anonymised during transcription, and identifying details were removed from the dataset.

6. Results: precarious income, housing insecurity and the emotional mediation of NEET life trajectories

This section presents the key findings of the qualitative analysis, focusing on the lived experiences of housing insecurity among young people in the NEET category. The analytical themes were derived through an iterative coding process combining inductive identification of recurring patterns in the data with a theoretically guided interpretation based on the Social-Affective Citizenship framework. The results are organised around core dimensions of housing precarity, including material conditions, institutional barriers, and affective experiences of insecurity, recognition, and exclusion. This structure allows for a systematic examination of how housing instability shapes the everyday trajectories and social position of NEET youth.

To ensure anonymity while providing relevant sociodemographic context, interview quotations are identified using a coding system that includes the respondent's number and gender (e.g., R13_Female for NEET respondents and P13_Male for professionals working with NEET youth). Since all NEET respondents were between 18 and 29 and age identifiers are not included to maintain anonymity. All respondents were from the Trnava Region, therefore, regional identifiers are also excluded.

6.1. Housing insecurity in NEET lived experience

The financial situation of young inactive NEETs in the Trnava region is closely related to their housing and overall social position. Some respondents state that their income consists mainly of social benefits or housing allowances, or occasional and short-term earnings in the informal economy. This pattern is consistent with international findings, which point out that low income and precarious employment significantly weaken young people's ability to maintain stable housing and increase their risk of social exclusion (Herring, 2023; Amnesty International, 2024). Financial insecurity significantly affects the daily lives of these young people, from finding housing to meeting basic needs. Many NEETs live in very low-income households, where a single pension or benefit provides the livelihood for several family members. In such circumstances, any unexpected event is a potential crisis.

> *We live with my mom. She has a pension and we manage to get by on that. But when the washing machine breaks down or something, we don't know how we're going to pay for it.* (R27_Woman)

A poor socio-economic situation often leads to long-term economic inactivity, social isolation, and loss of motivation. Many young respondents gradually accept their situation as unchangeable, a mechanism that sociology describes as "normalisation of uncertainty". The lack of social and economic resources also weakens the ability to plan, make decisions, and consider more stable housing, thus reproducing the cycle of vulnerability. From the SAC perspective, these experiences reflect not only material deprivation, but also a profound erosion of security both as a practical and emotional

condition for agency. Housing instability limits physical shelter as well as the capacity to imagine oneself as a socially recognised future-oriented actor.

> *I didn't know where to go. I had to leave my apartment and I slept here and there…. It's bad, of course, but when you look at it normally, you'd say that it's… well, it's not good, but what can I do about it, how can I change it?* (R13_Man)

Such narratives also reveal diminished dignity, as prolonged precarity normalises instability and weakens perceptions of social worth and entitlement to institutional support. Young people who have grown up in foster care, institutional care, or come from deeply disadvantaged families are a particularly vulnerable group. The transition from an institutional environment to independent living is a crucial and often very challenging phase in their lives. Without sufficient financial reserves, social support, and the skills needed for housing and employment, they quickly find themselves in another phase of uncertainty. They often end up in temporary accommodation or unstable informal tenancies, increasing the likelihood of remaining in the NEET status. For young people leaving institutional care, disrupted housing trajectories frequently coincide with weak recognition within both formal welfare systems and informal support networks, increasing their exposure to prolonged social invisibility.

> *When I was six years old, social services took me to a children's home. There were seven of us siblings, and four of us ended up in children's homes. That's where I grew up, that's where I learned my skills… you could say that the streets raised us.* (R34_Man)

Many young NEETs grow up in an environment characterised by a high degree of uncertainty and repeated changes in living conditions. Such experiences often undermine the development of trust in institutions and people, which can affect their ability to establish themselves in the labour market or in the education system. The early loss of a stable family environment and contact with supportive institutions can lead to the formation of risky life trajectories and a reduction in social support, which are key factors in analysing the precarious position of young NEETs in terms of housing and economic independence.

6.2. Institutional perspectives on structural barriers

Those who work with young NEETs often point to the link between housing and social marginalisation. Insecure housing, frequent moves, and a lack of stable housing options significantly worsen the situation of these young people, especially in the case of the most disadvantaged groups, who are dependent on various forms of temporary or emergency housing. The lack of support institutions such as shelters or social housing limits their ability to plan their daily lives and seek employment or educational opportunities. In SAC terms, the absence of adequate housing infrastructure reflects not merely service scarcity, but selective recognition in which the needs of highly vulnerable NEET youth remain peripheral to institutional priorities.

> *There is no shelter here, only a night shelter. The night shelter is only open at night… it's open from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m… People can stay there and sleep during those hours, but after that they have to leave… A shelter is supposed to help people earn a living. It is very difficult to get up for shifts when you sleep outside… you can only be in the night shelter at night, not during the day. So, you have nowhere to sleep to be able to function somewhere, so this shelter is missing here in the city, either a shelter or something simple, some kind of emergency housing.* (P6_Man)

Similarly, when it comes to long-term support for families, especially single-parent families, where there is usually a woman with several children, only limited housing options are available. These options are often subject to strict criteria that restrict access for the most vulnerable groups.

> *Well, a mother with children can stay with us for a year. A year is when you can provide them with certain social services, which is additional housing, usually in a different facility… Okay, there are also social municipal apartments, but they have their own conditions for acceptance… you must have been a permanent resident of that city for at least three years.* (P11_Woman)

This description shows that single mothers often face a combination of economic burdens, bureaucratic barriers, and a lack of flexible solutions, which puts them in a position of increased vulnerability. The lack of affordable and stable housing forces these families to live in precarious or temporary conditions, which reproduces social and economic disadvantage and increases the risk of marginalisation not only for mothers but also for their children. This demonstrates how political empathy is unevenly distributed through policy design, often excluding those whose instability most urgently requires intervention.

Those who work with young NEETs also point to the close link between work and housing. From their perspective, housing is a fundamental condition for social stability. If housing is threatened or uncertain, the ability of young NEETs to keep a job or even enter the labour market is significantly reduced. Housing insecurity thus acts as a mechanism for reproducing social exclusion. Without a stable place to live, it is difficult to plan, organise daily life, or build work habits.

> *Supported housing is important. Because with their lifestyle, housing is very often a problem, just like work. But it's better to have housing than no work. And once you have housing, you can work with it, try to solve the labour situation. So, housing and work go hand in hand.* (P2_Man)

This perspective confirms the view that housing is not merely one of many areas of disadvantage, but a fundamental prerequisite that influences the ability to participate in the labour market, social stability, and future planning.

6.3. Supported housing as intervention

Stable housing is a key condition for successful social integration. Housing is, therefore, not a reward for employment, it is rather a prerequisite that enables young people to gradually return to work routines, education, or building social ties. Within the SAC framework, stable housing represents a foundational form of security from which dignity, institutional recognition, and broader social participation can become possible. Professionals also point to foreign inspirations and policies that develop supported forms of housing. These are often models in which regions or states systematically invest in services that stabilise the living conditions of people in vulnerable situations.

> *Supported housing makes a big difference. In Finland, it works perfectly. They actually transformed their system; they have a state-owned lottery company, and put all the revenue into Housing First. And suddenly it turned out that there was money for it, that it works, and that it's totally fine.* (P3_Man)

The reference to the Finnish Housing First approach is not accidental. It is a model that has proven in several countries that stable and unconditional housing is more effective than traditional "step-by-step" systems, in which individuals must first demonstrate discipline or work activity in order to gain access to housing (Juhila et al., 2022). Professionals often point out that similar approaches would also be applicable in the Slovak context, however, there is a lack of political will and long-term funding. However, some organisations are trying to create supportive forms of housing, mainly through projects financed by European funds. These programmes show that a combination of affordable housing and continuous social work can have a significant stabilising effect, especially for young NEETs, families, or young couples. The Housing First model also illustrates a policy architecture grounded in political empathy, where unconditional housing is treated as a civic foundation rather than a conditional reward.

> *We also have supportive housing projects, where we have about ten apartments for these people. There, under certain conditions, they can live and obtain this apartment at a very reasonable price. They can live in the apartment for as long as they want. But for the first year, they pay nothing for six months, and then they pay for utilities. It has to be shifted somehow, so we have people accommodated this way. Most of them are families or couples.* (P8_Woman)

This practice shows that stable housing combined with social support can significantly improve the life chances of young NEETs. It often provides a stable point in situations that are otherwise marked by chaos, economic uncertainty, and low levels of social support. However, at the same time, it reveals the limitations of a system in which support is based primarily on temporary projects rather than a long-term housing strategy. Professionals emphasise that without sustained support from the state and a clear housing policy, such initiatives are limited in their temporary nature. From a sociological point of view, housing represents a fundamental and objective obstacle in addressing the situation of young people in the NEET status. The survival

priorities, focused on ensuring a safe place to sleep, food, and basic hygiene, naturally take precedence over the possibility of concentrating on work or education. Support services emphasise that the stabilisation of housing is a prerequisite for any further intervention. However, reliance on temporary project funding highlights the fragility of recognition when support remains contingent, fragmented, and politically non-systemic.

6.4. Typology of existential and housing deprivation

A regional analysis of young people with NEET status in the Trnava region showed that this is a very heterogeneous group with different life trajectories and risk factors. Based on qualitative data, one key typological subgroup was identified: young people experiencing existential and housing deprivation. This subgroup is defined by the following criteria:

- chronically unstable, inadequate, or completely lacking housing;
- absence of family background or weak social ties (particularly care leavers);
- and administrative invisibility due to loss of personal documents and exclusion from formal systems.

These three criteria jointly define the boundaries of this typology and distinguish it from other NEET subgroups. For young people in this typology, housing insecurity is a key factor in the reproduction of social exclusion and a major obstacle to any steps towards education or employment. It is almost impossible to plan one's life path or focus on long-term goals without stable material and spatial security. The everyday lives of these young people are often shaped by frequent moves, living in overcrowded or unsuitable conditions, or even homelessness. Many live in temporary accommodation or squats, where a chronic lack of stability exacerbates stress and existential uncertainty. In such cases, housing transforms from a spatial security infrastructure into a social barrier that limits any kind of progression.

A large part of this subgroup consists of young people who have left institutional care and are characterised by a lack of family background and very weak social ties. The inability to rely on relatives in critical situations reduces their resilience and makes it difficult for them to cope with everyday demands. Administrative invisibility further compounds their vulnerability. Personal documents are often lost, and replacing them is financially and organisationally demanding. Without documents, they cannot apply for social assistance, register as job seekers, or work legally, which keeps them in a state of social invisibility that becomes a critical failure of recognition, reinforcing exclusion not only from housing systems, but from broader citizenship infrastructures.

This condition reflects a cumulative deficit across all SAC dimensions: diminished security through unstable housing, weakened dignity through chronic precariousness, reduced recognition through institutional barriers, and limited political empathy through exclusion from long-term policy frameworks. For this subgroup, stabilising their housing situation is a basic precondition for any further progress. Without a safe and predictable place to live, all subsequent interventions in the areas of employment, education, or social counselling remain only partially effective. From a SAC perspective,

this subgroup occupies the outer margins of the housing ecosystem, where formal rights are least accessible and informal resources are weakest. Their marginal position also illustrates how deficits in political empathy can normalise exclusion by rendering structurally vulnerable youth less visible within dominant frameworks of policy concern.

Table 2. SAC dimensions as reflected in the existential and housing deprivation typology

SAC Dimension	Definition of criteria	Key empirical patterns
Recognition	Administrative invisibility	Document loss, exclusion from welfare eligibility, institutional invisibility
Dignity	Chronic housing precariousness	Normalisation of precarity, shame, weakened sense of entitlement, stigma of instability
Security	Unstable or absent housing	Frequent moves, overcrowded conditions, night shelters, temporary or no accommodation
Political empathy	Systemic exclusion	Absence of long-term housing strategy, reliance on project-based support, lack of structural policy support

Source: Author's own elaboration based on qualitative fieldwork in the Trnava region, interpreted through the SAC framework (Szarfenberg, 2026).

7. Discussion: affective governance, political empathy and social-affective citizenship in housing policy

Interpreting these findings through the four dimensions of SAC allows us to see housing policy as a specific form of affective governance. Across interviews, both NEET respondents and professionals repeatedly described how access to stable housing was conditional upon administrative eligibility, prior residence requirements, or family support, while those lacking these resources were often redirected to temporary or emergency solutions. The dominant discourse constructs homeownership and self-reliance as moral norms of good citizenship, while access to public or supported housing is framed as a conditional privilege. This pattern is particularly visible in accounts describing young people leaving institutional care, single mothers, or respondents without documentation, whose housing insecurity was not framed as structural vulnerability but as a failure to meet institutional conditions. Young NEETs, whose life trajectories are marked by unstable income, incomplete education, and periods of inactivity, are therefore positioned outside the category of "deserving" beneficiaries. This affective regime communicates that they do not fully belong to the imagined community of responsible adults and that their housing needs are the result of individual failure rather than structural constraints. In this way, the housing system simultaneously distributes material resources and regulates hierarchies of belonging. Beyond access to resources, these hierarchies also shape dignity by communicating

whose housing insecurity is understood as socially legitimate vulnerability and whose precarity is moralised as personal inadequacy.

A broader discussion of the issue of housing for young people in NEET status necessarily requires going beyond a purely empirical framework and entering the sphere of ideological and discursive mechanisms that shape political priorities and legitimise public policy interventions. Some research points to the fact that, in the case of social stereotypes of these vulnerable groups, it is necessary to work on humanising disadvantaged groups and strengthening political support (Findor et al., 2023). The sociological perspective shows that the problems of young people in the NEET status are not only material but also symbolic. They are related to how society understands merit, productivity, and the norms of good civic life. This reveals the absence of political empathy in the institutional treatment of housing insecurity among NEET youth, a dynamic through which policy actors selectively determine whose needs are made visible and whose are rendered peripheral (Zubrzycka-Czarnecka, 2025). Emotions of empathy in everyday politics can serve as tools and mechanisms that reinforce dominant narratives and shape social dynamics (Shah, 2024). Awareness of these affective dynamics can be the key to understanding how housing inequality is justified and how it is combated. Within the SAC framework, these symbolic processes are central because they mediate not only recognition, but also the preservation or erosion of dignity as a core component of social membership.

In the context of housing, an ideological framework prevails in which home ownership is viewed as a moral norm and a key marker of economic and civic responsibility. However, young people in the NEET category, by their very nature, do not meet this standard. These are people who lack a stable income, do not fall into the category of productive citizens, and whose life trajectory is marked by material insecurity. As a result, they become a group that, in political discourse, falls outside the framework of the deserving population and, therefore, does not receive the same level of public or political empathy. Young NEETs experiencing housing insecurity are often portrayed in political discourse through the lens of personal failure. Housing problems are attributed to their irresponsibility, rather than being analysed as the result of often structural factors, such as poverty or a lack of affordable housing. The individual search for blame obscures systemic causes. Such an emotional and moralising framework directly hinders the creation and implementation of effective structural measures that could improve the housing situation of NEETs.

At the same time, the empirical material suggests that the dominant response of NEET youth to these affective hierarchies is not open contestation but withdrawal. Rather than mobilising protest or collective claims, many respondents describe strategies of avoidance, adaptation, and normalization of uncertainty. Feelings of shame, fatigue, and distrust in institutions limit the ability to articulate demands as citizens and to claim housing as a right. From a SAC perspective, this pattern can be interpreted as a specific form of negative policy feedback. Experiences of non-recognition and stigma do not lead to politicisation, but instead reinforce a quietist emotional climate in which the exclusion of NEETs from housing strategies remains largely uncontested. Repeated exposure to precarious housing and institutional non-recognition can gradually undermine dignity, making withdrawal appear more realistic

than collective claim-making. In this sense, affective governance operates through selective recognition, determining which forms of vulnerability are institutionally visible and politically actionable.

The affective framework shows that emotions, especially empathy, are not only individual reactions but also instruments of political power. In the context of housing, they serve to legitimise decisions, set priorities, and create boundaries between those who deserve support and those who remain invisible. As the preceding analysis has shown, affective governance operates unevenly across social groups (Zubrzycka-Czarnecka, 2025; Hoření Samec, 2024; Findor et al., 2023; Murphy & Levy, 2012). Political narratives often invest empathy in groups that meet standards of productivity and predictability, whether they are working young families, students, or economically active young people. In contrast, young NEETs, who are perceived as an unproductive, unstable, or problematic group, are often excluded from political sympathy and attention.

The research and analysis of NEETs thus points to a broader problem. Social and political empathy in housing policy is not neutral but selective, often targeting only certain groups while systematically bypassing others, either intentionally or unintentionally. Our regional analysis, and in particular our typology of existential and housing deprivation, shows how essential it is to actively introduce this concept into NEET research itself. Empirical findings confirm that without an analytical framework that works with the affective and political dimensions of housing, some of the problems remain invisible and therefore not reflected in public policies. At the same time, this is a challenge for a broader professional discourse. If researchers, analysts, and policy makers want to gain a more accurate understanding of the housing marginalisation of young NEETs, they must consciously work with how "deserving" and "undeserving" groups are constructed in the political sphere. The stories collected in this study, which highlight, in particular, the lack of shelters, limited housing availability, and discriminatory criteria employed by local governments, suggest that institutional measures often fail to treat NEET youth as a priority group within housing policy. The absence of political empathy is not just a lack of understanding, but an active mechanism that reproduces inequality. The SAC framework clarifies how deficits across recognition, dignity, security, and political empathy reinforce one another, producing layered forms of exclusion that exceed conventional material analyses.

Young NEETs therefore remain outside the scope of housing strategies, which are implicitly oriented towards economically more stable young people. Our empirical material repeatedly demonstrates that respondents facing the greatest housing instability were often those least able to satisfy bureaucratic or moral expectations of independence, productivity, or administrative compliance. In other words, if access to housing is to be understood as a fundamental social right, both discourse and policy must move beyond moralising distinctions between "deserving" and "undeserving" recipients of support. Research on NEETs clearly shows that without extending social and political empathy to this area, structural inequality is reproduced and the marginalisation of the most vulnerable young people is deepened. Given that respondents consistently described housing stabilisation as a prerequisite for employment, education, and psychological security, the data strongly suggest that

housing should be treated as a foundational rather than secondary policy intervention. Recognising housing as a fundamental right is also an important first step towards creating the stable conditions necessary for more intensive, sustainable, and effective support. This support can enable young people who are not in employment, education, or training to overcome chronic instability and start building a path to independence and inclusion. The findings emphasise that housing must be understood as a prerequisite for any meaningful activation or reintegration strategy. These findings indicate that housing exclusion among NEET youth is sustained not only by material scarcity, but also by institutionalised hierarchies of recognition that shape whose needs are politically legible. The integration of the concept of political empathy into policymaking and public debate is, therefore, essential to addressing these structural inequalities. From a SAC perspective, housing policy must be understood not merely as resource allocation, but as a citizenship-forming institution that shapes recognition, dignity, security, and political belonging.

Housing exclusion among NEET youth should therefore be understood not solely as deprivation of shelter, but as a multidimensional deficit of social-affective citizenship. From this perspective, housing for NEET youth must be approached as a matter of social rights or poverty reduction, and also as a question of social-affective citizenship. The analysis also invites us to think of housing for NEET youth in terms of a matter of social rights, poverty reduction, or a question of social-affective citizenship. Current arrangements in Slovakia produce a situation in which NEETs are present in the housing ecosystem as users of temporary shelters, informal tenancies or time-limited projects, but remain largely absent from the field of political empathy and from long-term housing strategies. Expanding supported housing and integrating the principle of political empathy into policy design would improve material conditions and transform the emotional experience of young NEETs from one of marginality to one of recognition and belonging. In the terms of SAC, such reforms would strengthen their position as full social-affective citizens whose access to housing supports not only survival, but recognition, dignity, and meaningful participation.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between housing insecurity and the lived experiences of young people in the NEET category in the Trnava region of Slovakia through the combined lens of housing sociology and Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC). The findings show that housing insecurity is not merely a secondary consequence of unemployment or educational disruption, but a fundamental structural condition that shapes and reproduces social exclusion. Housing insecurity, precarious income, limited family support, and fragmented institutional responses significantly influence the life trajectories of vulnerable NEET youth, particularly those leaving institutional care or lacking stable social networks. By applying the SAC framework, the study demonstrates that housing systems operate not only through the distribution of material resources but also through regimes of recognition that shape dignity, a sense of belonging, and political visibility. Current housing arrangements often place the

most vulnerable young people in the NEET category outside dominant frameworks of merit, thereby reinforcing both material deprivation and symbolic marginalisation. Selective political empathy and conditional support thus contribute to the reproduction of inequality.

Despite these contributions, several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the analysis is regionally specific, focusing on the Trnava region in Slovakia, which limits the general applicability of the findings to other contexts with different housing systems or welfare arrangements. While the regional focus provides important contextual depth, the results should be interpreted as analytically transferable rather than statistically representative. Second, the use of targeted snowball sampling was appropriate for accessing a relatively difficult-to-reach population such as NEET youth with weak institutional attachment, however, it may have introduced selection bias by overrepresenting individuals connected to existing support networks and underrepresenting more isolated cases. Third, while the qualitative design offers in-depth insights into lived experiences and structural conditions, it does not allow for broader statistical generalisation. Finally, although the application of the Social-Affective Citizenship framework provides a novel analytical perspective, its use remains exploratory and would benefit from further validation in different empirical settings.

Taken together, the findings suggest that stable and dignified housing should be understood as a fundamental condition for social integration, rather than as a reward for prior participation in the labour market or institutional conformity Policies targeting NEET youth should, therefore, place housing stabilisation, supported housing, and inclusive institutional recognition at the centre of social intervention. To address the intertwined structural, symbolic, and emotional dimensions of youth exclusion, it is essential to move beyond moralising distinctions between "deserving" and "undeserving" groups of the population. This study argues that housing policy should not be viewed merely as social assistance, but rather as an institution that shapes citizenship. Recognising housing as both a social right and a key dimension of socio-affective citizenship is essential for creating more equitable pathways to autonomy, inclusion, and meaningful social participation for vulnerable young people.

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Generation rent in a super-homeownership regime: emotional dimensions of housing insecurity in Hungary

Abstract

This article examines the emotional dimensions of housing insecurity among young adults in Hungary, a post-socialist housing system characterised by exceptionally high rates of owner occupation, residual public rental housing and a weakly regulated private rental sector. While the concept of Generation Rent has been widely used to describe the growing difficulties young adults face in accessing homeownership, its implications differ across housing regimes. In Hungary's super-homeownership regime, renting has expanded among younger cohorts, yet owner occupation remains strongly associated with stability, autonomy, adulthood and social respectability.

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Drawing on a mixed-methods research design, the article combines survey evidence on housing trajectories, tenure aspirations and intergenerational support with 30 semi-structured interviews conducted with young adults in different housing situations. The analysis shows that housing insecurity is experienced not solely as an affordability problem but rather as an affective and relational condition shaped by uncertainty, dependence, shame, blocked autonomy, and constrained future planning. The article applies the framework of social-affective citizenship to demonstrate how housing regimes distribute not only material opportunities, but also unequal experiences of emotional security, dignity, belonging, and legitimate adulthood. The findings highlight the central role of intergenerational transfers in mediating access to stable housing, while also revealing the emotional ambivalence associated with family dependence. The Hungarian case suggests that Generation Rent in post-socialist super-homeownership systems cannot be understood simply as a tenure shift towards renting, but rather as a contradiction between persistent ownership-centred norms and increasingly insecure housing pathways among younger generations.

Keywords: housing insecurity, social-affective citizenship, youth housing, intergenerational inequality, generation rent

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the concept of *generation rent* has gained increasing prominence in academic and policy debates across Europe and beyond. The term refers to growing numbers of young adults who remain in the private rental sector for prolonged periods due to structural barriers to homeownership and declining access to affordable or social housing (Hoolachan et al., 2017; Lennartz et al., 2016). Initially conceptualised in the United Kingdom, the concept has since been applied to a wider range of housing systems, including post-socialist contexts characterised by high rates of owner occupation and limited rental alternatives (McKee et al., 2017; Hearne, 2020; Csizmady & Kőszeghy, 2022).

The emergence of generation rent is closely connected to broader socio-economic transformations, including labour market flexibilisation, housing financialisation, welfare retrenchment, and rising intergenerational inequalities (Forrest & Hirayama, 2015; Lennartz et al., 2016). Across Europe, younger generations increasingly face rising housing costs, insecure labour market conditions, and declining access to stable housing pathways. At the same time, housing opportunities are strongly shaped by national housing regimes and welfare arrangements, which influence both tenure structures and the social meanings attached to different housing forms (Kemeny, 1995; Stephens et al., 2015).

Research demonstrates that insecure rental housing may generate uncertainty, stress, diminished control over future planning, and feelings of blocked adulthood, particularly in societies where homeownership functions as a dominant social norm (Byrne & McArdle, 2022; McKee et al., 2017; 2020). Rather than limiting mobility in a simple sense, insecure renting often produces forms of forced or undesired mobility

that undermine residential stability and long-term planning. These dynamics are especially relevant in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe, where strongly ownership-oriented housing systems continue to shape both housing opportunities and the social meanings attached to different tenure forms.

This article examines the emotional dimensions of housing insecurity among young adults in Hungary through the framework of social-affective citizenship. Rather than treating emotions as secondary consequences of housing inequalities, the article conceptualises housing regimes as affective systems that distribute not only material resources but also experiences of security, recognition, dignity, and belonging. In doing so, the article contributes to emerging debates in housing and social policy scholarship concerning the emotional consequences of housing precarity and the unequal distribution of secure adulthood across generations. Combining quantitative and qualitative evidence, the analysis explores how Hungary's super-homeownership regime shapes both the structural and emotional dimensions of housing precarity among younger generations.

In this article, we apply a broad concept of housing insecurity, reflecting recent theoretical considerations which consider it as a multidimensional concept (Watson & Carter, 2020), including unaffordability, physical problems, forced moves and overcrowding (Routhier, 2018), affordability instability, safety, quality, as well as neighbourhood factors (Cox et al., 2017; Leopold et al., 2016). Applying this to the Hungarian context, by housing insecurity we refer to uncertain, unstable or weakly controllable access to housing, including legally insecure renting and affordability pressures, both potentially leading to forced mobility, as well as insecurity arising from the strong dependence on family support. Housing inequality is understood as the unequal access to adequate housing in terms of legal security, affordability, and services, as well as institutions and infrastructure, habitability, and location (UN, 1991). In the Hungarian context, such inequalities are shaped not only by income and labour market position, but also by unequal intergenerational support. The article treats housing insecurity and inequality as both material and affective conditions, shaping experiences of autonomy, dignity, recognition, and belonging.

The article proceeds as follows. First, it discusses the relationship between generation rent, housing regimes, and the emotional consequences of housing insecurity. Second, it presents the Hungarian housing context and the analytical framework of social-affective citizenship. Third, the article introduces its mixed-methods research design. Finally, the empirical sections analyse the structural expansion of insecure rental pathways and the lived emotional experiences associated with housing precarity among young adults in Hungary.

2. Literature review

2.1. Generation rent and housing regimes

The concept of generation rent emerged primarily within housing systems characterised by declining housing affordability, expanding private rental sectors, and

increasingly unequal access to homeownership (Hoolachan et al., 2017; Lennartz et al., 2016; McKee et al., 2017). Initially developed in the United Kingdom, the term refers to younger generations who remain in rental housing for prolonged periods due to structural barriers to ownership and the shrinking availability of affordable or social housing. While the phenomenon first gained visibility in Anglo-Saxon contexts, subsequent research demonstrates that similar processes increasingly characterise a wide range of European housing systems, including post-socialist societies (Hearne, 2020; Waldron, 2023).

The explanatory power of the generation rent framework, however, depends strongly on the institutional characteristics of different housing regimes. As Kemeny (1981; 1995) argued, housing systems differ fundamentally in terms of the relationship between owner occupation, social renting, and market renting. In dualist housing regimes, homeownership dominates both materially and culturally, while rental housing remains residualised, weakly regulated, and socially stigmatised. Under such conditions, renting is often perceived not as a legitimate long-term tenure form but as a temporary, inferior, or constrained housing solution. Consequently, exclusion from homeownership carries not only material disadvantages but also symbolic and emotional consequences.

These dynamics are particularly relevant in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe, where mass privatisation after 1989/1990 created exceptionally high rates of owner occupation and sharply reduced public rental housing (Hegedüs & Tosics, 1996; Stephens et al., 2015). Hungary represents an especially pronounced example of what Toussaint et al. (2012) describe as a "super-homeownership regime", (Csizmady et al., 2017). In this regime owner occupation became simultaneously the dominant tenure form, a key mechanism of welfare provision, and a culturally embedded marker of adulthood, autonomy, and social respectability. Public rental housing was residualised, while private renting remained weakly institutionalised and poorly regulated (Hegedüs & Horváth, 2018).

Within this context, the emergence of generation rent does not signify a transition towards tenure pluralism comparable to some Western European societies. Rather, it reflects a growing contradiction between persistent ownership-oriented norms and increasingly constrained access to ownership among younger generations, a tension also identified in research on homeowner societies, where the normative promise of homeownership increasingly diverges from actual access to ownership (Arundel & Ronald, 2021). Young adults are therefore frequently positioned between strong cultural expectations of ownership and structural conditions that delay or prevent access to stable housing pathways.

The rise of housing precarity among younger generations is closely connected to broader processes of labour market flexibilisation, welfare retrenchment, housing financialisation, and growing intergenerational inequality (Forrest & Hirayama, 2015; Lennartz et al., 2016). Across Europe, rising housing costs and declining affordability increasingly shift responsibility for housing access from public institutions towards households and families. Under these conditions, intergenerational transfers become central mechanisms mediating access to owner occupation (Arundel & Ronald, 2016; Toussaint et al., 2012).

Recent scholarship has further demonstrated that generation rent should not be understood as a socially homogeneous category. Howard (2025), for example, distinguishes between delayed buyers, long-term tenants, housing precariat groups, and second-generation owners whose housing pathways are shaped by differing levels of family support and structural position. This perspective is particularly relevant in Hungary, where housing inequalities are increasingly organised through unequal access to intergenerational wealth, and other forms of family support (Csizmady et al., 2022; Kőszeghy et al., 2023).

2.2. Housing transitions and emotional consequences

Housing transitions have long represented a central component of the transition to adulthood, closely connected to processes of family formation, labour market integration, and the achievement of social independence (Clapham, 2002; Forrest & Yip, 2013). In strongly ownership-oriented societies, access to stable housing is frequently interpreted not only as a material achievement but also as a key marker of adulthood, autonomy, and social belonging. Consequently, difficulties in accessing secure housing increasingly affect not only economic conditions but also emotional well-being, identity formation, and perceptions of future life trajectories.

Recent housing scholarship has increasingly emphasised the emotional and affective dimensions of housing insecurity. While earlier research primarily focused on affordability, tenure structures, and material deprivation, newer approaches highlight how housing precarity shapes everyday experiences of uncertainty, anxiety, shame, and instability (McKee et al., 2017, 2020; Waldron, 2023). Housing insecurity therefore extends beyond physical shelter conditions and becomes embedded in broader emotional experiences related to safety, recognition, and control over one's future.

The emotional significance of housing is closely connected to the concept of ontological security developed by Giddens (1991) and later applied to housing studies by Dupuis and Thorns (1998). From this perspective, housing provides not only physical protection but also continuity, predictability, and emotional stability in everyday life. Secure housing can support feelings of control, privacy, and belonging, while insecure or unstable housing conditions may generate chronic uncertainty and emotional stress. Research increasingly demonstrates that repeated mobility, insecure tenure arrangements, overcrowding, and affordability pressures can undermine ontological security, particularly among younger generations navigating uncertain housing pathways (Hoolachan et al., 2017; McKee et al., 2020).

These dynamics are especially pronounced within contexts characterised by strong cultural expectations surrounding homeownership. In societies where owner occupation functions as the normative ideal of adulthood and social success, prolonged renting may become associated with perceptions of failure, dependency, or incomplete adulthood (Arundel & Ronald, 2021; McKee et al., 2017). Housing insecurity, therefore, acquires important symbolic and emotional dimensions connected to dignity, recognition, and self-worth.

At the same time, emotional experiences of housing precarity are not uniform. Existing research shows that young adults often develop pragmatic coping strategies and adaptive housing practices in response to constrained housing opportunities (Clapham et al., 2014). Some forms of renting may also provide flexibility, mobility, and temporary autonomy, particularly within urban labour markets characterised by uncertainty and delayed life-course transitions. Nevertheless, these adaptive strategies frequently coexist with ongoing insecurity and the persistent normative dominance of ownership.

The post-socialist context introduces additional complexities into these processes. In Hungary, housing transitions are strongly shaped by the legacy of mass privatisation, limited rental alternatives, and welfare arrangements that strongly rely on family-based support mechanisms (Hegedüs & Horváth, 2018; Stephens et al., 2015). Therefore, access to stable housing depends heavily on intergenerational transfers and other forms of family assistance, producing substantial inequalities between young adults with differing family resources. As a result, housing insecurity often becomes intertwined with experiences of dependence, delayed autonomy, and constrained social mobility.

These broader transformations suggest that housing transitions among younger generations can no longer be understood solely through linear life-course models based on stable progression towards owner occupation. Instead, housing pathways increasingly involve fragmented trajectories, prolonged insecurity, reversibility, and emotionally ambivalent forms of dependence. For that reason, understanding these experiences requires approaches capable of linking structural housing inequalities with the subjective and emotional dimensions of housing precarity.

Importantly, housing precarity within super-homeownership systems is not experienced solely as a material condition. Because owner occupation retains strong symbolic significance, prolonged renting often becomes associated with insecurity, blocked adulthood, dependency, and social failure (McKee et al., 2020). Housing inequalities therefore operate simultaneously as economic, social, and emotional inequalities. Understanding the Hungarian case consequently requires analytical approaches capable of linking structural housing conditions to the affective dimensions of housing insecurity and exclusion.

2.3. Social-affective citizenship

The concept of social-affective citizenship provides a useful framework for understanding how housing insecurity shapes not only material living conditions, but also experiences of belonging, recognition, dignity, and emotional security. Building on broader theories of citizenship that extend beyond formal legal rights (Marshall, 1950), affective approaches emphasise that citizenship is also experienced emotionally through everyday relations of inclusion, exclusion, dependence, and recognition (Johnson, 2010; Fortier, 2010). In Szarfenberg's conceptualisation, social-affective citizenship draws attention to the affective dimensions of social membership and to the ways in which

welfare arrangements and social policy regimes shape citizens' emotional relations to institutions, social rights, and everyday life chances (Szarfenberg, 2026).

This perspective is particularly relevant for housing, since access to secure housing mediates not only material well-being, but also the capacity to live an autonomous, socially recognised, and emotionally stable adult life. Housing is, therefore, not simply a physical resource or economic asset, but also a key site through which individuals experience security, control, and social legitimacy. Conversely, insecure housing conditions may generate feelings of uncertainty, stigma, vulnerability, and diminished social belonging.

The social-affective citizenship approach is particularly relevant in contexts where homeownership functions as a dominant social norm. Under strongly ownership-oriented housing regimes, owner occupation frequently becomes associated with moral ideas of responsibility, adulthood, success, and deservingness, while prolonged renting may be interpreted as a sign of dependency, instability, or incomplete adulthood (McKee et al., 2020). In such contexts, exclusion from homeownership can produce not only material disadvantage but also emotional forms of marginalisation and symbolic exclusion.

This article draws particularly on approaches that conceptualise affective citizenship through multiple interconnected dimensions of everyday life. These dimensions include: (1) emotional security and stability; (2) autonomy and control over life trajectories; (3) recognition, dignity, and social legitimacy; and (4) belonging and relational embeddedness within family and social networks. Together, these dimensions make it possible to examine how housing inequalities become emotionally experienced and socially negotiated.

First, emotional security refers to the degree of predictability, permanence, and stability associated with housing conditions. Insecure rental arrangements, repeated mobility, and uncertain housing futures may undermine feelings of ontological security and continuity. Second, autonomy concerns the ability to establish an independent adult life and exercise control over everyday decisions and future planning. Housing dependence on parents or unstable rental pathways may therefore constrain perceived adulthood and self-determination.

Third, recognition refers to the symbolic and moral dimensions of housing pathways. In ownership-oriented societies, access to owner occupation often functions as a marker of social respectability and successful adulthood, while renting may become associated with stigma, failure, or downward mobility. Finally, belonging captures the relational dimensions of housing experiences, including dependence on family support, intergenerational solidarity, and the emotional ambivalence surrounding reliance on kinship networks under conditions of housing insecurity.

The social-affective citizenship framework also makes it possible to connect macro-level housing structures with subjective experiences of precarity. Rather than treating housing insecurity exclusively as an economic condition, this perspective highlights how structural inequalities are internalised, emotionally negotiated, and reproduced through everyday housing experiences.

In this article, the framework is operationalised through the analysis of emotional experiences associated with insecure housing pathways among young adults in Hungary, including insecurity, instability, blocked autonomy, dependence on family support, stigma surrounding renting, and perceptions of failed or delayed adulthood. By combining quantitative and qualitative evidence, the article examines how the Hungarian super-homeownership regime shapes both the structural and affective dimensions of housing precarity among younger generations.

3. Hungarian context

Following the post-socialist transition after 1989/1990, Hungary developed a strongly ownership-oriented housing regime characterised by high rates of owner occupation, limited rental alternatives, and a weakly institutionalised rental sector (Csizmady et al., 2017). Large-scale privatisation of formerly state-owned housing fundamentally transformed the structure of the housing system and substantially reduced the public rental stock (Hegedüs & Tosics, 1996). As a consequence, owner occupation came to be the dominant tenure form, while social rental housing became residual and private renting developed in a fragmented and weakly regulated manner.

By the early 2020s, approximately 90% of the Hungarian population lived in owner-occupied housing, placing Hungary among the most ownership-dominated housing systems in Europe (Eurostat, 2025). Housing policies after the transition further reinforced this orientation by prioritising owner occupation through subsidised mortgage schemes, family-based non-refundable housing support programmes and tax incentives connected primarily to ownership pathways (Hegedüs & Horváth, 2018). The Hungarian housing system, therefore, operates as what previous scholarship describes as a "super-homeownership regime" (Toussaint et al., 2012), in which housing functions not only as shelter but also as a central mechanism of welfare provision, social security, and intergenerational wealth accumulation. Within this framework, access to homeownership became closely connected to social mobility, family formation, and middle-class status, while alternative housing pathways remained weakly developed, and institutionally insecure.

These structural conditions significantly shape the housing experiences of younger generations. Over the past decade, rising housing prices, expanding housing inequalities, labour-market insecurity, and the limited affordability of owner occupation have increasingly delayed access to independent housing among young adults. At the same time, private renting has become more important in housing trajectories, while remaining institutionally weak, socially less legitimised and often insecure compared to owner occupation (Csizmady et al., 2022).

The private rental sector remains limited in size, but its role has increased markedly since the early 2000s (Csizmady & Kőszeghy, 2022). Previous estimates placed the PRS at approximately 6–8% of the housing stock. According to Housing Survey data, the share of private rental housing increased from 2.5% in 2003 to 6% in 2015, while among households moving on the housing market, the proportion moving into private rental housing rose from 11% in 1996–2003 to 28% in 2005–2015 (HCSO, 2005;

HCSO, 2016). These changes are particularly visible among younger households. Between 1999 and 2015, the proportion of households with a household head under 35 living in the PRS increased from 10.2% to 30.3%, while owner occupation among young households declined from 83.1% to 66.4% (Balogi & Kőszeghy, 2019). These figures indicate the structural emergence of a Hungarian form of generation rent, nevertheless, it is within a housing regime where ownership remains the dominant normative and policy model (Csizmady & Kőszeghy, 2022).

This expansion of private renting has not been accompanied by a comparable strengthening of tenant protection or affordable rental provision. Since the post-socialist transition, the Hungarian state has applied a largely laissez-faire regulatory approach to the private rental sector, leaving most aspects of landlord–tenant relations to private negotiation. The absence of effective supervision, dispute-resolution mechanisms, and law enforcement, combined with a high level of informality, produces significant tenure-security risks for tenants (Hegedüs, 2017; Hegedüs et al., 2014; Kováts, 2017; Csizmady et al., 2022). Qualitative research has also pointed to the formation of a low-end segment of the PRS, in which highly vulnerable households live in seriously inadequate housing conditions (Ámon & Balogi, 2018).

Recent data further confirm the limited capacity of the Hungarian housing system to provide secure and affordable alternatives to ownership. Between 2010 and 2024, Hungary recorded one of the steepest increases in residential property prices in the EU, with the house price index rising by around 234% (Eurostat, 2025). In Budapest, in 2024 Q2 an average of 11 years of average local income was needed to purchase a median-priced 75-square-metre dwelling, placing the city among the least affordable capital cities in the EU (MNB, 2024). Based on the 2022 Census, Hungary had around 4.6 million dwellings, of which roughly 12–13% were unoccupied or not used as a main residence. The public rental sector remains extremely small: municipally owned dwellings accounted for only 2.4% of occupied dwellings (HCSO, 2023).

In Budapest, the rental sector is larger than the national average but remains limited in relation to demand. The National Bank of Hungary (Magyar Nemzeti Bank, MNB) estimates suggest around 140,000 long-term rental dwellings in the capital, while rental housing still accounts for less than one fifth of occupied dwellings (MNB, 2024). Housing market reports also highlight the significant role of investment demand in Budapest. In 2025 Q1, investors accounted for 37% of home buyers and 35% of sellers in the capital, while earlier MNB data indicate that investment-purpose purchases had fluctuated at high levels in previous years (MNB, 2025).

At the same time, housing-related public expenditure remains strongly oriented towards non-socially targeted ownership support. In 2023, more than 90% of public expenditure on housing was not socially targeted, while socially targeted homeownership subsidies were essentially non-existent (Habitat for Humanity Hungary, 2024). Programmes such as the Family Housing Allowance Scheme (CSOK), its rural variant and the recent CSOK Plus loan scheme have channelled substantial public resources into subsidising ownership, particularly towards middle-income households with children and relatively stable employment. Young adults with lower incomes, insecure jobs or limited family resources often remain excluded from effective housing support. Demand-side subsidies introduced without a parallel expansion of affordable rental or

social housing have also contributed to housing price inflation, particularly in metropolitan markets, reducing the effective accessibility of ownership for first-time buyers without substantial private or family resources.

Therefore, housing inequalities are increasingly shaped by intergenerational transfers and unequal access to family support. Access to owner occupation frequently depends on parental financial assistance through early asset transfer, inherited property or informal family loans. Young adults without access to such resources face substantially greater difficulties entering owner occupation and are more likely to remain in insecure rental pathways. Consequently, housing trajectories increasingly reproduce broader patterns of social inequality and inherited advantage (Csizmady et al., 2022).

The foreign-currency mortgage crisis of the late 2000s further intensified housing insecurity and significantly shaped public perceptions of housing debt. Many households experienced severe financial difficulties following exchange-rate fluctuations and rising repayment burdens, contributing to widespread distrust towards mortgage borrowing and long-term indebtedness (Bohle, 2014; Augustyniak et al., 2022). The emotional impact of the crisis was still evident years later in the attitudes toward housing expressed by some of our young respondents.

Within this context, the emergence of generation rent in Hungary reflects a growing contradiction between persistent ownership-oriented social norms and increasingly constrained access to stable housing pathways. Young adults are frequently positioned between strong cultural expectations of homeownership and structural conditions characterised by affordability pressures, insecure rental housing, and strong dependence on family-based support mechanisms. Consequently, many experience prolonged dependence on parental support, delayed residential autonomy and forms of forced or undesired mobility that undermine residential stability and long-term planning.

4. Methodology

This article applies a mixedmethods research design to examine the relationship between housing insecurity, tenure trajectories, and the emotional dimensions of young adulthood in Hungary's strongly ownershiporiented housing regime. It draws on selected material from a broader project on housing access, mortgage-related risks, housing inequalities and strategies, and combines the authors' own survey and interview data with secondary national surveys to contextualise structural trends in housing conditions among younger cohorts.

4.1. Analytical framework and operationalisation

The analytical framework links structural perspectives on housing inequality and welfare regimes with the social-affective citizenship approach, which conceptualises housing insecurity as shaping four interrelated dimensions of everyday life: emotional security, autonomy, recognition, and belonging. These dimensions are examined

primarily through qualitative narratives, while the survey data identify the structural housing positions, tenure trajectories and intergenerational inequalities within which these emotional experiences are produced.

In operational terms, emotional security refers to the degree of stability, continuity, and predictability associated with housing conditions, including repeated moves, unstable rental contracts, and deteriorating housing quality. Autonomy captures the extent to which young adults can establish and maintain an independent household, free from enforced dependence on parents or precarious tenures. Recognition concerns the symbolic and moral status of different housing pathways in a super-homeownership regime, where owner occupation is linked to dignity and successful adulthood while renting is often devalued. Belonging focuses on relational embeddedness, intergenerational solidarity and the ambivalent emotions associated with family-based housing support as a hidden welfare mechanism.

The four dimensions provide the core interpretative framework, supplemented by cross-cutting attention to institutional trust, spatial justice, and generational inequality.

The qualitative coding scheme specified how recurring emotional themes – such as housing instability, affordability pressure, blocked autonomy, family dependence, shame, fear and distrust of mortgage debt, spatial sacrifice, and the normalisation of precarity – map onto these four dimensions, and this structure also guides the organisation of the empirical sections. Although the quantitative data allow for descriptive differentiation by age, parental property background and housing status, the article does not aim to provide a full multivariate intersectional analysis by gender and education; instead, these variables are used to contextualise qualitative interpretations of housing insecurity and unequal access to housing resources within the social-affective citizenship framework.

4.2. Quantitative data sources

The primary quantitative source is a survey of young adults living in Budapest and agglomeration area, conducted between December 2017 and January 2018 by the Institute for Sociology, Centre for Social Sciences, using computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). A random household sampling strategy was applied, selecting households with at least one person aged 18–35, within which one eligible young adult was invited to participate, yielding a final sample of 800 respondents. The survey was designed to provide descriptive evidence on the housing circumstances, trajectories, preferences and aspirations of young adults in the capital rather than nationally representative estimates for all Hungarian young people.

The questionnaire covered multiple aspects of housing and tenure, including current housing status, previous moves, housing access strategies, tenure preferences, attitudes towards private renting and mortgage borrowing, perceptions of housing security and housing-related risks, and expectations concerning future housing pathways. The sample included respondents with diverse socio-demographic and housing positions: approximately 40% were men and 60% women; roughly one fifth had tertiary education, while the majority had completed secondary education; most

were in employment, with smaller groups of students and unemployed or otherwise inactive respondents. In terms of housing position, respondents were distributed across several tenure categories, including owner or partial owner, family member of an owner, municipal or service tenant, private or company tenant and other legal arrangements, which allows comparison of how different housing positions intersect with emotional experiences of security, autonomy, and recognition.

The analysis also draws on a nationally representative survey of the adult population (N≈1,500) conducted by the Centre for Social Sciences in cooperation with TÁRKI, which contained a housing module on access strategies, openness towards different tenure forms, attitudes to private renting, housing aspirations, affordability concerns and mortgage-related difficulties. In this article, these data are used only as contextual background where relevant; the primary quantitative analysis is based on the authors' Budapest survey.

To situate the authors' findings within longer-term structural developments, the analysis further draws on the 2015 Housing Survey of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO/KSH), a nationally representative survey of approximately 20,000 addresses selected from a sampling frame based on the 2011 Census and updated with newly constructed dwellings. The survey, which covers both occupied and unoccupied dwellings, was implemented through enumerator-administered electronic questionnaires with an option for online self-completion, and the final database was weighted and calibrated to population and housing benchmarks by region, settlement type, gender, age group, dwelling stock and vacant dwellings. In this article, HCSO data are used to illustrate broader shifts in tenure patterns and the expansion of private renting among younger households; since they refer to national housing trends while the authors' survey concerns young adults in Budapest, the two sources are treated as complementary rather than directly comparable.

Finally, selected indicators from the nationally representative Hungarian Youth 2020 Survey (Székely, 2021), conducted among 8,000 respondents aged 15–29, are used to situate youth housing aspirations and the continued importance of homeownership and secure housing in young people's life-course expectations. As this dataset contains only limited information on rental experiences, tenure insecurity, intergenerational transfers, and housing-related emotions, it is not analysed as part of the primary empirical material but serves solely as a secondary contextual source.

4.3. Qualitative component and analysis

The qualitative component consists of 30 semi-structured interviews conducted between summer 2017 and spring 2018 by trained members of the research team. Interviewees were aged between 21 and 35 years. The sample was purposively designed to capture diversity in housing positions and trajectories rather than statistical representativeness, including young adults living in private rental housing, remaining in the parental home, entering owner occupation with varying levels of family support, experiencing unstable housing mobility and facing severe housing exclusion or homelessness.

Respondents also varied in terms of gender, age, educational attainment, labour--market position, and settlement of origin (Budapest, regional towns, villages, and the Budapest agglomeration), as well as in their degree of access to intergenerational housing resources. This heterogeneity made it possible to explore how similar structural pressures are experienced and negotiated across different social positions and housing pathways. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and anonymised prior to analysis. Interview quotations are followed in parentheses by the anonymised respondent code (e.g., R24) assigned to each interviewee (Table 1). The interview guide covered childhood and family housing trajectories, the circumstances of leaving the parental home, experiences of renting and homeownership, perceptions of mortgage borrowing, housing-related emotions, and insecurities, reliance on family support, and expectations concerning future housing pathways.

Table 1. Characteristics of interview participants

ID	Sex/ age	Settlement	Housing	ID	Sex/ age	Settlement	Housing
R1	F23	B	O	R16	M33	B	PR
R2	M27	B	O	R17	F29	B	O
R3	F31	R	F	R18	F29	A	F
R4	M26	B	O	R19	F30	B	O
R5	F22	B	F	R20	F24	B	PR
R6	M32	B	F	R21	F34	B	O
R7	M27	R	F	R22	M21	A	F
R8	F35	A	O	R23	M35	B	PR/O
R9	N34	R	O	R24	M27	B	PR
R10	F28	R	PR	R25	M23	B	PR/O
R11	M33	B	F	R26	M25	R	F
R12	N27	B	F	R27	M29	G	O
R13	F25	B	PR	R28	M34	R	H
R14	M29	B	F	R29	M33	V	SR
R15	M31	A	F	R30	F29	B	O

Notes: F = female; M = male; N = not stated. O: B = Budapest; A = Budapest agglomeration; R = regional/small town; V = village; G = Greece. H: O = owner-occupied; F = family/partner-owned; PR = private rental; PR/O = renter owning property; H = homeless; SR = seeking social rental.

The qualitative analysis combined inductive thematic coding with theoretically informed analytical categories derived from the social-affective citizenship framework. In the first stage, inductive coding was used to identify recurrent themes emerging from respondents' narratives, including experiences of housing instability, affordability pressure, family dependence, uncertainty, shame, blocked autonomy, delayed adulthood, distrust towards mortgage debt, spatial trade-offs, and coping strategies in the face of precarious housing pathways. In the second stage, these empirically

generated codes were reorganised around the four dimensions of emotional security, autonomy, recognition, and belonging, which structure both the interpretation and presentation of the findings. Coding was conducted manually and iteratively, with codes refined through repeated reading of the transcripts and careful attention to passages in which respondents explicitly connected housing conditions to emotions, self-perceptions, family relations or future life plans. Quotations included in the article were selected because they exemplify recurring patterns across interviews rather than exceptional individual cases.

The mixed-methods design links structural patterns in Hungary's housing regime with young adults' lived experiences. Survey and national data identify tenure insecurity, affordability pressures, and intergenerational dependence, while interviews show how these constraints shape belonging, autonomy, recognition, and social adulthood.

4.4. Temporal scope and limitations

The 2017–2018 data capture a pre-COVID phase in the emergence of generation rent in Hungary and should not be treated as a description of current market conditions. They nevertheless remain valuable because comparable mixed-methods evidence is scarce and key features of Hungary's housing regime – super-homeownership tenure structure, weak private rental sector institutionalisation, reliance on family support, and limited access to secure housing – have persisted. The data therefore continue to illuminate the emotional mechanisms of housing insecurity and provide a benchmark for future research.

Parts of the structural analysis based on the survey and interview material have informed previous publications on generation rent, tenure choice, intergenerational transfers, and housing mobility in Hungary (Csizmady et al., 2017; Csizmady & Kőszeghy, 2022; Csizmady et al., 2022). The present article re-analyses this material from a distinct perspective by placing the emotional dimensions of housing insecurity and the framework of social-affective citizenship at the centre of the analysis.

5. Structural housing patterns among young adults

5.1. Ownership aspirations

Despite the growing role of private renting in young adults' housing trajectories, homeownership remains the dominant housing ideal in Hungary. Authors' survey findings show that ownership continued to be strongly associated with stability, security, independence, and successful adulthood (Figure 1). Among the most common associations linked to owner occupation were "goal", "security", and "stability", while rental housing was more frequently associated with "cost", "uncertainty", and "not mine".

Figure 1. Word clouds illustrating the initial associations evoked by owner-occupied and rental housing.

privately owned apartment rented apartment

Source: Authors' compilation, based on the authors' survey, 2017/2018.

Survey data from HCSO 2015 further indicate that nearly 80% of young adults identified homeownership as their long-term housing goal, while the Hungarian Youth 2020 survey found that only around 10% of respondents aged 15–29 considered homeownership unimportant. These findings reflect the continued normative dominance of ownership within Hungarian society (Csizmady & Kőszeghy, 2022).

At the same time, clear tensions emerge between aspirations and realistic housing opportunities. Rising housing prices over the previous decade, affordability constraints, and limited access to financial resources have increasingly restricted access to ownership. Although ownership remained the preferred long-term tenure form, only 28.5% of respondents expected to become homeowners within the following five years, while 39.4% anticipated remaining in rental housing (Table 2).

Table 2. Homeownership aspirations and expected housing trajectories among young adults in Hungary

Indicator	% of respondents
Homeownership as long-term goal	~80%
Expect to become homeowner within 5 years	28.5%
Expect to remain in rental housing	39.4%

Source: Authors' survey 2017/2018.

Young adults in Budapest and larger cities were somewhat more likely to regard homeownership as non-essential; however, this difference should be interpreted cautiously, since it may partly reflect the higher prevalence of renting and stronger housing market pressures in the capital rather than a straightforward attitudinal shift.

Overall, the findings suggest that while ownership remained the dominant normative aspiration, actual housing trajectories among young adults are becoming increasingly delayed and uncertain.

5.2. Renting and insecurity

The findings indicate a substantial expansion of private renting among younger cohorts in Hungary. Between 1999 and 2015, the proportion of young households living in the private rental sector increased from 10.2% to 30.3%, while owner occupation among young households declined from 83.1% to 66.4% (HCSO, 2016) (Table 3). In Budapest, 37.7% of young households lived in private rental housing by 2015. Moreover, according to the authors' 2017/2018 survey, 43.3% of young Budapest residents had lived in private rental housing at some point in their housing trajectories.

Table 3. Changing housing tenure patterns among young adults in Hungary (1999–2015)

Housing tenure among young households	1999	2015
Owner occupation	83.1%	66.4%
Private rental sector	10.2%	30.3%
Private rental sector in Budapest	–	37.7%

Source: Authors' compilation based on HCSO data (Csizmady et al, 2022).

Despite this structural expansion, renting continued to be perceived primarily as a constrained or temporary housing solution. According to our survey, 82.1% of respondents believed that tenants live in rental housing because they cannot afford homeownership, while fewer than one in five considered renting compatible with their preferred housing situation. This suggests that renting was perceived primarily as a constrained rather than fully legitimate long-term housing pathway. This interpretation was stable across age groups: 75.8% of respondents aged 18–23, 79.7% of those aged 24–29 and 80.3% of those aged 30–35 associated renting primarily with the inability to access owner occupation (Table 4).

Table 4. Perceived reason for renting by age group

Age group	Renting fits life situation	Cannot access ownership
18–23	19.1%	75.8%
24–29	15.6%	79.7%
30–35	17.0%	80.3%

Source: Authors' survey 2017/2018.

The differences between age groups are relatively modest, suggesting that the perception of renting as a constrained housing position is not confined to the youngest respondents or to a specific early life-course phase. Rather, it appears as a more

general normative pattern across young adulthood. This indicates that private renting was not yet socially normalised in 2017–2018 as a legitimate long-term tenure option, even among cohorts for whom rental experience has become increasingly common. The data, therefore, point to a tension between the structural expansion of renting and its continued symbolic devaluation within Hungary's ownership-oriented housing regime.

Further survey evidence confirms this ambivalence. Among respondents for whom long-term renting was a relevant scenario, 40.4% considered extended renting at least partly conceivable, while 24.3% rejected it and 28.9% expressed ambivalence. Respondents with direct rental experience evaluated renting somewhat more positively, recognising advantages such as flexibility and urban accessibility. However, these pragmatic attitudes did not fundamentally challenge the broader normative dominance of owner occupation.

The findings, therefore, point to a contradictory situation in which private renting became increasingly widespread structurally, while remaining socially and emotionally weakly legitimised within the Hungarian housing regime.

5.3. Intergenerational inequalities

The findings highlight the central role of intergenerational transfers and other forms of family support in shaping housing opportunities among young adults. Access to homeownership increasingly depends on parental financial assistance through early asset transfer, inherited assets, family loans, and accumulated savings. According to our survey nearly 80% of young urban homeowners received substantial family support, most commonly through down payments, inheritance, or interest-free family loans.

Housing ownership was also closely related to residential autonomy. While 88.7% of respondents who owned housing property lived independently, 61.3% of those without property still lived with their parents. This underlines the role of property ownership in mediating not only tenure position, but also the ability to establish an independent adult household. Young adults without access to such resources face substantially greater difficulties entering owner occupation and are more likely to remain in insecure rental pathways. The strongly ownership-oriented housing system, the weakly regulated rental sector, and the limited availability of affordable housing further reinforce these inequalities.

The findings also suggest that the foreign-currency mortgage crisis remained an important reference point in shaping housing attitudes among younger generations for years after the crisis. At the time of the survey and interviews, mortgage borrowing was still frequently associated with financial risk, vulnerability, and insecurity, contributing to cautious or delayed housing decisions.

The survey also shows a strong association between parental property ownership and young adults' current housing situation. Among respondents whose parents owned housing property, 79.3% lived either as owners or as family members of owners, while only 18.8% were tenants. By contrast, among respondents whose parents did not own

housing property, only 38.9% lived in owner-occupied housing, while 49.2% were tenants, and 11.9% lived as beneficiary flat users. These descriptive findings indicate that access to family property strongly structures young adults' housing pathways (Table 5).

Table 5. Parental property ownership and young adults' current housing situation

Parents own housing property	Owner/family member of owner	Tenant	Beneficiary flat user
Yes	79.3%	18.8%	1.9%
No	38.9%	49.2%	11.9%

Source: Authors' survey, 2017/2018.

Overall, the quantitative findings demonstrate that the expansion of insecure rental pathways among younger generations was closely connected to broader processes of intergenerational inequality and unequal access to family wealth within Hungary's super-homeownership regime.

These findings are consistent with our earlier multivariable analysis of Hungarian housing mobility, which showed that lack of access to intergenerational transfers, savings, and mortgage finance significantly increases the likelihood of remaining in the rental sector, while non-refundable family support and own savings are associated with mobility within the owner-occupied sector (Csizmady et al., 2022).

Although these descriptive findings cannot by themselves explain the subjective meaning of housing insecurity, they identify the structural conditions within which such experiences are produced and interpreted. While the quantitative findings reveal broader structural patterns, the qualitative interviews demonstrate how these conditions were emotionally experienced and negotiated in everyday life.

Taken together, the descriptive findings based on the 2017–2018 authors' survey show that young adults' housing insecurity was already structured by more than individual income or tenure preference at that time. The expansion of renting, the persistent aspiration towards ownership and the unequal role of parental property ownership together reveal a housing regime in which secure adulthood was increasingly conditional upon inherited or family-mediated resources. The following qualitative section therefore examines how these structural inequalities were translated into emotional experiences of insecurity, blocked autonomy, dependence and uncertain adulthood among young adults in this pre-COVID phase of Hungary's generation rent.

6. Lived emotional consequences of housing insecurity

The qualitative interviews revealed that housing insecurity among young adults in Hungary extends far beyond material deprivation or affordability problems. Respondents frequently described housing as a central dimension through which questions of stability, autonomy, adulthood, dignity, and future orientation are experienced and negotiated. The findings demonstrate that housing precarity was not

perceived solely as a temporary economic difficulty, but rather as an emotionally embedded and socially structured condition shaped by the broader ownership-oriented housing regime.

6.1. Emotional insecurity and instability

Many interviewees described housing trajectories marked by repeated moves, unstable rental arrangements, uncertain tenure conditions, and the constant need to adapt. In several cases, housing instability had been present since childhood and continued into adulthood through insecure rental pathways and temporary living arrangements. One respondent recalled having moved "minimum 8 times" during his life (R24), while another described a trajectory through "different rental apartments, one worse than the other" (R28). Such instability was not only spatial but also material: in one account, poor housing conditions had become normalised to the point that "one of the apartments was constantly full of mould" (R24).

These insecurities were particularly visible among respondents who had experienced the lower end of the private rental sector. One interviewee described a former rental dwelling as unsuitable for ordinary family life: "The conditions… I think they were not for children… not for normal people. (…) Technical problems, bugs… she did not tell us in advance. (…) We could not open a window as the stench came in… and we paid 40 thousand for a one room-and-kitchen flat" (R10). Such accounts show that housing insecurity was experienced not only through tenure instability, but also through everyday exposure to poor housing quality, landlord dependence and limited capacity to exit inadequate arrangements.

Housing insecurity therefore appeared not simply as a financial constraint, but as a broader condition of unpredictability affecting everyday life and future planning. Several respondents associated insecure housing situations with emotional exhaustion, limited control over their living environment, and feelings of permanent transition. As one participant described his housing situation, "I am in constant transit" (R11). These experiences suggest that the expansion of private renting in Hungary often produces forms of ontological insecurity linked to the absence of permanence, limited control over housing conditions, and continuous uncertainty regarding future housing trajectories.

6.2. Shame, stigma and failed adulthood

The interviews also highlighted the strong normative dominance of homeownership within the Hungarian society. Respondents frequently interpreted owner occupation as the expected and morally legitimate form of adulthood, while prolonged renting or dependence on parents was often associated with failure, incompleteness, or blocked independence.

Several interviewees explicitly connected independent housing to adult identity and self-worth. One respondent explained that remaining in the parental home was primarily a consequence of economic constraints, noting that "maintaining a household

from a Hungarian salary is not the easiest thing" (R26). They could "remain there even until the age of 30" (R26) not because this represented an ideal life situation, but because independent housing remained financially inaccessible.

The emotional pressure generated by ownership expectations also appeared in the ways respondents discussed renting. Several participants framed renting as a compromise rather than a legitimate long-term housing solution. One interviewee described shared rental housing as "the only possibility" (R7) for leaving the parental home.

The normative hierarchy between ownership and renting was also internalised by respondents who recognised the practical advantages of renting. As one respondent explained: "It is cool if someone lives in a private rental, especially if his work demands a lot of travelling. However, because I was socialised in this Hungarian system, I have the feeling that paying rent is like throwing money away, as you don't pay for your own house" (R7). This ambivalence illustrates how renting could be pragmatically accepted while still being symbolically devalued.

These narratives demonstrate how housing insecurity becomes linked to broader questions of social recognition and adulthood. The inability to access homeownership is frequently interpreted not only as an economic limitation, but also as a perceived inability to achieve socially expected life-course milestones.

6.3. Family dependence and emotional ambivalence

Family support emerged as one of the most important mechanisms shaping housing opportunities among young adults. Early intergenerational asset transfers, inherited assets, co-residence with parents, and informal family support frequently compensated for the limited affordability of both ownership and rental housing. State subsidies and intergenerational transfers tended to reinforce rather than mitigate housing inequalities, functioning less as redistributive instruments and more as amplifiers of existing socio-economic advantages within younger cohorts.

In several interviews, respondents explicitly acknowledged the decisive role of family resources in accessing stable housing pathways. One participant explained that the family house had been purchased with "grandparental financial support" (R25). Another interviewee described how the family continued to provide access to housing resources even after leaving home, noting that "my parents live in the house, and I use the apartment when I am at home" (R23).

The unequal role of inherited assets was expressed particularly clearly by a respondent in private rental housing: "There is not much chance for young people like us, coming from nothing, to buy a flat. If you did not inherit, there is no chance" (R24), or: "I wouldn't even talk about how many jobs I had, I wouldn't take up a loan" (R3). This narrative connects blocked access to ownership with both the absence of family wealth and distrust of mortgage-based housing pathways.

At the same time, dependence on family support often generated emotionally ambivalent experiences. While respondents frequently expressed gratitude for parental or grandparental assistance, they also associated prolonged dependence with limited

autonomy and constrained adulthood. Family support, therefore, functioned simultaneously as a protective mechanism and as a reminder of unequal access to housing opportunities.

The findings also indicate that access to homeownership increasingly depends on accumulated family assets and inherited advantages. Several respondents referred to inheritance as one of the few realistic pathways to ownership.

These experiences demonstrate how housing inequalities among young adults are increasingly reproduced through intergenerational inequalities in wealth, property ownership, and family resources.

6.4. Resilience and resistance

Despite widespread insecurity and constrained housing opportunities, the interviews also revealed forms of adaptation, pragmatism, and resistance. Some respondents attempted to reinterpret renting and mobility in more flexible ways, particularly in relation to changing labour market conditions, and urban lifestyles.

For certain interviewees, renting represented not only economic necessity but also a degree of independence compared to previous housing situations. One respondent explained that renting initially appeared attractive because it offered "a kind of independence compared to the dormitory" (R6). Another participant described moving into rental housing as "the best decision of my life" (R25), despite the compromises involved.

Nevertheless, even among respondents expressing more flexible attitudes towards renting, ownership generally remained the long-term normative ideal. Therefore, housing aspirations continued to be shaped by the broader emotional and cultural dominance of owner occupation within the Hungarian housing regime.

At the same time, several interviewees also expressed resignation regarding the possibility of achieving stable ownership under current conditions. One respondent summarised these constrained expectations by stating: "Unless I win the lottery, it is impossible" (R22).

Overall, the interviews demonstrate that young adults' housing experiences are characterised by a complex combination of insecurity, dependence, adaptation, and emotional negotiation. Housing precarity thus emerges not only as a structural condition, but also as an affective experience deeply connected to social norms surrounding adulthood, autonomy, and belonging.

Table 6 summarises the main emotional dimensions identified in the qualitative material and their relationship to the analytical framework of social-affective citizenship.

Table 6. Emotional dimensions and related analytical lens of housing insecurity among young adults in Hungary

Analytical theme	Dominant emotional experiences	Social-affective citizenship dimension
Housing insecurity and instability	uncertainty, exhaustion, insecurity	emotional security / stability
Blocked autonomy and delayed independence	dependency, frustration, constrained adulthood	autonomy
Family dependence and intergenerational inequality	ambivalence, obligation, gratitude	belonging / relational dependency
Ownership as moral norm	dignity, legitimacy, security	recognition
Fear of mortgage debt	vulnerability, distrust, anxiety	emotional security / institutional trust
Spatial trade-offs and constrained mobility	compromise, exhaustion	autonomy / accessibility / spatial justice
Normalisation of precarity	resignation, adaptation	recognition / generational inequality

7. *Discussion*

The findings of this article demonstrate that the emergence of generation rent in Hungary cannot be understood simply as a tenure shift from ownership to renting. Rather, the Hungarian case reflects a growing contradiction between persistent ownership-oriented social norms and increasingly constrained access to stable homeownership among younger generations. In this respect, the article contributes to broader debates within housing and social policy scholarship by showing how housing inequalities operate not only through differential access to material resources, but also through the unequal distribution of emotional security, recognition, autonomy, and notions on legitimate adulthood.

The Hungarian case strongly supports Kemeny's (1995) argument that housing regimes shape not only tenure structures but also the social meanings attached to different forms of housing. Within strongly ownership-oriented and dualist housing systems, rental housing frequently remains residualised, weakly legitimised, and symbolically inferior to owner occupation. The findings suggest that this dynamic is particularly pronounced in Hungary's post-socialist "super-homeownership regime" (Toussaint et al., 2012), where owner occupation continues to function simultaneously as a dominant tenure form, a welfare mechanism, and a culturally embedded marker of adulthood, stability, and social respectability.

At the same time, the article demonstrates that structural housing pathways among younger generations are increasingly diverging from these normative expectations. The quantitative findings indicate a substantial expansion of private renting among younger cohorts, particularly in Budapest, while the qualitative interviews reveal that renting continues to be emotionally associated with uncertainty, temporariness,

dependence, and blocked adulthood. This coexistence of expanding rental pathways and persistently ownership-oriented norms highlights one of the central contradictions of the contemporary Hungarian housing system: although housing trajectories are changing structurally, the symbolic hierarchy privileging ownership remains remarkably stable. In this respect, the Hungarian findings align with previous research demonstrating that generation rent emerges most sharply in housing systems where renting remains culturally stigmatised and institutionally insecure rather than socially normalised (Arundel & Ronald, 2021; McKee et al., 2017; Hearne, 2020).

The findings further reinforce recent research emphasising that housing insecurity should be understood not only as a material condition but also as an emotional and affective experience (McKee et al., 2020; Waldron, 2023). Respondents frequently described insecure housing situations through experiences of instability, emotional exhaustion, unpredictability, and difficulties in long-term planning. Repeated mobility, insecure rental arrangements, deteriorating housing quality, and constrained housing choices often undermined forms of ontological security traditionally associated with stable housing (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998). Similar processes have been identified in earlier studies examining how insecure housing conditions destabilise everyday continuity, future orientation, and emotional well-being among younger generations navigating increasingly fragmented housing pathways (Hoolachan et al., 2017; McKee et al., 2020).

Importantly, the findings demonstrate that these emotional experiences are strongly shaped by ownership-oriented social norms and policy narratives. Respondents frequently interpreted prolonged renting not merely as a temporary housing arrangement but as a sign of delayed adulthood, dependence, or personal inadequacy. This finding resonates with broader scholarship suggesting that strongly ownership-oriented housing systems increasingly transform housing transitions into moralised markers of successful adulthood and social worth (Arundel & Ronald, 2021; McKee et al., 2017). Within the Hungarian context, where ownership continues to be strongly associated with social success and respectable adulthood, exclusion from owner occupation acquires therefore important symbolic and emotional dimensions. In this sense, the findings support arguments that housing systems operate simultaneously as material and moral regimes that distribute not only resources but also recognition, dignity, and social legitimacy (McKee et al., 2020).

The framework of social-affective citizenship proved particularly useful for interpreting these dynamics because it made it possible to connect macro-level housing structures with subjective experiences of insecurity and exclusion. The findings demonstrate that housing inequalities shape multiple interconnected dimensions of everyday life, including emotional security, autonomy, recognition, and belonging. Thus, housing precarity emerges not simply as a question of affordability or tenure status, but as a broader condition affecting the capacity of young adults to establish socially recognised and emotionally secure life trajectories. Consequently, the findings reinforce broader arguments within affective approaches to citizenship that welfare arrangements shape not only material incorporation but also experiences of dignity, belonging, and legitimate social participation (Fortier, 2010; Johnson, 2010).

The article also highlights the central role of intergenerational dependence within Hungary's housing system. Consistent with previous research on post-socialist housing inequalities (Csizmady et al., 2022; Stephens et al., 2015), both the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that access to stable housing increasingly depends on intergenerational transfers, and other forms of family support. Family support, therefore, functions as an informal welfare mechanism compensating for the limitations of both state housing provision and the private housing market, reflecting broader patterns of familialised welfare restructuring the characteristics of post-socialist housing systems (Stephens et al., 2015; Toussaint et al., 2012).

The findings reveal the emotional ambivalence associated with this dependence too. While respondents frequently described family support as indispensable for accessing stable housing pathways, they also associated prolonged dependence with constrained autonomy, blocked adulthood, and unequal life chances. The transition to adulthood therefore becomes increasingly conditional upon unequal family capacities to provide housing support. This finding further supports earlier research demonstrating that intergenerational transfers increasingly mediate access to secure housing and reproduce broader patterns of socio-economic inequality among younger cohorts (Arundel & Ronald, 2016; Csizmady et al., 2022; Howard, 2025).

The findings additionally suggest that the emotional legacy of the foreign-currency mortgage crisis continued to shape housing attitudes among younger generations for years after the crisis. Although homeownership remained the dominant aspiration, mortgage borrowing was frequently associated with vulnerability, indebtedness, and loss of control. This contributes to an important paradox within the Hungarian housing regime: owner occupation retains strong symbolic legitimacy even as pathways towards ownership become increasingly financially risky and socially exclusionary. In this respect, the findings reflect broader tensions identified in scholarship on housing financialisation and insecure transitions to adulthood under conditions of intensified market dependence (Forrest & Hirayama, 2015; Lennartz et al., 2016).

The interviews also identified limited forms of adaptation and resistance. Some respondents attempted to reinterpret renting more pragmatically, particularly in relation to flexibility, mobility, and changing labour-market conditions. Others questioned the normative dominance of ownership more directly, emphasising the structural unfairness of the housing system rather than individual failure. Although these counter-narratives remain relatively weak compared to the broader cultural legitimacy of ownership, they nevertheless suggest the emergence of alternative understandings of adulthood, housing security, and social belonging among younger generations. Similar forms of pragmatic adaptation and negotiated acceptance of insecure housing pathways have also been identified in earlier studies examining how younger adults reinterpret precarious housing trajectories under constrained structural conditions (Clapham et al., 2014; Waldron, 2023).

These findings also carry broader implications for social policy. The results suggest that housing inequalities among younger generations cannot be addressed through ownership-centred housing measures. Policies that continue to privilege owner occupation while neglecting affordable and secure rental alternatives may further deepen both material and emotional forms of inequality. In this respect, the Hungarian

case illustrates how housing systems distribute not only access to housing itself, but also access to security, autonomy, dignity, and socially recognised adulthood.

More broadly, the article suggests that the dynamics of generation rent within post-socialist super-homeownership systems differ in important respects from the Western contexts in which the concept originally emerged. In Hungary, the expansion of renting occurs not alongside the normalisation of tenure pluralism but within a housing regime where ownership remains structurally privileged, culturally dominant, and emotionally valorised. Consequently, housing precarity among younger generations becomes closely intertwined with experiences of insecurity, dependence, blocked autonomy, and diminished social recognition. These findings underline the importance of integrating emotional and affective dimensions more systematically into both housing research and social policy debates concerning youth precarity, intergenerational inequality, and the changing transition to adulthood.

Building on earlier analyses of generation rent, tenure choice, and intergenerational transfers in Hungary (Csizmady et al., 2017; Csizmady et al., 2022), this article adds an affective dimension by showing how structurally constrained housing pathways are translated into experiences of insecurity, blocked autonomy, dependence, shame, and uncertain adulthood.

8. Conclusion

This article examined the emotional dimensions of housing insecurity among young adults in Hungary within an increasingly constrained but still strongly ownership-oriented housing regime. Combining quantitative and qualitative evidence, the analysis demonstrated that the emergence of generation rent in Hungary reflects not simply changing tenure structures but a deeper contradiction between persistent ownership-centred social norms and increasingly insecure housing pathways among younger generations.

The findings showed that although private renting has expanded substantially, owner occupation continues to function as the dominant cultural ideal associated with stability, autonomy, and socially recognised adulthood. Consequently, housing precarity emerges not only as a material condition but also as an emotionally and relationally structured experience shaped by insecurity, dependence, and diminished social legitimacy.

The article also highlighted the central role of intergenerational inequalities within Hungary's super-homeownership regime. Access to stable housing has become increasingly dependent on intergenerational transfers and other forms of family support, while young adults lacking such support face prolonged insecurity and forms of forced or undesired mobility. At the same time, dependence on family resources generated emotionally ambivalent experiences connected to gratitude, obligation, and reduced autonomy.

By applying the framework of social-affective citizenship, the article contributes to housing and social policy scholarship by demonstrating how housing systems distribute not only material opportunities, but also unequal experiences of security, dignity, belonging, autonomy, and notions of legitimate adulthood across generations.

More broadly, the Hungarian case suggests that the dynamics of generation rent within post-socialist super-homeownership systems differ in important ways from those observed in Western housing regimes. In Hungary, the expansion of renting occurs within a context where ownership remains both structurally privileged and emotionally dominant, producing particularly strong tensions between housing aspirations and lived housing realities among younger generations.

These patterns suggest that housing policy cannot be treated as a narrowly sectoral field: housing insecurity among younger generations has far-reaching implications for demographic sustainability, labour market flexibility, and social mobility, making it a central concern for social policy more broadly.

Addressing the housing crisis of younger generations therefore requires approaches that recognise housing not only as an economic resource, but also as a fundamental condition of emotional security, social recognition, and equitable transitions to adulthood.

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Emotions in the policy-making arena: shaping housing responses to flooding by political subjects

Abstract

This paper examines how Prime Minister Donald Tusk used emotional appeals to frame housing-related policy responses during the 2024 flood crisis in Poland. The study is based on a Qualitative Content Analysis of six public speeches delivered between September 13 and September 25, 2024. Drawing on elements of Szarfenberg's Beyond the Rational Calculator (BRC) tool, it focuses on three housing-related policy areas and their affective framing: evacuation, reconstruction, and long-term state responsibility. The analysis identifies three findings. First, evacuation was framed not primarily as coercive state action but as a morally necessary and emotionally justified act of protection, legitimised through fear, solidarity, trust in rescuers, and collective memory of earlier floods. Second, reconstruction was presented not merely as technical recovery but as a forward-looking moral project in which rapid aid delivery, coordination, and continued institutional presence served to reassure affected communities and stabilise uncertainty. Third, Tusk's speeches constructed a broader image of the state as an enduring moral guarantor of housing protection, dignity, and continuity in disaster settings. The findings also suggest that citizens' reception of this

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message may have varied depending on their previous experiences with political messaging, public institutions, and disaster-related state support, shaping whether it was interpreted as reassuring, persuasive, or contestable. The article argues that the speeches combined affective legitimisation with emotional containment. Since the study is limited to six speeches by a single political actor, its claims remain exploratory, and it should be understood as a proof of concept rather than a definitive account of emotional governance.

Keywords: housing policy, political subjectivity, affective legitimisation, emotional containment, disaster governance

Introduction

Flooding is a natural disaster that poses a significant challenge to social policy, directly affecting social needs and well-being. The discussion of flooding as a social policy issue aligns closely with Walker and Burningham's (2011) analysis of flood risk, vulnerability, and environmental justice. They argue that flood risk is socially stratified, with lower-income and marginalised groups often more exposed to risk and having fewer resources for recovery. Effective flood response must, therefore, address both immediate relief, such as emergency housing and food assistance, and long-term resilience, including infrastructure adaptation and climate mitigation, in order to prevent social exclusion and worsening inequalities, particularly among marginalised communities. Beyond material needs, flooding also triggers emotional and political responses that shape social policy development, including housing-related interventions.

Housing occupies a politically charged position in social policy because it links material welfare, inequality, citizenship, and state responsibility. Housing research has traditionally focused on institutional arrangements, material provision, affordability, socio-economic inequality, and the role of the state in securing access to adequate housing (Spicker, 2012). More critical approaches have expanded this perspective by showing how housing systems are shaped by welfare regimes, ideology, lived experience, and the relationship between the state, the market, and the family (Schwartz, 2012).

However, the emotional and symbolic dimensions of housing policy remain less developed, particularly in disaster settings. Floods do not only destroy physical infrastructure; they also generate fear, loss, attachment to place, resistance, hope, and expectations of care and recognition. These emotions shape how housing-related interventions are justified, contested, and made legitimate. Yet the role of emotions as instruments of governance in housing policy responses remains underexplored.

This article addresses this gap by examining how emotions are mobilised in the political framing of housing-related responses to natural disasters, focusing on the 2024 flood crisis in Poland. It poses the following question: How did emotional appeals by the Polish Prime Minister shape housing-related policy responses during the 2024 flood crisis? It is examined through a case study (Stake, 2003) and Qualitative Content Analysis (Schreier, 2012) of six public speeches delivered by Prime Minister Donald Tusk between September 13 and September 25, 2024. The analysis focuses on the

affective framing of three housing-related policy areas: evacuation, reconstruction, and long-term state responsibility.

Conceptually, the article draws on selected elements of Szarfenberg's Beyond the Rational Calculator (BRC) diagnostic tool, situated within Levels 1–2 of the Dynamic Process Model of Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC). These frameworks allow political speech to be analysed not merely as commentary on policy, but as part of affective governance, through which housing-related interventions are framed, legitimised, and contested. More specifically, the analysis uses the concepts of affective legitimisation and emotional containment to examine how political speech justifies disruptive housing-related measures while also acknowledging, regulating, and stabilising collective emotions. In this sense, the article contributes to the BRC/SAC perspective and to a more affectively sensitive understanding of housing policy under crisis conditions.

The paper is structured as follows. After the introduction, it presents the theoretical framework, study context, and research methods. It then analyses how emotional language is used by a policy actor at the macro level of the policy-making arena to frame housing-related policy instruments in response to flood-related events. The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings and their implications.

Theoretical background: Beyond the Rational Calculator (BRC), affective legitimisation, and emotional containment

This article draws on the Beyond the Rational Calculator (BRC) diagnostic tool developed by Szarfenberg in this volume. The tool conceptualises political actors along three axes: motivation, agency, and affective orientation. The Knight–Knave dimension concerns whether policymakers are guided primarily by the public good or by self-interest and electoral calculation. The Queen–Pawn axis captures the extent to which they possess agency to shape agendas or are constrained by institutional, political, and media pressures. The Rational Calculator–Feeling Subject dimension concerns the role of affect: while the Rational Calculator relies on technical reasoning and policy instruments, the Feeling Subject treats emotional messaging as integral to problem definition, legitimacy, and public debate.

This perspective challenges the assumption that emotion is irrational or disruptive in public decision-making. It is consistent with Affective Intelligence Theory (Marcus et al., 2000), which argues that emotional signals, especially anxiety, can enhance political attention, reflection, and reassessment. Therefore, emotional engagement, when structured and acknowledged, may strengthen rather than weaken public reasoning. In this sense, Szarfenberg's figure of the Feeling Subject captures the integration of affective and rational logics. Legitimacy, especially in social policy, depends not only on institutional design or economic rationale, and moreover, on emotional resonance: the capacity to address care, responsibility, and shared purpose.

The BRC model is particularly useful for analysing housing policy under disruptive conditions such as natural disasters. In such contexts, policy is not only a matter of regulation, resources, or technical coordination, but also of affective governance. Flood-related housing responses require public compliance, acceptance of disruptive

measures, and trust in institutions, especially in relation to evacuation, temporary displacement, reconstruction, and compensation. Emotions, therefore, are central in how policy interventions are justified, made intelligible, and rendered legitimate.

I use the concept of affective legitimisation to describe the process through which policy decisions, institutions, or political actors gain public acceptance by mobilising social emotions such as fear, empathy, anger, pride, or solidarity. In this understanding, legitimacy is grounded not only in legality, technical effectiveness, or rational consent, but also in emotional resonance, symbolic gestures, and empathetic interaction. In housing-related crisis governance, affective legitimisation helps explain how disruptive interventions, such as evacuation or reconstruction, can be framed not merely as administrative necessities, but as morally and socially justified actions. Drawing on Comer's (2024) analysis of affective legitimation, I understand emotional appeals not as opposed to rationality, but as intertwined with it: institutions may appear legitimate when they present themselves as both caring and competent, compassionate and effective.

Emotional containment, understood as the effort to acknowledge, absorb, and redirect collective emotions in ways that preserve trust, order, and institutional credibility is closely related to this. Following Maor (2025), emotional containment does not simply suppress emotion. Rather, it reframes emotional responses so that fear, frustration, and loss can be channelled into socially constructive forms such as solidarity, confidence, and cooperation. In housing policy, this may involve reassuring statements about reconstruction, visible coordination efforts, and affective appeals to shared sacrifice. At the same time, emotional containment may also serve more strategic or manipulative functions when political actors downregulate emotions that are inconvenient or threatening to their authority (Zubrzycka-Czarnecka, 2025).

This study also builds on two strands of literature at the intersection of housing and flood risk. First, studies of post-disaster housing governance show that housing is not a static sectoral concern, but part of a dynamic and contested field of crisis governance, marked by tensions between centralised procedures and the needs of affected communities (Jacobs & Williams, 2011; Williams et al., 2009). Second, emerging research on the emotional and psychological dimensions of disaster experience shows that flood-related housing insecurity is shaped not only by material vulnerability, but also by trauma, fear of loss, and attachment to place (Rahman et al., 2025; Ewenson & Sanderson, 2025; Woodhall-Melnik & Weissman, 2021).

In light of this research, I conceptualise housing policy in the context of flooding as a multi-layered field of governance shaped by institutional capacity, risk mitigation, socio-economic inequality, and emotional meaning. Rather than treating housing as a bounded policy sector, I understand housing instruments as embedded in broader processes of disaster response, state accountability, and emotional governance. The analysis focuses on three types of housing-related intervention: evacuation and displacement, reconstruction and repair of accommodation infrastructure, and state-led public engagement and compensation related to housing loss.

Read through the SAC lens, the BRC tool is not only a typology of political subjectivity. It is also a diagnostic instrument for identifying what kinds of citizens are implicitly imagined, addressed, and governed through policy design. In disaster

housing governance, the gap between the Rational Calculator and the Feeling Subject is especially visible. Evacuation and reconstruction are typically justified through risk calculations, engineering expertise, and administrative procedures, yet affected residents may experience home through attachment, memory, fear, and loss. Affective legitimisation and emotional containment can, therefore, be interpreted as macro-level techniques intended to bridge this gap. They translate technical necessity into relational promises to see, respect, and protect citizens, while also regulating the emotional register of citizenship by encouraging solidarity and trust, downregulating panic and anger, and managing the distribution of blame.

Finally, although the article draws selectively on crisis communication and crisis leadership (Howarth, 2011; Maor, 2025), framing (Entman, 1993; van Hulst & Yanow, 2016), and representative claim-making (Saward, 2010), it remains grounded in housing studies. In this article, a frame is understood as an interpretive pattern that gives meaning to a housing-related policy response by linking it to emotions, values, responsibility, and expected forms of citizen conduct. Framing refers to the process through which political actors construct, reinforce, and adjust such patterns in public speech.

Study context

Between September 13 and October 4, 2024, Poland experienced a catastrophic phase of the flood triggered by a Genoa low-pressure system, which brought prolonged and intense rainfall to Central Europe (Bujalski, 2024). The flood affected several voivodeships: Lower Silesian, Lubusz, Opole, Lesser Poland, Subcarpathian, Silesian, and West Pomeranian (Pajdała-Kusińska, 2024). In some regions, particularly in southwestern Poland, rainfall totals exceeded 400 mm over just three days, surpassing the annual average in many areas of the country (Powódź, 2024). The intense rainfall caused the Oder River and its tributaries to overflow, leading to widespread flooding.

Cities and towns such as Kłodzko, Lądek-Zdrój, Stronie Śląskie, Głuchołazy, Prudnik, Nysa, Bystrzyca Kłodzka, Szprotawa, and Lewin Brzeski were severely affected, with major infrastructure damage and substantial disruption to everyday life. Residential areas were inundated, resulting in large-scale evacuations and significant property losses. The flood caused nine confirmed deaths in the affected areas: likely one Czech citizen who died on the Czech side of the border, one German citizen, and seven Polish citizens (Boryń, 2024). The greatest damage occurred in the Lower Silesian, Opole, and Lesser Poland voivodeships.

In response to the disaster, the Polish government declared a state of natural disaster between September 16 and October 16, 2024 in the affected regions and implemented emergency measures to support those impacted (Panufnik, 2024). At the same time, the crisis exposed significant shortcomings in the crisis policymaking system (Powódź, 2024). Delayed warnings, inadequate preventive measures, and insufficient coordination among institutions were identified as key factors contributing to the scale of the losses. Although flood hazard maps and flood risk mitigation plans were available, many local governments had not fully incorporated them into their

development strategies. Moreover, while important hydrotechnical investments, including retention reservoirs in the Kłodzko Valley and the Racibórz reservoir, had been implemented, they proved insufficient to handle the unprecedented volume of water.

A nationwide telephone survey found that 1.6% of Polish residents were directly affected by the flood, while a further 9% experienced flooding in their immediate neighbourhoods (CBOS Flash, 2024, p. 1). The highest impacts were reported in the Opole and Lower Silesian voivodeships, where 53% and 47% of respondents, respectively, reported nearby flooding (CBOS Flash, 2024, p. 1). Medium-sised cities of up to 100,000 residents were particularly affected, alongside smaller towns (CBOS Flash, 2024, p. 1).

The disaster also highlighted the role of emergency services. The State Fire Service and Territorial Defence Forces were positively evaluated by 94% of survey respondents (CBOS Flash, 2024, p. 2). Local authorities also received favourable evaluations, with 59% of respondents approving their efforts, while central government actions were rated slightly lower, at 55% (CBOS Flash, 2024, p. 2). A survey conducted by Opinia24 for RMF FM also showed regional variation in assessments of the government's response (Filipek, 2024). The most critical evaluations came from residents of the Lubusz and Silesian voivodeships, where only 36% of respondents believed that politicians from the ruling coalition had risen to the challenge. In Lower Silesia, 41% of respondents assessed the government's intervention positively, while the highest approval was recorded in Opole, where 50% believed that the government had handled the crisis effectively.

Public perceptions of the central government's response also varied significantly according to political and ideological orientation. Respondents with left-wing or centrist views were more likely to approve of the government's actions than those with conservative views (CBOS Flash, 2024, p. 3). Although this article does not trace the long-term political consequences of the flood, the crisis already revealed marked regional and partisan differences in evaluations of the government's response. This suggests that disaster policymaking became not only a matter of emergency coordination, but also a site of broader political legitimation and contestation. These differences are analytically important for situating Poland as a comparative case of housing governance, disaster response, and political legitimacy.

To locate the 2024 flood response within SAC's Level 1, the Ecosystem of Provision, it is useful to distinguish the different logics through which housing-related support was delivered and experienced. The formal bureaucratic locus included state-led emergency policymaking, such as evacuation coordination, emergency aid, reconstruction programmes, and administrative rules governing eligibility, timing, and compensation. At the same time, the crisis activated community-based loci, including informal mutual aid, neighbour-to-neighbour care, and place-based moral economies in which staying, protecting property, and preserving community memory carried strong normative value.

Formal community arrangements, especially local authority coordination of civic initiatives and volunteer mobilisation, mediated between these spheres in practice, even when they remained less visible in central political speech. Market dynamics, including insurance, contractors, and building supply chains, also shaped the feasibility

and pace of repair and rebuilding, intersecting with state programmes and household resources. This article focuses on how the Prime Minister framed and attempted to coordinate the bureaucratic–community interface, because it is here that the emotional governance becomes especially visible and politically consequential.

The Polish case is analytically relevant for several reasons. First, emotions are not usually foregrounded as an explicit analytical category in housing studies, even though they are present in public debate and in the political framing of housing issues. Moments of crisis make the emotional dimension of policymaking more visible, particularly when policy decisions concern home, loss, displacement, security, and reconstruction. The 2024 flood case is, therefore, especially useful because it shows how emotional appeals can become a salient component of political legitimation in a field where they are not usually treated as central to housing policy analysis.

Second, Poland exemplifies a post-socialist model of housing policy that is broadly characteristic of the Visegrád region and, more generally, of parts of Central and Eastern Europe. This model is marked by high levels of homeownership, limited public housing provision, relatively low public spending on housing policy, as well as strong cultural attachment to ownership and the home. In the context of flood response, these features are particularly important because evacuation, displacement, and housing loss affect not only material security. They are deeply rooted norms of autonomy, belonging, and property-based stability.

Third, the Polish case can be read not only as a national example, but also as an instance of how a post-socialist housing regime responds to a flood crisis. Its broader analytical value lies in making visible the tensions that arise when a highly ownership-based housing system confronts large-scale disruption and emergency intervention. In this sense, the case is useful for comparison with countries representing other housing-policy models, allowing future research to examine how different welfare-housing configurations shape the emotional legitimation, institutional delivery, and public reception of flood-related housing measures.

Consequently, its relevance lies less in statistical representativeness than in what Stake (2003, pp. 145–147) terms "naturalistic generalisation": the capacity of a well-contextualised case to illuminate patterns, tensions, and dynamics that may be recognisable in other settings, even where the institutional model differs. Therefore, the example of Poland is useful for understanding a national flood response and for analysing how ownership-based, post-socialist housing regimes manage legitimacy, displacement, and reconstruction under conditions of crisis.

Research strategy

This study applies the BRC framework selectively rather than comprehensively. While the model is designed to capture the broader policy chain, including administrators and frontline workers, the present analysis is limited to the central political level and adopts a top-down perspective focused on one actor: Prime Minister Donald Tusk. Residents' perspectives, media messaging, and frontline implementation are not systematically incorporated, and the study does not assess how Tusk's speeches

were received. Future research, inspired by the SAC framework, especially Levels 2 and 3, should integrate residents' experiences and extend the BRC tool to additional actors in order to identify potential affective inconsistencies across levels of governance.

To keep the SAC framework analytically visible despite the top-down, speech-based design, each coded segment is read as performing two functions. First, it positions the policy actor along the BRC axes: Knight/Knave, Queen/Pawn, and Rational Calculator/Feeling Subject. Second, it articulates a mediation claim addressed to citizens, which can be interpreted in terms of recognition, dignity, and security (Szarfenberg, 2026). The analysis, therefore, attends not only to which housing-related instrument is discussed, such as evacuation, reconstruction, or compensation, but also to the implied citizen subject position and the affective trigger being activated.

Where the speeches invoke solidarity, civic duty, suspicion, anger, or resistance, I treat these as indicators of SAC's affective citizenship dimensions: governance and regulation, differentiation and hierarchy, expectation and solidarity, and contestation and resistance. This dual reading strengthens the study's contribution to SAC by showing how macro-level emotional governance anticipates and attempts to shape citizen experience.

The SAC framework is applied selectively. Its sub-frameworks – ECPA, which examines causal mechanisms at the micro level, and ELP, which traces the long-term effects of policy on collective emotions – are omitted. A comprehensive application of SAC would require combining both approaches to capture individual-level dynamics and systemic emotional shifts at Level 4. In SAC terms, the case engages primarily with the bureaucratic logic of state-led evacuation and reconstruction, while intersecting with informal community dynamics of resistance, memory, and attachment to place.

Although Critical Discourse Analysis is not adopted in a strict sense, Schreier's (2012) Qualitative Content Analysis was used to reconstruct affective frames and ideological assumptions in political speeches. This method is compatible with some diagnostic aims of discourse-oriented research, while offering a more structured and replicable approach consistent with the study's constructivist orientation (Frysztacki, 2009). QCA was chosen because it combines interpretive depth with systematic coding, making it suitable for analysing how emotions were embedded in crisis policymaking and translated into housing-related policy responses. The choice of QCA was also informed by its established use in housing studies (see: Bate, 2020; Fang & van Liempt, 2021).

The research question guiding the analysis was: How did emotional appeals by the Polish Prime Minister shape housing-related policy responses during the 2024 flood crisis? Since the study examines political framing rather than citizens' reception, public speeches were selected as the primary source material. Survey-based methods would be more appropriate for a subsequent reception-oriented study than for the present analysis of macro-level affective governance.

The case study focuses on Donald Tusk, leader of the Civic Platform. Six speeches delivered during key stages of the 2024 flood crisis were purposively sampled from his official YouTube channel: two from the initial stage, September, 13–14; two from the middle stage, September, 20; and two from the concluding phase, September, 24–October, 4 (Table 1). This sampling strategy allowed for a manageable dataset while capturing variation in framing across the crisis.

Table 1. Corpus of analysed speeches

Speech no.	Date	Crisis phase	Title
1	Sept. 13, 2024	Initial phase	Donald Tusk and Tomasz Siemoniak: Press conference after the briefing with the services, Wrocław
2	Sept. 14, 2024	Initial phase	Donald Tusk: Briefing after the briefing with the services in connection with the flood threat, Nysa
3	Sept. 20, 2024	Middle phase	Donald Tusk: Flood crisis headquarters in Nowa Sól
4	Sept. 20, 2024	Middle phase	Donald Tusk: Flood crisis headquarters in Szczecin
5	Sept. 24, 2024	Concluding phase	Donald Tusk: Evening crisis headquarters in Wrocław
6	Sept. 25, 2024	Concluding phase	Donald Tusk: Measures taken to prevent the effects of flooding, Warsaw

Source of the texts: Official YouTube channel of Donald Tusk.

The QCA coding frame combined deductive categories informed by theory with inductive categories derived from the data (Schreier, 2014, pp. 174–176). The term "coding frame" is used here in Schreier's methodological sense and should be distinguished from "frame" as an interpretive pattern in political speech. Data were categorised using a codebook with one theory-driven main category: the use of emotional language by a political actor at the macro policy-making level in relation to housing policy during flood events. This was subdivided into three subcategories: legitimisation of forced actions, with a focus on evacuation; emotional mobilisation of public support for reconstruction; and the transformation of collective emotion into a moral frame of enduring state responsibility for housing in disasters.

Six additional data-driven subcategories contextualised these findings within broader emotional and socio-political dynamics. The segmentation of material (Schreier, 2012, pp. 126–145) was thematic and researcher-driven, with sentence fragments or full sentences treated as units of coding. Only Tusk's statements were analysed in depth; statements from other actors were coded as context.

The material was coded by the author in two rounds using the coding frame. Because this was a single-coder study, formal inter-rater reliability was not assessed. To enhance coding consistency, the coding frame was piloted and refined before the main analysis, category definitions were specified in a codebook, and coded passages were revisited in a second round of analysis. Ambiguous cases were resolved by returning to the full speech context and by checking consistency with the conceptual definitions of the categories.

In addition to the empirical coding frame, the analysis involved a second-order theoretical interpretation of coded segments. After the empirical coding identified the political and emotional functions of speech segments, these segments were interpreted through the lenses of the BRC dimensions, affective legitimisation, and emotional containment. Table 3 summarises this theoretical interpretive framework.

Table 2. Empirical coding frame

Main category	Subcategory	Type	Working definition
Use of emotional language by a political actor at the macro policy-making level in relation to housing policy during flood events	Legitimisation of forced actions (evacuation)	Theory-driven	Speech segments in which emotional appeals are used to justify, morally elevate, or normalise evacuation or other disruptive housing-related interventions.
	Emotional mobilisation of public support for reconstruction and repair		Speech segments in which emotional appeals are used to support rebuilding, repair, aid delivery, and longer-term housing recovery.
	Transformation of collective emotion into a moral frame of enduring state responsibility		Speech segments in which emotions are used to construct the state as a long-term guarantor of housing protection, dignity, continuity, and care in times of disaster.
Contextual emotional and socio-political dynamics shaping housing-related policy framing	Resistance/ mistrust toward state action	Data-driven	Segments referring to refusal, suspicion, antagonism, disinformation, or low confidence in state actors or emergency measures.
	Historical memory of previous floods		Segments invoking earlier floods, past helplessness, or prior resilience as interpretive resources for the current crisis.
	Institutional continuity/state presence		Segments emphasising that the state, services, or recovery institutions will remain active beyond the immediate emergency.
	Solidarity/civic reciprocity		Segments invoking mutual help, sacrifice, unity, civic responsibility, or national cohesion in response to flooding.
	Coordination/ delivery/planning		Segments emphasising procedures, aid delivery, logistics, timelines, technical organisation, or institutional management.
	Leadership accountability/ political responsibility		Segments in which the Prime Minister claims responsibility, direction, or visible leadership over crisis response.

Table 3. Theoretical interpretive framework

Lens	Dimension	Definition	Analytical focus
BRC	Knight	Public-good orientation	Solidarity, protection, welfare
	Knave	Self-interest orientation	Image management, political gain
	Queen	Visible agency	Leadership, control, responsibility
	Pawn	Constrained agency	Institutional or crisis constraints
	Rational Calculator	Procedural reasoning	Technical delivery, coordination
	Feeling Subject	Emotional resonance	Legitimation, reassurance, trust
Affective legitimisation	–	Moral-emotional justification	Making intervention publicly defensible
Emotional containment	–	Regulation of collective emotions	Stabilising fear, uncertainty, and mistrust

The theoretical framework was not used as a first-stage coding scheme, but as an interpretive layer applied to empirically coded segments. The collected data were then interpreted in relation to selected elements of the SAC framework discussed earlier in the article.

The method's strength lies in combining interpretation with systematic coding. Rather than counting occurrences of specific frames, the analysis focused on their contextual meaning and policy implications. This approach made it possible to identify potential moments of affective dissonance, where political frames appeared to sit uneasily with contextually documented tensions in affected communities.

Coding consistency was strengthened through clear coding rules, a piloted coding frame, and repeated coding rounds. Validity was enhanced through constant comparison with the source material, attention to full speech context, and theoretical triangulation. Limitations include the narrow scope of the study – one actor, six speeches – and the absence of reception analysis. QCA itself also requires careful coding frame design and is sensitive to researcher subjectivity. Nevertheless, by systematically analysing Tusk's emotional strategies, the study demonstrates how emotions are mobilised in crisis policymaking and offers an entry point for future applications of the SAC framework.

Because the study is based on a single case, one political actor, and a speech-based dataset, its findings should be understood as analytically exploratory. The analysis identifies patterns in the linguistic construction of emotional governance, but it does not allow for definitive claims about reception, causal effects, or the broader validity of the framework across cases.

The author used generative AI, specifically ChatGPT, in two ways. First, it was used as language support for mechanical tasks, including paraphrasing and reformulating sentences, improving clarity and readability, harmonising terminology, and minor reference reformatting. Second, it was used as a scholarly assistant in an advisory

capacity, for example, to consult on the coherence of successive stages of the project. All AI outputs were reviewed, verified, and edited by the author. The overall logic and intellectual contribution of the article, including the identification of the research problem, selection of theoretical frameworks and methods, choice of sources, design of the analytic and interpretive strategy, and revisions made in response to peer review, remain the result of the author's work. AI was used in line with responsible-use principles, including accuracy checks, source verification, privacy protection, and intellectual property safeguards. The author retains full responsibility for the content.

Findings: How did emotional appeals by the Polish Prime Minister shape housing-related policy responses during the 2024 flood crisis?

The findings are organised around three thematic clusters, each linking a housing-related policy instrument to a specific emotional framing strategy. For each cluster, I first examine how the Prime Minister's speeches frame the policy issue. I then interpret this framing in terms of affective legitimisation and/or emotional containment, before identifying the SAC dimensions these speech acts may invoke or anticipate.

Given that the study is based on a speech-based analysis of a single political actor, these claims should be read as interpretive inferences rather than as direct evidence of citizens lived experience or reception. This structure does not replace the QCA categories. Instead, it clarifies how those categories connect to the SAC architecture and why crisis messaging should be analysed as part of the welfare–citizenship regime.

Emotions as legitimisation of forced actions (evacuation from home)

Prime Minister Donald Tusk consistently framed evacuation from home as both emotionally necessary and morally imperative. His speeches drew on urgency, danger, collective memory, and national duty to justify state recommendations and encourage voluntary compliance with emergency measures. Evacuation was thus presented not as a bureaucratic imposition, but as an expression of collective care rooted in civic responsibility and affective solidarity.

To anchor this framing in collective experience, Tusk invoked past traumatic events: "In Wrocław in 1997, I remember precisely the floods of 2010 as well". This appeal to historical memory activated an emotional register in which present measures, including evacuation, could be understood as ethically necessary responses shaped by lessons from earlier disasters. At the same time, Tusk explicitly acknowledged the resistance that evacuation could generate. "Firefighters informed me that people often refuse to evacuate", he noted, foregrounding the emotional complexity of compliance.

Rather than presenting such resistance as mere irrationality, the speeches implicitly recognised that evacuation may involve a painful rupture with property, identity, continuity, and attachment to place. Homes appeared here not only as shelters, but also as repositories of memory and survival, particularly for those who had already lived through previous disasters such as the floods of 1997 and 2010. Tusk responded

to this resistance by combining empathy with escalating urgency: "In an hour or five hours, evacuation may already be impossible due to the water level". This shift moved evacuation from the register of state advice to that of self-preservation, resonating with fear, concern, and protective instinct.

Tusk also sought to avoid the perception of coercion. As he emphasised, "Firefighters and police provide buses; they appeal, but they will not use force". Emergency responders were, therefore, framed not as enforcers, but as figures of care, facilitation, and moral support. This framing was reinforced through his condemnation of disinformation: "Firefighters, soldiers, and police officers encountered aggression resulting from these lies" and through the assertion that "trust between rescuers and the rescued is an absolutely necessary condition for the success of the rescue operation".

The same emotional logic was extended through symbolic affirmation. Tusk emphasised the moral authority of emergency responders, acknowledged the difficulty of persuading residents to leave, invoked Nowa Sól's experience in 1997 as an example of collective resilience, and praised citizens who "spontaneously, without any compulsion" defended their communities. He also stressed that the presence of responders offered practical help and "a lot of encouragement to residents". In this way, even logistical operations were invested with moral meaning through references to solidarity, transparency, and the longer emotional aftermath of the crisis.

Analytically, this linguistic pattern can be read as a combination of affective legitimisation and emotional containment. Evacuation was affectively legitimised insofar as it was framed through emotionally charged appeals to solidarity, care, memory, sacrifice, and protection. These appeals transformed a potentially contested state intervention into a morally intelligible and publicly defensible act.

At the same time, the speeches performed a layered strategy of emotional containment. By validating fear and attachment to place while simultaneously emphasising physical danger, Tusk reframed resistance to evacuation not as irrational defiance, but as an emotionally understandable response to trauma. The repeated emphasis on trust, reassurance, and the benevolent role of firefighters, police officers, and soldiers suggests an attempt to downregulate panic, resentment, and suspicion, while upregulating confidence in public institutions and willingness to cooperate.

In this sense, the framing did more than justify evacuation. It attempted to regulate the emotional atmosphere in which evacuation had to become acceptable. The condemnation of disinformation is especially important here, because it repositioned mistrust not simply as a messaging problem, but as a moral and affective threat to coordinated rescue action. Therefore, the speeches may be interpreted as seeking both to authorise intrusive state intervention and to stabilise the collective emotional field around that intervention.

Because this study does not include direct reception data, the following claims should be treated as contextually grounded interpretive inferences rather than as direct evidence of how local audiences actually understood these speeches. From the perspective of Szarfenberg's framework, this strategy positions Tusk close to the Feeling Subject pole. Emotion is treated not as a distraction from policy, but as an indispensable medium of messaging, legitimation, and governance. His appeals to

collective memory, relational authority, civic empathy, and moralised trust are analytically coherent with the Knight–Queen–Feeling Subject configuration.

This coherence becomes less stable, however, when the speeches are situated within the broader political and communicative ecology of the welfare state. In a context marked by high polarisation (Górska, 2019), identity-based mistrust, and localised resistance to centralised messaging, affectively rich public address may not necessarily generate emotional legitimacy. The case of evacuation resistance in Bliszczyce suggests that such messaging may fail in environments of deep institutional mistrust.

This inference is supported, albeit indirectly, by several contextual indicators discussed in the case material: reported refusals to evacuate, aggression toward emergency personnel fuelled by disinformation, and municipal-level accounts of procedural confusion, including the marginalisation of village heads and shortages of resources (Kotras et al., 2025). These examples do not provide direct evidence of reception. They do, however, suggest that the emotional and institutional credibility of central government messaging was uneven in some local settings.

As Howarth (2011) argues, emotional resonance is never unilateral; it is mediated through contested identities and social representations. Read in light of this literature, and in conjunction with critiques of classed and metropolitan political framing (cf. Kraszewski, 2024), Tusk's appeals may plausibly have been filtered through local memories of marginalisation and distance from Warsaw politics. Reports of confusion at the municipal level (Kotras et al., 2025), further suggest that affective credibility may have been weakened by practical incoherence.

Without direct reception data, it is not possible to claim definitively how these speeches were experienced by residents. Nevertheless, the available material and secondary context suggest that the framing of evacuation may, in some settings, have been perceived not as care, but as state overreach, emotional misrecognition, or symbolic dominance. In this reading, Tusk's performance remains analytically reconstructible as structurally coherent along the Knight–Queen–Feeling Subject axes, yet its emotional credibility appears uneven across the wider public sphere.

His role may, therefore, be seen as shifting situationally between Queen and Pawn, Knight and Knave, Feeling Subject and Rational Calculator, depending on the ideological alignment, local history, and prior institutional experience of those addressed. This points to the limits of affective governance in a polarised political ecosystem, where emotional legitimacy is not simply projected from above but co-constructed, refracted, and contested by audiences.

It also invites reflection on Tusk's partial embodiment of the Rational Calculator, particularly, in the top-down design of the evacuation strategy. Although the policy was framed emotionally, it still relied on standardised messaging and tacitly assumed that emotional compliance would follow from affective framing. The tensions identified here, therefore, do not invalidate the Feeling Subject reading. Rather, they suggest that its effectiveness was constrained by a more technocratic logic of delivery and by the fractured trust environment in which the framing circulated.

Emotional mobilisation of public support for the reconstruction and repair of accommodation infrastructure

Prime Minister Donald Tusk strategically mobilised emotional framing to build public support for housing reconstruction and repair. His speeches did not present rebuilding as a merely technocratic or logistical task. Instead, housing was framed as a symbol of national resilience, emotional security, and civic solidarity. Recovery was thus portrayed as a response to destruction, and moreover, as a collective moral undertaking and an opportunity for renewal.

One of Tusk's central linguistic strategies was to cast reconstruction as a forward-looking national project. He repeatedly suggested that rebuilding should not simply restore what had been lost but lead to improvement. This reframing positioned affected residents as participants in a broader process of collective recovery and progress rather than passive recipients of state aid.

Tusk also linked emotional solidarity with logistical planning. "Currently, we are facing a great task of drying and, of course, rebuilding", he stated, placing the recovery within a dignified, and even heroic, frame. Preparedness was presented as both a technical necessity and a source of emotional reassurance.

This logic was reinforced through references to continuity of care beyond the immediate emergency. In the key declaration that "when the waters recede, the services will stay with the people", Tusk rejected the earlier patterns of state withdrawal. He explicitly contrasted the current response with 2010: "I remember how in 2010 people felt helpless… the services ended their work, but [residents] were left with the drama". These invocations of prior failure activated emotional memory while positioning the current government's actions within a narrative of institutional learning and moral progress.

Tusk strengthened this narrative by referring to earlier policy innovation, including "the quick help system we launched on a large scale in 2008", and by defining effective aid delivery in ethical terms: "Our task is for it to be fast, flexible, so people don't have to wait when they really need urgent help". Speed and flexibility were, therefore, framed not merely as indicators of administrative competence, but as expressions of attentiveness and public responsibility.

At the same time, Tusk emphasised planning, coordination, and material scale. "We want to move not only with ad hoc aid, but also with the organisation of the reconstruction programme", he stated, while announcing a government plenipotentiary and "billions of zlotys" for the affected areas. He also foregrounded the practical uncertainty faced by victims, stressing that people "must know what to do, what to prepare for: renovation or rebuilding, temporary housing".

This emphasis on practical guidance was further developed through calls for the precise coordination of aid. As Tusk put it, "it's not so much about worrying what to deliver, but how to deliver it… with what help and coordination". He also called for the mobilisation of architects, engineers, and inspectors from unaffected regions. Particularly significant were his references to the material and emotional disruption caused by post-flood living conditions: "In wet buildings or apartments you can't even use electricity for safety reasons, so drying is becoming one of the most important actions".

Finally, Tusk reinforced the legitimacy of the reconstruction effort through visible outcomes and moral valuation. "Over 30,000 emergency grants have already been disbursed within a few days", he noted, insisting that support must not be merely symbolic, but oriented toward "a better future" for those affected.

Analytically, this linguistic configuration can be read as combining affective legitimisation with emotional containment. Reconstruction was affectively legitimised insofar as it was elevated from a technical recovery measure to a morally charged national task, framed through the registers of solidarity, dignity, hope, and shared responsibility. The repeated insistence that rebuilding should lead to improvement gave the policy a future-oriented ethical horizon, presenting state intervention not simply as compensation for loss, but as a promise of renewal.

At the same time, the speeches also appear to perform a strategy of emotional containment. By emphasising continuity of institutional presence, rapid grants, coordinated expertise, and clear procedural guidance, Tusk's messaging sought to absorb uncertainty and channel collective anxiety into manageable, future-oriented expectations. The reminder that "the services will stay with the people" is especially significant because it addressed as administrative continuity and the affective problem of abandonment.

Similarly, references to drying, temporary housing, and the practical steps of rebuilding translated diffuse post-disaster distress into a sequence of governable actions. In this sense, the framing worked not only by celebrating solidarity, but also by stabilising the emotional aftermath of displacement and damage through frames of control, visibility, and purposeful coordination. The insistence that aid must be rapid, flexible, and non-symbolic further converted material delivery into an affective sign of state attentiveness.

From the perspective of the BRC and SAC frameworks, this framing places Tusk close to a Knight–Feeling Subject configuration, while also preserving important elements of the Rational Calculator. On the one hand, the speeches consistently shape reconstruction in terms of public good, collective uplift, and ethical responsibility rather than electoral gain. Housing repair and infrastructural rebuilding become arenas in which the state is expected to demonstrate care, continuity, and responsiveness.

On the other hand, this moral-emotional framing remains inseparable from repeated emphasis on delivery mechanisms, measurable outcomes, procedural organisation, and scale: quick grants, billions allocated, professional mobilisation, and reconstruction timelines. The result is not a simple opposition between affect and rationality. It is rather a hybrid mode of political subjectivity in which emotional governance is articulated through technocratic performance.

In SAC terms, the framing may be read as an attempt to mediate recognition, security, and reassurance at the macro level by making the reconstruction process appear both morally attentive and administratively credible. Because this study does not include direct reception data, however, the analysis cannot establish whether these messages were actually experienced as reassuring or legitimate by affected residents.

What the analysis does suggest is that Tusk's speeches sought to integrate emotional repair and material reconstruction into a single frame of state responsibility. This points to the broader analytical importance of reconstruction framing within affective

governance: rebuilding is presented not merely as technical restoration, but as a site where legitimacy, trust, and the emotional meaning of housing are renegotiated in public.

The transformation of collective emotion into a moral frame of enduring state responsibility for housing in disaster settings

Perhaps the most consistent and far-reaching emotional strategy in Prime Minister Donald Tusk's public messaging was the construction of a long-term moral frame in which the state appeared as the enduring guarantor of housing protection, security, and dignity. This framing did not merely offer reassurance during a moment of crisis. It sought to recast the relationship between citizens and the state as one grounded in emotional trust, historical continuity, and civic reciprocity.

Tusk repeatedly personalised the role of the state, presenting government not as an abstract bureaucracy, but as an emotionally accountable and morally invested actor. "The Polish state will also take on the organisational and financial burden," he declared, explicitly linking institutional commitment to ethical responsibility. This framing was intensified through direct personal accountability: "As Prime Minister, I will of course take responsibility for these decisions". Such statements did more than signal administrative control; they projected governance as a form of ethical presence.

Tusk further deepened this moral contract by invoking solidarity and national pride. "Polish history shows that in difficult moments, we know how to unite", he stated, embedding contemporary flood responses within a broader historical narrative of collective resilience. By framing cooperation as an expression of national character, and not passive obedience, he mobilised emotional cohesion in support of both state-led and community-based responses.

He also warned against the politicisation of the crisis, presenting unity as a moral obligation: "Let us unite in this work. We owe it to the flood victims, firefighters, police, soldiers". In this register, solidarity functioned not merely as a stylistic ornament, but as an affective norm of collective conduct. Housing was thereby reframed not simply as infrastructure, but as a moral and civic good embedded within a wider vision of public care.

This long-term framing also extended to the changing nature of state responsibility. "Unfortunately, it will more and more often be the case that anti-flood actions… will sometimes turn into rescue actions", Tusk warned, underscoring the growing importance of state responsibility in both preventive and reactive housing measures. Civic cooperation, mutual understanding, and affective messaging were elevated as democratic virtues: "Let us accept as obvious that everyone wants to help each other… this mutual communication and understanding is very, very necessary".

The frame of memory, presence, and trust culminated in a strong insistence on long-term institutional commitment: "People cannot be left alone after the dramatic event". Emotional signifiers such as "solidarity", "determination", and "mutual understanding" were repeatedly used to legitimate immediate emergency intervention and the longer arc of post-crisis recovery.

The framing further extended into the register of systemic change. "We already need to work on the first phase of the flood-affected area recovery programme", Tusk declared, presenting housing as a site of political, moral, and affective responsibility rather than a static object of repair. His references to "European funds" suggested a longer temporal and institutional horizon, while symbolic gestures, such as offering "green school" placements for evacuated children, embedded the state's housing role within a broader language of care, protection, and continuity.

Analytically, this linguistic pattern can be read as transforming collective emotion into a moral frame of enduring state responsibility. The speeches did not simply justify discrete policy measures. Rather, they assembled a broader affective grammar in which the state appeared as protector, guarantor, and ethical presence. In this sense, the framing performed a strong form of affective legitimisation: legitimacy was constructed not only through problem-solving capacity or formal authority, but also through emotional vocabularies of care, solidarity, duty, and historical continuity.

Housing, in particular, was elevated beyond its material or infrastructural dimension and presented as a morally charged domain through which the state demonstrated its continuing obligation to citizens. At the same time, this framing also appears to have performed an important function of emotional containment. By invoking historical trauma, notably the floods of 1997 and 2010, and juxtaposing it with images of improved institutional presence, Tusk's speeches sought to absorb collective fear and redirect it toward hope, learning, continuity, and trust.

Emotional transparency, visible, for example, in the encouragement not to fear conversations with residents, and repeated appeals to mutual understanding framed emotional distress as a condition to be acknowledged and governed through solidarity, and not a threat. In this way, the framing sought to authorise state intervention and to stabilise the emotional field around that intervention by converting vulnerability into a renewed moral claim on state responsibility.

The significance of this pattern lies in the fact that emotional containment operated here through reassurance and the construction of a long-duration frame in which housing recovery became part of an enduring social contract.

From the perspective of the BRC and SAC frameworks, this messaging can be read as a particularly strong performance of the Feeling Subject, closely aligned with the Knight–Queen configuration. Tusk presents himself as acting in the public interest, exercising visible agency, and grounding legitimacy in emotional and ethical resonance rather than in technocratic neutrality alone. The speeches suggest a deliberate shift from technical governance toward emotional stewardship, in which the state is described as a caring and morally invested actor, and not merely the organiser of services.

In SAC terms, this may be interpreted as an attempt to mediate recognition, dignity, and security at the macro level by embedding housing policy within a larger moral frame of continuity, protection, and reciprocal obligation. At the same time, this reading depends on analytic reconstruction rather than direct evidence of reception. Because the study is based on the speeches of a single actor and does not include audience data, it cannot establish whether this performance was widely recognised as reassuring, credible, or legitimate.

Indeed, as the wider context suggests, such a strategy may not have been equally legible across all regions and publics. In a fragmented media environment marked by polarisation and mistrust (Kowalczyk, 2024), even a linguistically coherent performance of moral-emotional leadership may be refracted through partisan suspicion and unequal trust in central institutions. The strategy identified here should, therefore, not be treated as definitive evidence of affective success, but rather as an indication of how macro-political speech can seek to construct an enduring moral basis for housing-related state action under crisis conditions.

What this section most clearly suggests is that Tusk's messaging attempted to bind immediate flood response, longer-term recovery, and the symbolic meaning of housing into a single frame of state responsibility. In that respect, it offers a strong illustration of how emotional governance can operate through the legitimation of particular interventions and the public framing of the state itself as an affective and moral actor.

Conclusion and discussion

This study contributes to the social policy approach to housing research by applying selected elements of Szarfenberg's Beyond the Rational Calculator (BRC) diagnostic tool to the analysis of emotional governance during the 2024 flood crisis in Poland. Read through this lens, the case offers a more differentiated account of how political legitimacy may be constructed at the intersection of emotional messaging and policy design. The analysis suggests that Prime Minister Tusk's public role should not be understood as a fixed or essentialised political subjectivity, but as a situationally performed configuration that shifts across the axes of Knight–Knave, Queen–Pawn, and Rational Calculator–Feeling Subject.

In this case, emotional frames, such as empathy, solidarity, and reassurance, and policy precision, such as grants, timelines, and organisational commitments, appear not as opposites, but as mutually reinforcing elements of crisis governance. The study, therefore, lends provisional support to the argument that the Feeling Subject mode may humanise technically disruptive decisions, including evacuation, reconstruction, and compensation, without displacing rational planning.

At the same time, the analysis points to moments of possible affective dissonance, understood as instances in which Tusk's emotional framing appears to have clashed with broader patterns of mistrust, resistance, and political contestation. Read together with the wider secondary context, the case suggests that emotional appeals may not operate uniformly across politically differentiated settings. In regions marked by lower trust in Civic Platform and greater distance from centralised authority, the same linguistic strategies that seek to convey care and solidarity may instead be read as performative, technocratic, or manipulative.

This does not invalidate the relevance of affective governance. Rather, it points to its fragility and contingency. Emotional legitimacy, as this case suggests, is not simply projected from above. It is co-constituted through historically sedimented trust relations, political identities, and local interpretive frames. In this respect, the argument resonates with social-constructivist work on representative claim-making

(Saward, 2010), especially the suggestion that political claims are read back, accepted, modified, or resisted by audiences in context and not simply designed by some representatives.

The claims advanced in this article should nevertheless be interpreted with caution. Given its design as a single-case, single-actor, speech-based study, the analysis does not provide a definitive account of emotional governance or of the explanatory power of the BRC and SAC frameworks. Rather, it offers an exploratory proof of concept, showing that these frameworks can be meaningfully operationalised in the analysis of disaster-related housing policy messaging. Consequently, the findings are preliminary, interpretive, and hypothesis-generating. They also indicate the analytical promise of bringing affective categories into the study of housing policy under crisis conditions.

Furthermore, the study offers a cautious contribution to the Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework, especially at the level of the relationship between provision and mediation. At Level 1, the Ecosystem of Provision, the case suggests that flood-related housing support was organised through a hybrid configuration combining a formal bureaucratic logic – state-led evacuation, emergency aid, reconstruction programming, and compensation – with community-based dynamics of attachment, local solidarity, informal resistance, and place-based memory. As a result, housing during the flood crisis appears not as a bounded sectoral domain, but as a layered field in which institutional action, local meaning structures, and emotionally charged expectations intersected.

At Level 2, the Mechanisms of Mediation, the analysis traces how macro-political speech sought to mediate recognition, dignity, and security. Recognition was projected through repeated acknowledgment of suffering, memory, and shared vulnerability. Dignity was addressed through the framing of evacuation and aid as respectful, voluntary where possible, and morally justified. Security was articulated through promises of institutional continuity, reconstruction, compensation, and long-term responsibility. Because the study does not include reception data, this discussion should be read as an interpretive reconstruction of how macro-level speech sought to structure citizen experience, rather than as evidence of how citizens actually accepted, negotiated, or resisted these claims.

Level 3, concerning the emotional experience of citizenship itself, lies beyond the direct empirical reach of this study. Nevertheless, the material allows for cautious theoretical inferences. The speeches suggest a mode of governance that relies heavily on affective repertoires – solidarity, sacrifice, reassurance, duty, and moral reciprocity – as foundations of legitimacy. They also suggest that emotional resonance was unlikely to be evenly distributed across contexts and may have varied according to political alignment, regional trust, and prior experiences of state responsiveness or abandonment. Therefore, the study does not demonstrate affective citizenship empirically. On the other hand, it indicates how macro-level speech acts may seek to pre-structure the emotional terms on which citizenship is lived, contested, or withdrawn.

Although this article does not trace Level 4 feedback empirically, the SAC framework helps articulate why these dynamics may matter beyond the immediate crisis. If evacuation, reconstruction, and compensation are publicly framed – and subsequently received – as recognising, dignifying, and reliable, they may contribute to

stabilising feedback loops of trust, compliance, and sustained expectations of state responsibility. If, however, emotional appeals are read as detached, performative, or politically selective, similar interventions may feed resentment, withdrawal, or polarised contestation. The present study cannot determine which of these pathways ultimately prevailed. Still, it can identify the conditions under which such divergent socio-emotional trajectories may begin to emerge.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the BRC and SAC frameworks are analytically productive for examining how macro-level political actors attempt to govern not only through rules, resources, and institutional instruments, but also through emotional vocabularies of care, solidarity, responsibility, and reassurance. One of the central implications of the case is, therefore, methodological as well as theoretical: emotional governance is not an incidental supplement to housing policy in times of crisis, but may form part of the very medium through which disruptive interventions become publicly intelligible, morally authorised, and politically sustainable. The article captures only one segment of a broader political-emotional process. Nevertheless, its value lies in opening this process to further empirical and theoretical investigation.

The text also contributes to housing studies by shifting analytical attention from exclusively institutional and material determinants toward the symbolic, emotional, and performative dimensions of housing policy, without dismissing the former. In this account, housing is not reducible to shelter, infrastructure, or compensation mechanisms. It emerges instead as a site of affective investment, political meaning, and moral expectation. This resonates with recent calls in critical housing studies, including Woodhall-Melnik and Weissman (2021), to take trauma, emotional displacement, and place attachment more seriously, particularly in disaster settings where the loss or disruption of home exceeds purely material damage. In this sense, the article suggests that emotional legitimacy may be central, rather than peripheral, to how housing-related interventions are justified and contested.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the usefulness of Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) for examining affective governance in public messaging. While QCA is often associated with thematic categorisation and meaning reconstruction. Here, it proved useful for identifying patterns of affective legitimisation, emotional containment, and possible affective dissonance in elite political speech.

The study's limitations define the most important avenues for further research. Future studies should extend the analysis beyond a single macro-political actor and include additional institutional levels, especially, administrators, local officials, frontline workers, and residents themselves. They should also incorporate bottom-up materials, such as interviews, ethnographic accounts, local media, social media, or participatory observation, to examine how emotional governance is actually received, negotiated, or resisted. Comparative research across welfare regimes, disaster types, and political cultures could clarify whether emotional containment and affective legitimisation operate as recurring techniques of crisis governance or whether their form and effectiveness remain strongly context-dependent.

The ethical dimension of emotional governance also deserves closer attention, since strategies that stabilise trust in one context may be experienced as manipulation in another, especially, where institutional delivery is uneven or historical accountability

is weak. Therefore, future research should connect macro-level analysis of speech and policy messaging with the lived, contested, and temporally unfolding dynamics through which emotional governance reshapes citizenship. This would require fuller operationalisation of SAC components not examined here, especially the ECPA framework at the micro level and the ELP model concerning longer-term shifts in collective emotional climates.

Understood in this way, the present article does not close the theoretical question. It opens it by showing that the emotional life of housing policy in disaster conditions is analytically tractable, theoretically significant, and worthy of fuller investigation.

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Social-affective citizenship and the transformation of welfare belonging: affective regimes of Ukrainian refugee inclusion in Poland (2022–2025)

Abstract

This article examines how Polish political elites constructed and transformed the affective foundations of welfare inclusion for Ukrainian refugees between 2022 and 2025. Drawing on the Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework, it conceptualises refugee reception as a process shaped not only by legal and institutional arrangements but also by affective narratives that define belonging, deservingness, and welfare membership. The analysis is based on 46 political statements and 126 coded meaning units.

The findings identify three interconnected affective regimes: Humanitarian Belonging, Reciprocal Deservingness, and Conditional Membership. The initial phase of refugee reception was dominated by empathy, solidarity, and collective responsibility, legitimising welfare inclusion based on vulnerability and humanitarian need. Over time, political discourse increasingly emphasised reciprocity, fairness, productivity, and social contribution as criteria for sustaining support. Simultaneously, exclusionary

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narratives centred on costs, resentment, emotional fatigue, and national priority became more visible, particularly within right-wing opposition discourse.

The analysis demonstrates that conditionality did not emerge in response to declining solidarity. Rather, elements of reciprocity, fairness, and welfare sustainability were already embedded within the initial solidarity regime and became more salient over time. The article contributes to scholarship on refugee governance and welfare deservingness by showing that affective narratives shape welfare boundaries. It also advances Social-Affective Citizenship theory by demonstrating how solidarity, reciprocity, and conditionality operate as interconnected mechanisms through which welfare membership is negotiated and legitimised.

Keywords: Poland, political discourse, Ukrainian refugees, Social-Affective Citizenship, welfare conditionality

1. Introduction

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 generated one of the largest displacement movements in contemporary Europe. Poland became a central destination for Ukrainian refugees and a particularly revealing case for analysing the evolution of refugee reception, welfare provision, and political debate. As displacement shifted from an emergency to a protracted situation, the moral and affective foundations of institutional responses also changed. Political elites recalibrated the vocabulary through which support for refugees was justified, gradually redefining eligibility for welfare assistance and the conditions attached to it. Over time, the initial consensus surrounding refugee reception gave way to intensifying debates about reciprocity, deservingness, welfare sustainability, and the criteria for sustaining solidarity.

This article contends that Poland's response to Ukrainian displacement between 2022 and 2025 was marked by a gradual transformation in the affective foundations of welfare inclusion. The initial phase was dominated by a broad cross-party regime of empathic solidarity, whereas subsequent political debates increasingly mobilised narratives of reciprocity, fairness, and productive deservingness. Solidarity was not simply replaced by exclusion; rather, it was progressively redefined through more conditional interpretations of welfare membership. Consequently, access to recognition and support became increasingly linked to expectations of reciprocity, contribution, and social adaptation.

Drawing on the framework of Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC), this article conceptualises affect as a mechanism for governing belonging and deservingness (Szarfenberg, 2026). SAC highlights the circulation of emotions among political actors, institutions, and public narratives, thereby shaping the moral economy of inclusion. In the Polish context, affective registers functioned as instruments for stabilising and subsequently renegotiating the terms of welfare access for Ukrainian refugees. Through an analysis of political speeches, public interventions, and welfare-related policy proposals from 2022 to 2025, the article reconstructs the evolution of affective meaning-making and its relationship to the institutional trajectory of refugee protection.

The Polish case illustrates that the boundaries of welfare inclusion are determined not only by legal reforms but also by evolving affective repertoires that influence perceptions of deservingness. Existing scholarship has analysed the reception of Ukrainian refugees through concepts such as humanitarianism, selective solidarity, differentiated protection, refugee governance, and welfare deservingness. These studies have provided significant insights into the unequal distribution of inclusion, the influence of identity and proximity on support for refugees, and the gradual development of conditional forms of welfare membership.

Although an expanding body of scholarship has examined Poland's response to Ukrainian refugees from these perspectives, limited attention has been devoted to the affective mechanisms through which welfare inclusion is legitimised, contested, and redefined over time. Most existing studies focus on policy outcomes, institutional arrangements, or public attitudes, leaving the affective transformation of political discourse and its relationship to welfare conditionality comparatively underexplored.

This article offers three primary contributions to the literature. First, it advances research on refugee deservingness and welfare conditionality by demonstrating that entitlement evaluations are structured by affective narratives rather than solely by policy arguments. Second, it enriches scholarship on refugee reception by showing that humanitarian solidarity was not simply displaced by exclusion but was progressively reconfigured through discourses of reciprocity, fairness, and productive deservingness. Third, it advances Social-Affective Citizenship theory by demonstrating how evolving affective regimes of humanitarian belonging, reciprocal deservingness, and conditional membership structure welfare inclusion. In doing so, the article provides a systematic empirical application of the Social-Affective Citizenship framework and illustrates how affective regimes become embedded in welfare debates, shaping the boundaries of political and social membership. The article further situates Poland's post-2022 response against the background of pre-war Ukrainian labour migration and within broader European debates on the shift from emergency solidarity to more conditional forms of refugee welfare inclusion.

To address these gaps, the article examines how political actors constructed the affective conditions of belonging for Ukrainian refugees and how these constructions reshaped understandings of deservingness and welfare inclusion. The analysis is guided by two research questions:

1. How did affective narratives surrounding Ukrainian refugees evolve within Polish political discourse between 2022 and 2025, and what distinct affective regimes emerged during this period?
2. How did changing affective regimes reshape notions of deservingness and contribute to the growing conditionality of welfare inclusion for Ukrainian refugees?

The analysis identifies the coexistence and gradual reconfiguration of three affective regimes centred on humanitarian belonging, reciprocal deservingness, and conditional membership.

2. *Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC), deservingness and welfare inclusion*

2.1. The Polish context of refugee reception after 2022

The reception of Ukrainian refugees in Poland unfolded within a distinctive historical and institutional context (Klaus & Szulecka, 2023). Although Poland was traditionally regarded as a country of emigration, the years following its accession to the European Union were marked by a growing presence of foreign workers, particularly from Ukraine (Klaus & Szulecka, 2023; Łukasiewicz et al., 2026). Before 2022, the presence of Ukrainians in Poland was already substantial, but their incorporation was framed primarily through labour migration, with welfare membership remaining outside the dominant framework. Since 2014, Ukrainian migration to Poland had expanded rapidly as a result of labour-market demand, simplified short-term employment procedures, visa-free mobility, and deteriorating economic and security conditions in Ukraine (Klaus & Szulecka, 2023; Strzelecki et al., 2025).

By 2021, this pattern was clearly reflected in Eurostat first-residence-permit data. Poland issued 967,300 first residence permits to non-EU citizens that year, accounting for one third of all such permits granted in the EU; 790,100 of these permits were issued for employment-related reasons. Ukrainian citizens were the largest group of first-permit recipients in the EU, with 875,800 permits granted, 83% of them issued by Poland and 88% granted for employment-related reasons (Eurostat, 2022).

This pre-war openness, however, was highly selective in institutional terms. Ukrainians were welcomed predominantly as temporary and economically useful workers, while many remained dependent on short-term permits, declarations of employment, visa-free stays, or other administratively fragile forms of legalisation (Klaus & Szulecka, 2023; Kindler & Szulecka, 2022; Łukasiewicz et al., 2026). As a result, their inclusion was broad in labour-market terms but limited in welfare terms: they were incorporated as workers and contributors rather than as full members of the welfare community. These pre-existing ties shaped both the scale of the initial reception and the capacity of Polish society to respond rapidly to the arrival of displaced Ukrainians after February 2022, while also making the post-2022 shift from labour-market incorporation to protection-based welfare inclusion particularly significant.

The outbreak of war in February 2022 triggered one of the largest and fastest displacement movements in contemporary European history (Duszczyk & Kaczmarczyk, 2022). Poland became the principal country of first reception and one of the main destination countries for people fleeing Ukraine. More than 3.5 million border crossings from Ukraine to Poland were recorded during the first months of the war (Duszczyk & Kaczmarczyk, 2022), while approximately 1.6 million displaced persons remained in Poland during the initial phase of the crisis (UNHCR, 2022). By 2025, almost one million individuals had been registered in the PESEL UKR system, which served as the principal gateway to legal status, welfare entitlements, and public services in Poland (Urząd do Spraw Cudzoziemców, 2025).

In response to the crisis, Poland complemented the EU Temporary Protection regime with an extensive national support framework for people fleeing Ukraine. A key element of this response was the Special Act of 12 March 2022 (Ustawa z dnia 12 marca 2022 r., 2022), which incorporated Ukrainian refugees into major areas of Poland's legal and welfare system by granting broad access to legal residence, healthcare, education, the labour market, and social benefits, including the universal child benefit programme (500+, later increased to 800+) (Klaus & Szulecka, 2023).

At the same time, scholars have emphasised that the Polish response combined liberalisation with selectivity (Łukasiewicz et al., 2026; Hernes & Łukasiewicz, 2026). While displaced Ukrainians received rapid access to protection, public services, and welfare benefits, other categories of asylum seekers and forced migrants generally remained subject to more restrictive admission and protection arrangements (Klaus & Szulecka, 2023). Consequently, Poland's post-2022 approach to forced migration has been characterised as simultaneously liberal and restrictive, reflecting broader hierarchies of deservingness shaped by geopolitical, cultural, and, in some accounts, racialised distinctions (Łukasiewicz et al., 2026; Marciniak & Scovil, 2026).

Although the initial framework provided extensive access to welfare benefits and public services, subsequent political debates increasingly focused on limiting eligibility, strengthening conditionality, and linking access to support with labour market participation and other expectations directed toward beneficiaries. This gradual reorientation was reflected in successive amendments to the Special Act and culminated in the decision, adopted in early 2026, to phase out the exceptional protection framework established in 2022.

Another distinctive feature of the Polish response was the central role of local governments, civil society organisations, volunteers, and private citizens (Klaus & Szulecka, 2023; Łukasiewicz et al., 2026). Much of the practical support provided to displaced Ukrainians depended on cooperation between public institutions and non-state actors (Klaus & Szulecka, 2023; Łukasiewicz et al., 2026). This unprecedented societal mobilisation became an important reference point in subsequent political debates on solidarity, responsibility, and the scope of welfare obligations toward refugees (Marciniak & Scovil, 2026; Zogata-Kusz et al., 2026).

The combination of extensive social support, differentiated access to protection, and evolving welfare arrangements makes Poland a particularly valuable case for examining how affective conditions of belonging, deservingness, and welfare inclusion were constructed, negotiated, and contested within political discourse.

2.2. Selective solidarity and refugee reception

The reception of Ukrainian refugees in Europe has generated a rapidly expanding body of scholarship examining the political, social, and moral foundations of refugee inclusion (Hernes & Łukasiewicz, 2026; Łukasiewicz et al., 2026). Early analyses emphasised the unprecedented scale of solidarity mobilised in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and highlighted the exceptional character of protection regimes adopted across Europe (Hernes & Łukasiewicz, 2026; Marciniak & Scovil,

2026). At the same time, a growing number of studies have questioned whether this solidarity represented a genuinely universal humanitarian response or a selective form of inclusion structured by perceptions of deservingness, cultural proximity, and geopolitical alignment (Klaus & Szulecka, 2023; Hernes & Łukasiewicz, 2026; Łukasiewicz et al., 2026; Zogata-Kusz et al., 2025, 2026). These debates resonate with broader theoretical discussions on humanitarianism, deservingness, and selective inclusion. Long before the Ukrainian refugee crisis, scholars such as Fassin (2012) and Ticktin (2011) demonstrated that humanitarian responses are rarely universal in practice and are often shaped by moral hierarchies that distinguish between more and less deserving recipients of protection.

One influential strand of scholarship interprets the reception of Ukrainian refugees through the concept of selective solidarity (Hernes & Łukasiewicz, 2026; Łukasiewicz et al., 2026). Studies of the Ukrainian refugee response have argued that the unprecedented mobilisation of support was facilitated by perceptions of cultural proximity, shared European identity, religious affinity, and a common geopolitical opposition to Russia (Zogata-Kusz et al., 2025; 2026; Marciniak & Scovil, 2026; Łukasiewicz et al., 2026). Consequently, Ukrainian refugees were frequently represented as particularly deserving beneficiaries of protection and welfare support (Zogata-Kusz et al., 2025, 2026; Łukasiewicz et al., 2026).

These findings also connect the Ukrainian case to broader debates on selective solidarity and hierarchies of deservingness. Earlier scholarship has shown that refugee protection is often differentiated through socially and politically constructed categories of belonging, identity, and moral worth (Holzberg et al., 2018). The Ukrainian case thus illustrates how humanitarian inclusion operates through boundary-making between more and less desirable recipients of solidarity (Klaus & Szulecka, 2023; Hernes & Łukasiewicz, 2026; Łukasiewicz et al., 2026).

The Polish response to Ukrainian refugees also gains additional significance when contrasted with reactions to the 2015–2016 refugee crisis. Whereas refugee reception during the European refugee crisis was frequently framed in Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries through narratives of security threats, cultural incompatibility, and opposition to refugee relocation, the arrival of displaced Ukrainians generated an unprecedented mobilisation of solidarity. This contrast suggests that solidarity cannot be treated as an automatic response to humanitarian crises. As research on migration and refugee discourses has demonstrated, public and political responses are shaped by processes of boundary-making that distinguish between different categories of migrants and refugees (Krzyżanowska & Krzyżanowski, 2018). Ukrainian refugees were widely represented as culturally proximate neighbours, victims of external aggression, and participants in a shared geopolitical struggle against Russia. These representations facilitated forms of inclusion that differed markedly from the reception of refugees from Syria and other non-European countries a decade earlier (Zogata-Kusz et al., 2025; 2026; Hernes & Łukasiewicz, 2026; Łukasiewicz et al., 2026). The comparison, therefore, reinforces arguments advanced in the literature on selective solidarity and deservingness, showing that access to protection is mediated by socially and affectively constructed boundaries of belonging rather than humanitarian need alone.

2.3. Deservingness and welfare conditionality

The selective character of Ukrainian refugee inclusion has stimulated growing engagement with theories of welfare deservingness (Meuleman et al., 2020; Knotz et al., 2022; Zogata-Kusz et al., 2025). Building on Van Oorschot's (2000; 2006) CARIN framework, subsequent research has demonstrated that public support for welfare provision is structured by evaluations concerning recipients' control over their circumstances, attitudes, reciprocity, social identity, and level of need (Meuleman et al., 2020; Knotz et al., 2022). Research on Ukrainian refugees proves that these mechanisms were particularly visible in debates concerning access to welfare benefits and public services (Łukasiewicz et al., 2026; Zogata-Kusz et al., 2025). Ukrainians were initially perceived as highly deserving recipients of support due to their circumstances of forced displacement, supposed willingness to work, and cultural proximity to host societies (Zogata-Kusz et al., 2025; Marciniak & Scovil, 2026; Klaus & Szulecka, 2023). However, recent studies suggest that deservingness evaluations evolved over time (Zogata-Kusz et al., 2026; Łukasiewicz et al., 2026). While early support was largely grounded in humanitarian need and shared identity, later debates increasingly emphasised reciprocity, labour market participation, gratitude, contribution, and compliance with social expectations (Zogata-Kusz et al., 2026; Łukasiewicz et al., 2026). Consequently, entitlement became increasingly linked to economic participation and socially valued forms of conduct (Łukasiewicz et al., 2026; Zogata-Kusz et al., 2026). These developments can be interpreted through the broader lens of welfare conditionality, which highlights the growing tendency to link access to welfare support with expectations concerning reciprocity, responsibility, and appropriate conduct (Dwyer, 2004).

Studies of refugee governance in Poland and elsewhere indicate that initial emergency responses gradually gave way to discussions concerning the sustainability of welfare provision, the allocation of public resources, and the appropriate limits of inclusion (Łukasiewicz et al., 2026; Hernes & Łukasiewicz, 2026). Although Ukrainians continued to enjoy privileged access to protection compared to many other refugee groups, political and public debates increasingly focused on fairness, burden-sharing, reciprocity, and the relationship between welfare rights and obligations (Zogata-Kusz et al., 2026; Łukasiewicz et al., 2026).

From the perspective of welfare conditionality scholarship, these developments illustrate how solidarity may become increasingly intertwined with expectations of contribution and adaptation, thereby producing more conditional forms of welfare inclusion (Dwyer, 2004). The Ukrainian case provides a contemporary empirical example of broader dynamics previously identified in welfare-state research.

While these studies provide important insights into selective solidarity, deservingness, and welfare conditionality, they focus primarily on policy outcomes, public attitudes, or institutional arrangements (Knotz et al., 2022; Meuleman et al., 2020). Less attention has been devoted to the affective mechanisms through which inclusion and exclusion are legitimised, negotiated, and transformed within political discourse. Existing research identifies changing evaluations of deservingness and welfare entitlement but offers fewer tools for explaining how emotional narratives

shape these evaluations, structure expectations toward refugees, and contribute to the reconfiguration of welfare boundaries (Marciniak & Scovil, 2026; Ekström et al., 2025; Klaus & Szulecka, 2023; Tyler, 2020).

2.4. Social-Affective Citizenship and affective conditions of belonging

The Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework developed by Szarfenberg (2026) provides the conceptual basis for analysing these affective mechanisms. Building on scholarship on affective citizenship, affective governance, the politics of belonging, and emotional boundary-making (Ahmed, 2014; Fortier, 2021; Ayata, 2019), SAC conceptualises citizenship as the intersection of institutional arrangements and affective processes through which recognition, solidarity, inclusion, and exclusion are negotiated. From this perspective, welfare institutions do not merely allocate rights and resources; they also communicate symbolic judgements concerning worth, legitimacy, and membership. Consequently, access to welfare support is shaped not only by legal status or policy design but also by affective constructions of who belongs, who is considered deserving, and under what conditions inclusion is maintained.

Particularly relevant for the present study is SAC's emphasis on the affective dimensions of solidarity, reciprocity, hierarchy, and belonging. Drawing on Ayata's (2019) work on affective citizenship and Fortier's (2021) analysis of affective governance, the framework highlights how inclusion within a political community is structured through emotional norms, moral evaluations, and socially embedded expectations directed toward particular groups. SAC further incorporates insights from Roy et al. (2022), who emphasise the role of solidarity, mutual care, and expectations of state responsibility in shaping experiences of citizenship and social membership. Political actors play a central role in producing and circulating feeling rules that define appropriate emotional orientations toward specific social groups (Hochschild, 1979; 1983). In the context of refugee reception, such expectations may involve demonstrations of gratitude, reciprocity, contribution, loyalty, or alignment with dominant understandings of collective identity. These processes generate what SAC conceptualises as affective conditions of belonging: emotionally mediated criteria through which access to recognition, solidarity, and welfare support becomes contingent, negotiated, and potentially conditional (Ahmed, 2014; Fortier, 2021).

2.5. Research gap and analytical framework

Taken together, these strands of scholarship have advanced our understanding of selective solidarity, deservingness, and the conditionality of refugee inclusion. They show how access to protection and welfare support is shaped by perceptions of need, identity, reciprocity, and fairness, as well as by broader political and institutional contexts. Less attention has been paid, however, to the role of affective narratives in shaping evaluations of deservingness and structuring expectations toward refugees as members of the welfare community.

The Social-Affective Citizenship framework offers a useful lens for addressing this limitation by linking welfare inclusion to broader processes of belonging, recognition, solidarity, and exclusion. Applying this perspective to the Polish case allows us to examine how political elites articulated and negotiated the affective conditions of belonging in response to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees and how these conditions informed evolving understandings of reciprocity, deservingness, and welfare entitlement. This approach extends existing scholarship by focusing on the affective foundations of welfare inclusion and the role of political discourse in redefining the boundaries of support.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research corpus and selection criteria

The final corpus consisted of 46 political statements and 126 coded meaning units (MUs) produced between 2022 and 2025. The material included presidential addresses, parliamentary speeches, press conferences, official government communications, media interviews, and other public political interventions. Information on the composition of the corpus, its distribution across political actors and years, and the complete list of analysed communications is provided in Appendix A (Tables A1–A3). The extended appendix has been deposited as a dataset in a research data repository to ensure transparency and support the replicability of the research (Nakonieczna-Bartosiewicz, 2026).

The selection of material was guided by 4 inclusion criteria: (1) the statement addressed Ukrainian refugees, refugee assistance, welfare provision, or related public policies; (2) the speaker occupied a nationally relevant political position; (3) the communication was publicly accessible; and (4) it either received nationwide media coverage or was disseminated through an official political communication channel. Exclusion criteria included local-level statements, comments concerning the war in Ukraine that did not address refugee reception or welfare provision, and duplicate communications.

The temporal distribution of the corpus reflects major political and legislative developments that have affected the reception of Ukrainian refugees and related welfare policies. As a result, 2024 is represented by fewer communications, reflecting the relative stabilisation of the refugee debate between the highly politicised period of 2022–2023 and its renewed politicisation during the 2025 presidential election campaign.

The corpus focuses on political elites because of their central role in shaping public narratives and influencing welfare and migration policies. The selected speakers were leaders of their respective political parties or individuals holding prominent political and institutional positions at the national level. In several cases, additional speakers were included because they participated in joint press conferences or collective political interventions representing official party or governmental positions. To preserve the integrity of these communications, all participants making substantive statements relevant to the research topic were included in the corpus.

President Andrzej Duda and President Karol Nawrocki were analysed separately due to their distinct temporal location within the corpus and potentially different affective repertoires. However, interpretations concerning President Nawrocki should be treated as preliminary, given the limited number of statements available for analysis. The distribution of statements and meaning units by political actor is presented in Appendix A, Table A3.

3.2 Analytical framework and coding procedure

The analysis combines Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse analysis (1992; 1995) with the Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework (Szarfenberg, 2026) and an iterative qualitative coding procedure inspired by Saldaña (2021) and Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020). Fairclough's approach provided the broader analytical architecture for interpreting textual features, discursive practices, and their embedding within wider socio-political contexts. The SAC framework informed the analysis's substantive focus by directing attention to affective constructions of belonging, solidarity, reciprocity, deservingness, and welfare inclusion.

The primary unit of analysis was the meaning unit (MU), defined as an analytically coherent segment expressing a distinct affective, evaluative, or normative position toward Ukrainian refugees, welfare support, or related policy measures. Meaning units were identified on the basis of semantic coherence, not formal sentence boundaries. Consequently, a single political statement could contain multiple meaning units reflecting different affective orientations and evaluative logics.

All source materials were analysed and coded in their original Polish-language versions. Coding decisions were, therefore, based on meanings, affective expressions, and contextual nuances present in the original texts. English translations were prepared only at the final stage of manuscript preparation for the purpose of presenting selected illustrative quotations in the article. All translations are the author's own.

The analytical procedure followed a theory-informed iterative coding strategy. Initial coding was guided by concepts from the Social-Affective Citizenship framework, particularly solidarity, reciprocity, conditionality, resentment, gratitude, fairness, security, and boundary-making in welfare. These categories operated as flexible analytical orientations that guided the coding process without predetermining the final code structure.

Coding was conducted using QDA Miner Lite. In later stages of analysis, coding matrices, category refinement, and comparisons across years and political formations were managed in Microsoft Excel. Coding was conducted by a single researcher and followed an interpretive qualitative logic focused on reconstructing affective meanings and discursive patterns, not on producing statistical intercoder reliability. The process was iterative and abductive: meaning units were revisited and recoded where necessary to refine operational definitions and ensure consistency across the dataset.

The first coding cycle focused on identifying affective framings, justificatory narratives, and evaluative constructions related to refugee reception, welfare provision, state obligations, reciprocity, and social boundaries. Multiple codes could be assigned to a single meaning unit when several affective orientations coexisted. The coding

scheme was developed deductively from the literature on Social-Affective Citizenship and subsequently refined inductively through successive rounds of coding and recoding.

In the second stage of analysis, coded meaning units were compared across political actors and time periods. This comparative procedure enabled the identification of recurring affective constellations and shifts in the emotional construction of refugee reception. The final coding architecture consisted of 17 affective categories organised into broader analytical domains used to reconstruct affective regimes across actors and time. The complete coding scheme, operational definitions, and coding indicators are presented in Appendix B (Tables B1–B2) and are included in the deposited dataset (Nakonieczna-Bartosiewicz, 2026).

The study did not employ keyword frequency analysis or keyword-in-context (KWIC) procedures. Its objective was not to measure lexical prevalence but to identify affective meanings embedded in political discourse. Coding, therefore, focused on semantic and contextual meanings, allowing categories such as solidarity, resentment, gratitude, reciprocity, or cost to be identified even when these terms were not explicitly used.

3.3. Affective coding scheme and reconstruction of affective regimes

The final coding architecture consisted of 17 affective and justificatory codes organised into five analytical domains: inclusive affects, stabilising affects, conditionality affects, exclusionary affects, and governance-oriented justificatory codes. These domains, detailed in Appendix B, Tables B1–B2, functioned as an intermediate level between first-cycle codes and the reconstruction of affective regimes. The coding scheme captured affective expressions and normative evaluations through which political actors constructed, justified, and contested refugee inclusion. Particular attention was paid to narratives of empathy, solidarity, reciprocity, gratitude, fairness, productivity, cost, resentment, and security. Affective regimes were reconstructed from recurring constellations of codes across domains. They were derived from patterns of co-occurrence identified across political actors, documents, and time periods.

Code configurations recurring across multiple actors, documents, and years were treated as affective regimes. Less frequent or isolated code combinations were interpreted as individual discursive variations. On this basis, three affective regimes were identified: the Humanitarian Belonging Regime, the Reciprocal Deservingness Regime, and the Conditional Membership Regime.

The Humanitarian Belonging Regime was primarily associated with the co-occurrence of E_EMPATHY, E_SOLIDARITY, UNITY/COLLECTIVE_STRENGTH, E_GRATITUDE, and SECURITY, reflecting constructions of humanitarian responsibility, collective mobilisation, shared vulnerability, and common security. The Reciprocal Deservingness Regime emerged from recurrent combinations of E_RECIPROCITY, E_FAIRNESS, E_EXPECTATIONS, PRODUCTIVE_DESERVINGNESS, STATE_RESPONSIBILITY, and E_SYSTEM_BALANCE, linking welfare inclusion to contribution, reciprocity, and concerns about welfare sustainability. The Conditional Membership Regime was characterised by recurring

associations between E_COST, E_RESENTMENT, GRATITUDE_DEFICIT, EMOTIONAL_FATIGUE, and EXCLUSION/BOUNDARY_WORK, reflecting efforts to redefine the boundaries of welfare membership through narratives of burden, unfairness, and national priority. Together, these regimes served as analytical devices for tracing changes in the affective foundations of welfare inclusion.

The regimes should not be understood as mutually exclusive categories. Individual meaning units could contain elements associated with more than one regime, reflecting the coexistence of competing affective logics within political discourse. The purpose of the regime typology was, therefore, not to classify statements into fixed categories but to reconstruct dominant affective configurations through which refugee reception and welfare membership were interpreted and negotiated. Operational definitions, coding indicators, and illustrative examples are presented in Appendix B.

3.4. Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the analysis relies on qualitative interpretive coding conducted by a single researcher. Although the coding scheme was systematically refined throughout the research process and previously coded material was repeatedly revisited to ensure analytical consistency, the identification and categorisation of affective meanings inevitably involve interpretive judgement. Hence, the findings should be read as a theoretically informed reconstruction of discursive patterns, with limited capacity to provide a direct measure of emotional content. Likewise, the affective regimes identified in the analysis represent analytical constructs developed to capture recurring configurations within the corpus; they are heuristic devices for interpretation, not fixed or mutually exclusive categories. All coding was conducted on the original Polish-language material. However, the illustrative quotations presented in English necessarily involve some interpretive translation and may not fully reflect all linguistic, cultural, and contextual nuances embedded in the source texts.

Second, the study focuses exclusively on elite political discourse. The corpus was intentionally constructed around statements by nationally relevant political actors, given their role in shaping public narratives and influencing welfare and migration policies. Consequently, the analysis reconstructs the affective logics, justificatory narratives, and feeling rules articulated within political communication. It does not seek to capture the attitudes, experiences, or practices of refugees, frontline service providers, civil society actors, or the broader Polish population. Moreover, although the corpus was systematically assembled around major political actors and key moments in public debate, it does not encompass the full range of political communication about Ukrainian refugees during the analysed period.

Third, the distribution of material across political actors and years is uneven. Differences in media visibility, political activity, and the intensity of public debate resulted in varying levels of representation within the corpus. In particular, the relatively limited number of statements available for 2024 constrains direct comparisons

across all periods. Similarly, findings regarding President Karol Nawrocki should be interpreted with caution, given the relatively small number of observations.

Finally, the analysis is designed to identify patterns of affective legitimation, discursive change, and welfare boundary-making, not to establish causal relationships. While changes in political discourse may coincide with policy reforms, shifts in public attitudes, or broader media dynamics, the study does not seek to determine the direction or strength of such causal influences. The findings should, therefore, be interpreted as a reconstruction of evolving affective regimes and affective conditions of belonging within elite political discourse, with limited capacity to assess societal attitudes, policy effectiveness, or behavioural outcomes.

4. Findings

The analysis of meaning units extracted from political statements delivered between 2022 and 2025 reveals a transformation not simply in the emotional tone of refugee-related discourse but in the affective conditions through which Ukrainian refugees were recognised as legitimate members of the welfare community. Across the analysed period, political actors continuously negotiated who belonged, why support should be provided, and under what conditions welfare inclusion could be justified. Three dominant affective configurations emerged from the material: (1) Humanitarian Belonging Regime, (2) Reciprocal Deservingness Regime, and (3) Conditional Membership Regime. Supplementary distributions of affective codes across political formations and illustrative coding examples are presented in Appendix C (Tables C1–C3). These configurations represented competing and evolving models of belonging, extending beyond distinct emotional repertoires. They overlapped and coexisted throughout the analysed period, although different affective logics became more prominent at different moments.

Before discussing these regimes, it is important to note that the corpus demonstrates substantial political consensus during the initial phase of the refugee response. Across government and opposition actors alike, the early discourse was dominated by empathy, solidarity, collective responsibility, and support for displaced Ukrainians. At the same time, the data reveal that concerns related to fairness, state responsibility, and the sustainability of support were already present from the outset. Greater political differentiation emerged over time, particularly around welfare entitlements, economic costs, reciprocity, and the conditions under which support should continue.

4.1. Humanitarian belonging regime: humanitarian inclusion and moral community (2022–2023)

The first affective regime extended belonging primarily through vulnerability and humanitarian need. Ukrainian refugees were represented as legitimate members of the moral community on the basis of vulnerability and displacement. Inclusion was justified through empathy and solidarity, which functioned as the dominant affective

foundations of belonging, while welfare support was framed as a morally self-evident response to humanitarian need.

In 2022, the most frequently occurring affective categories across the corpus were E_SOLIDARITY, E_EMPATHY, UNITY/COLLECTIVE_STRENGTH, and E_GRATITUDE. Refugees were primarily represented as innocent victims of war, while Polish society was constructed as a compassionate moral community obligated to provide protection and assistance.

> *I know that you are doing this out of the goodness of your hearts. (…) As a nation, we are once again showing what solidarity truly means*. (Duda, 2022, March 2)

Political actors across the ideological spectrum employed highly emotional language, emphasising suffering, vulnerability, and moral responsibility. References to women, children, war trauma, and humanitarian duty appeared repeatedly. Refugees were described as people fleeing violence and seeking safety, while politicians highlighted the moral imperative of providing shelter, security, and care. Empathy was closely intertwined with solidarity, producing a narrative in which helping Ukrainians became a defining expression of national identity and civic responsibility.

> *Out of these one million refugees, (…), the vast majority are women with children – the most vulnerable individuals fleeing the war. (…) Thousands of Polish families have offered shelter to our neighbours from across the eastern border.* (Morawiecki, 2022, March 7)

Equally important was the prominence of UNITY/COLLECTIVE_STRENGTH. Political leaders repeatedly portrayed the refugee response as a collective achievement transcending political divisions. Statements celebrating the opening of homes, voluntary assistance, grassroots mobilisation, and local initiatives constructed Poland as a unified community capable of extraordinary solidarity. The recurring metaphor of "opening hearts and homes" became a central symbolic marker of this period.

> *And they must be helped. The whole of Poland has become involved in this effort. (…) A great network of mutual assistance has emerged.* (Zandberg, 2022, March 8)

This inclusive discourse was further reinforced by security-related arguments. Support for Ukrainian refugees was often framed not merely as humanitarian assistance but also as a contribution to Poland's own security. Ukrainian resistance against Russia was represented as protecting both Ukrainian and Polish freedom and sovereignty.

> *What does a true warrior need? To know that his family is safe. We provide shelter for their women (…), and they are fighting for our freedom as well, because we would be Putin's next target…* (Morawiecki, 2022, May 21)

Consequently, security functioned primarily as an inclusive justificatory frame that reinforced solidarity during this phase. Humanitarian assistance and national security

were presented as mutually reinforcing objectives, with support for Ukrainian refugees framed as contributing to both humanitarian protection and Poland's own security.

The Humanitarian Belonging Regime also incorporated narratives of gratitude. In this phase, gratitude served primarily as an affirmation of solidarity, whereas later phases linked it more directly to expectations directed at refugees. Political actors frequently expressed appreciation for volunteers, local communities, municipalities, public institutions, and citizens involved in refugee assistance.

Importantly, this regime did not construct refugee reception solely as temporary humanitarian relief. Political actors frequently discussed access to education, healthcare, housing, and labour markets as essential components of protection and social participation. Ukrainians were increasingly represented as legitimate participants in a shared social space, beyond their immediate status as emergency beneficiaries of aid.

At the same time, the corpus indicates that the foundations of later debates concerning reciprocity, conditionality, and welfare sustainability were already present within the Humanitarian Belonging Regime. Alongside empathy and solidarity, political actors frequently referred to fairness, state responsibility, system balance, and the organisation of support. Although these considerations remained subordinate to humanitarian concerns, they foreshadowed subsequent discussions regarding reciprocity, contribution, and the appropriate limits of welfare inclusion.

> *This assistance cannot be purely spontaneous. Today, it is both spontaneous and organised. That is why, at today's meeting of the Council of Ministers, we adopted a special law prepared under an accelerated procedure (…).* (Morawiecki, 2022, March 7)

The corpus also contains an early exclusionary counter-discourse, concentrated almost exclusively within the Confederation. Unlike other political actors, Confederation representatives frequently framed refugee reception in terms of costs, unfairness, resentment, emotional fatigue, and boundary protection. Although marginal within the broader debate at this stage, these narratives anticipated many of the themes that became increasingly visible in later phases of political contestation.

Presidential discourse constituted a partially distinct component of this regime. Throughout most of the analysed period, President Andrzej Duda articulated narratives centred on empathy, solidarity, gratitude, and moral responsibility, while largely avoiding cost-oriented and exclusionary framings. In contrast, the 2025 presidential campaign introduced a noticeable shift. Karol Nawrocki increasingly emphasised reciprocity, labour market participation, and contribution as conditions legitimising access to welfare support, thereby incorporating themes that were more closely associated with the Reciprocal Deservingness Regime.

In SAC terms, the Humanitarian Belonging Regime established a predominantly need-based model of belonging. Access to recognition, solidarity, and welfare support was justified primarily through vulnerability, shared humanity, and collective responsibility. While concerns about fairness, state responsibility, and system sustainability were already present, they remained secondary to humanitarian

considerations. The affective conditions of belonging were, therefore, relatively inclusive and only weakly conditioned by expectations of reciprocity or contribution.

4.2. Reciprocal deservingness regime: deservingness, reciprocity, and welfare membership (2022–2025)

The second affective configuration transformed the basis of belonging without rejecting inclusion itself. Refugees continued to be recognised as legitimate members of the welfare community, but their inclusion was increasingly justified through notions of reciprocity, fairness, and contribution. The central question was no longer whether support should be provided but how the relationship between refugees and the host society should be organised.

Elements of the Reciprocal Deservingness Regime were already visible during the initial phase of refugee reception.

> *But I would also like to address an appeal to the Ukrainians who have arrived in Poland. (…) Let us say, a principle of heart for heart.* (Morawiecki, 2022, March 7)

> *The assistance is mutual. As we help refugees and Ukraine, they fight for our security.* (Morawiecki, 2022, April 25)

Although empathy and solidarity remained clearly dominant, political actors increasingly referred to fairness, reciprocity, state responsibility, and the normalisation of refugee presence. The relatively frequent occurrence of E_FAIRNESS, E_RECIPROCITY, STATE_RESPONSIBILITY, NORMALISATION, and E_SYSTEM_BALANCE indicates that concerns about the organisation, sustainability, and social legitimacy of support were embedded within the initial Humanitarian Belonging Regime. Discussions, therefore, focused not only on the moral imperative of helping refugees but also on the conditions under which support could be maintained in a manner perceived as fair and sustainable for the broader welfare community. These themes remained secondary to humanitarian considerations in 2022 but became increasingly prominent in subsequent years.

The growing visibility of E_RECIPROCITY further reinforced this shift. Political actors increasingly referred to the economic and social contributions made by Ukrainians, emphasising labour market participation, tax payments, and broader contributions to Polish society.

> *(…) it is evident that this assistance is mutual. Just as we help refugees and Ukraine, and they fight there for our security, those who have come to our country work for the benefit of the Polish economy.* (Morawiecki, 2022, April 25)

Reciprocity, therefore, became an important mechanism for legitimising continued inclusion. Refugees were represented not only as vulnerable beneficiaries of protection but also as active participants contributing to the functioning of the welfare community.

During 2023 and 2024, these themes became more pronounced. Political actors continued to defend support for Ukrainians while simultaneously emphasising the need for balanced solutions that would protect both refugees and citizens.

> *We still do not know how much money has been spent on this (…). I want a firm and realistic policy that, first of all, protects Poland and Polish interests while also helping Ukraine in its war against Russia.* (Tusk, 2023, September 21)

Appeals to fairness were increasingly linked to discussions about access to public services, welfare entitlements, and the distribution of responsibilities between the state, local governments, and society. Support was progressively framed as a relationship involving mutual obligations rather than a purely humanitarian response.

By 2025, this affective configuration had become significantly more prominent across several mainstream political actors. E_RECIPROCITY, E_EXPECTATIONS, PRODUCTIVE_DESERVINGNESS, and E_SYSTEM_BALANCE all increased in frequency, indicating a growing tendency to evaluate welfare inclusion through the lens of contribution, responsibility, and social participation. Political actors increasingly argued that access to welfare benefits should be accompanied by labour market participation, tax contributions, respect for social norms, and engagement with Polish society. The code PRODUCTIVE_DESERVINGNESS became particularly salient during this period, reflecting a shift toward representations of refugees as deserving because they worked, contributed economically, and participated in collective welfare arrangements. These expectations were especially visible in debates concerning access to family benefits, where support was increasingly linked to labour market participation and contribution to the host society.

> *As for benefits such as 800+ for Ukrainians, they should be granted only if Ukrainians work, live in Poland, and pay taxes in Poland*. (Trzaskowski, 2025, January 17)

> *The 800+ benefit should be available only to those Ukrainians who undertake the effort of working in Poland.* (Nawrocki, 2025, August 25)

> *The system should absolutely be tightened so that no fraudsters can exploit the Polish state (…). But it is in both our moral and economic interest to ensure that everyone who needs support receives it. They may receive the 800+ benefit for several or even a dozen years, but they will spend decades in Poland paying taxes and social security contributions as workers. Given Poland's demographic situation, this is not a giveaway. It is an investment.* (Hołownia, 2025, September 5)

The convergence of these arguments across politicians representing opposing political camps suggests that productive deservingness had become a broadly accepted criterion for legitimising welfare inclusion by 2025. What initially appeared as a supplementary justification for support evolved into a cross-partisan principle structuring legitimate access to welfare benefits.

The most pronounced transformation occurred within PiS discourse, which evolved from a humanitarian-security synthesis in 2022 toward a more conditional configuration combining solidarity with reciprocity, productive deservingness, and welfare sustainability. While solidarity remained an important component of the party's discourse, it became increasingly embedded within narratives of contribution, responsibility, and balanced welfare provision.

This development indicates an important shift in the affective conditions of belonging. Whereas the Humanitarian Belonging Regime legitimised inclusion primarily based on need, the emerging discourse of reciprocal deservingness increasingly linked recognition and support to forms of economic and social participation. Contribution became an additional source of deservingness alongside vulnerability.

Importantly, this discourse did not amount to a rejection of solidarity. Rather, it transformed solidarity itself. Support for Ukrainian refugees continued to be defended by most mainstream actors, but increasingly under conditions linked to reciprocity, contribution, and responsible participation.

In SAC terms, belonging became increasingly reciprocal. Refugees remained eligible for inclusion, but membership within the welfare community was progressively tied to expectations of contribution, participation, and mutual obligation. The shift, therefore, did not mark a replacement of solidarity by exclusion, but a redefinition of the emotional and moral foundations through which solidarity itself was justified.

4.3. Conditional membership regime: boundaries, costs, and the reassertion of national priority (2022–2025)

The third affective regime did not merely seek to condition inclusion; it questioned the scope of belonging itself. Whereas the reciprocal deservingness accepted refugees while attaching conditions, the conditional membership regime increasingly challenged whether refugees should be treated as members of the welfare community in the first place.

Unlike the previous two regimes, this discourse was concentrated primarily within the Confederation throughout the entire period under analysis. In 2022 alone, Confederation politicians employed a distinct affective repertoire dominated by E_COST, E_RESENTMENT, EXCLUSION/BOUNDARY_WORK, and EMOTIONAL_FATIGUE. While solidarity and empathy remained dominant among most political actors, Confederation consistently framed refugee reception in terms of welfare expenditures, unequal treatment, and the protection of citizens' interests. As a result, exclusionary narratives were present from the outset of the refugee response and continued across subsequent stages of the debate.

> *The costs are a burden for all of us (…) at a time of soaring inflation, rising mortgage payments, and growing problems for Polish citizens.* (Grabarczyk, 2022, May 17)

A central feature of this regime was the construction of welfare support as a zero-sum relationship between refugees and citizens. Political actors repeatedly emphasised financial costs, pressure on public services, housing shortages, and competition for social resources.

In 2022, refugee assistance was already linked to broader concerns about inflation, public spending, and the distribution of scarce resources, foreshadowing later narratives centred on welfare competition and national priority.

Welfare provisions were portrayed as excessive, unfair, or insufficiently justified, while refugees were increasingly represented as beneficiaries of preferential treatment.

> *How long will we maintain another nation with our taxes?* (Mentzen, 2025, January 23)

References to "privileges", "maintaining another nation", and claims that "Poles are treated worse in their own country" became recurring rhetorical devices. Within this discourse, refugees were no longer primarily represented as vulnerable victims but as potential recipients of benefits which should rightfully be reserved for citizens.

The exclusionary repertoire therefore operated through a different logic of belonging from humanitarian solidarity and reciprocal deservingness. It shifted the question from how refugees should participate in the welfare community to whether their incorporation should extend beyond temporary humanitarian assistance.

The affective architecture of this regime relied heavily on resentment and boundary-work. E_RESENTMENT and EXCLUSION/BOUNDARY_WORK frequently appeared together, constructing a symbolic distinction between deserving members of the national community and outsiders whose access to welfare support required stronger justification. The recurring emphasis on national priority reinforced the view of welfare as a resource primarily intended to serve citizens.

> *(…) Poles who have lived within this system have at least contributed to it.* (Braun, 2022, May 17)

In SAC terms, this discourse sought to narrow the boundaries of belonging by reasserting the distinction between members and non-members of the welfare community.

Another important feature was the growing prominence of GRATITUDE_DEFICIT and EMOTIONAL_FATIGUE. Political actors increasingly referred to the sacrifices made by Polish society and questioned whether these efforts had been sufficiently recognised. Narratives concerning insufficient gratitude, abuse of hospitality, or declining public willingness to provide support became particularly visible in 2025.

> *I often hear people saying that there is no gratitude on the Ukrainian side. I, however, must say that I do not share this perception. (…) I have heard words of thanks many times. But I know people who say that there is no gratitude, that [Ukrainians] believe they are entitled to it, and so on. Such voices exist. (…) This is our reality, and we should not pretend otherwise. The question is what solutions should be sought to calm these sentiments.* (Duda, 2025, March 5)

Although such arguments remained concentrated among exclusionary actors, their increasing frequency suggests that the emotional foundations of solidarity had become less stable than during the initial phase of refugee reception.

The most significant development occurred in 2025, when nearly all exclusionary categories reached their highest levels within the corpus. E_COST, E_RESENTMENT, EXCLUSION/BOUNDARY_WORK, GRATITUDE_DEFICIT, and EMOTIONAL_FATIGUE all increased substantially, indicating a growing tendency to frame refugee reception in terms of burden, unfairness, and national priority. Although selected elements of boundary-work, gratitude deficit, and emotional fatigue also appeared within parts of mainstream political discourse by 2025, exclusionary narratives remained most strongly associated with Confederation. At the same time, mainstream political actors increasingly adopted elements of conditionality, particularly through references to reciprocity, contribution, and welfare sustainability. However, they generally stopped short of embracing the exclusionary logic characteristic of Confederation. They did not advocate withdrawing support but sought to redefine the conditions under which support should continue.

Consequently, the central cleavage in the later stages of the debate was no longer between support and opposition to refugee assistance. Instead, political actors differed over the conditions of inclusion. While mainstream parties increasingly linked welfare membership to reciprocity, productivity, and social participation, exclusionary actors questioned the legitimacy of extending welfare support beyond narrowly defined national boundaries. The result was a growing contestation over the affective conditions of belonging and the proper limits of welfare inclusion.

In SAC terms, this regime sought to narrow the affective boundaries of membership. Recognition and welfare inclusion were increasingly subordinated to national priority, while citizens and refugees were constructed as competing claimants to limited social resources. Belonging was, therefore, transformed from a relatively inclusive status into a more restrictive and contested category.

4.4. Reconstructing affective conditions of belonging

Taken together, the findings reveal a gradual transformation in the affective conditions through which Ukrainian refugees were incorporated into the Polish welfare community. This transformation did not follow a simple trajectory from solidarity to exclusion; rather, it involved the coexistence and reconfiguration of multiple affective logics. During the initial phase, inclusion was justified primarily through empathy, solidarity, collective responsibility, and humanitarian need. Over time, however, belonging became increasingly linked to reciprocity, fairness, labour market participation, tax contributions, and mutual obligations between refugees and the host society.

At the same time, exclusionary narratives remained present throughout the period under analysis and became substantially more visible by 2025. These narratives challenged the scope and legitimacy of refugee support by emphasising costs, resentment, emotional fatigue, gratitude deficits, and the priority of citizens' interests. However, they remained a competing interpretation of the proper boundaries of welfare membership and did not become the dominant affective framework across the political spectrum.

A key finding of the analysis is that neither conditionality nor exclusion emerged as reactions to declining solidarity. Elements of fairness, reciprocity, state responsibility, and welfare sustainability were already visible within the initial Humanitarian Belonging Regime, while exclusionary narratives were present from the outset of the debate, primarily within the Confederation. Subsequent developments, therefore, reflected the reconfiguration and intensification of existing affective logics rather than their replacement.

Viewed through the lens of Social-Affective Citizenship, these developments reveal a broader transformation in the emotional foundations of welfare inclusion. The central shift was not from inclusion to exclusion but from relatively unconditional forms of humanitarian belonging toward increasingly conditional forms of membership grounded in reciprocity, productivity, fairness, and welfare sustainability. As a result, access to recognition and support became progressively linked to affective expectations concerning contribution, responsibility, and appropriate participation within the welfare community. In this sense, the debate increasingly shifted from the question of whether refugees deserved protection to the question of what kinds of affective and social performances qualified them for membership within the welfare community.

The findings, therefore, suggest that solidarity did not disappear from Polish political discourse but underwent a process of redefinition. While humanitarian need remained an important source of legitimacy, support for refugees became increasingly embedded within a framework of conditional membership in which belonging was negotiated through evolving expectations of reciprocity, productive deservingness, and social contribution. Conditionality thus emerged not as an alternative to solidarity but as one of the mechanisms through which solidarity itself was justified and sustained. The distribution of affective codes across political formations and the actor-specific configuration of affective regimes are summarised in Appendix C (Tables C1–C2).

5. Discussion

The reception of Ukrainian refugees in Poland cannot be adequately understood either as a simple story of humanitarian solidarity or as a linear transition from hospitality to exclusion. The analysis instead shows a dynamic process in which competing affective logics shaped the boundaries of welfare membership. Viewed through the lens of Social-Affective Citizenship, refugee reception emerged as a field of affective governance: emotions did not merely accompany political decisions but structured the conditions under which inclusion, recognition, and welfare entitlements became legitimate.

The Polish case demonstrates that welfare institutions operate not only through legal rules and administrative procedures but also through affective mechanisms that define who is perceived as deserving of support and under what conditions. Institutional arrangements such as the Special Act of March 2022 translated solidarity into concrete rights and entitlements, while political narratives supplied the affective legitimacy through which these arrangements were established, maintained, and gradually transformed. Refugee governance thus functioned as a form of affective–institutional

governance in which political actors renegotiated the affective foundations of welfare inclusion.

This resonates with scholarship on deservingness and welfare conditionality, which shows that access to welfare support is shaped by evaluations of need, reciprocity, identity, and contribution (van Oorschot, 2000; 2006; Meuleman et al., 2020; Knotz et al., 2022). It also aligns with studies of Ukrainian refugee reception that document the growing importance of reciprocity, labour market participation, gratitude, and social contribution in evaluations of refugee deservingness (Łukasiewicz et al., 2026; Zogata-Kusz et al., 2025; 2026), while connecting these developments to broader scholarship on welfare conditionality (Dwyer, 2004).

Yet these evaluations are not merely cognitive judgements or policy preferences; they are embedded in affective structures that shape perceptions of legitimacy, obligation, and membership. In this respect, the article extends scholarship on affective governance and belonging, which emphasises emotions, moral evaluations, and affective expectations in defining the boundaries of political communities (Ahmed, 2014; Fortier, 2021; Ayata, 2019). It also develops Szarfenberg's argument that citizenship operates not only through formal rights and institutions but also through socially organised affective expectations that determine who is recognised as a legitimate member of the welfare community.

A central contribution concerns the relationship between solidarity and conditionality. Existing scholarship often treats conditionality as a reaction to declining solidarity or as evidence of hostility toward welfare beneficiaries. The Polish case suggests a more complex dynamic. Elements of reciprocity, fairness, state responsibility, and welfare sustainability were already visible during the initial reception phase, when empathy and solidarity remained dominant. Exclusionary narratives concerning costs, unequal treatment, and national priority were also present from the outset, although largely confined to the Confederation. The later transformation of refugee discourse therefore reflected the increasing salience and mobilisation of pre-existing affective logics. It was not just the replacement of one regime by another.

This contributes to SAC theory by showing that conditionality may emerge from within solidarity itself. Solidarity and conditionality did not operate as opposite moral positions but as interconnected affective mechanisms. The same political actors who initially justified support on humanitarian grounds later defended welfare provision on the grounds of reciprocity, contribution, responsibility, and productivity. Conditionality thus functioned not as a rejection of solidarity but as a way of redefining and stabilising it under changing political, economic, and institutional conditions.

The growing prominence of reciprocity and productive deservingness is significant. In the initial phase, belonging was justified primarily through vulnerability and humanitarian need. Over time, political actors increasingly linked welfare inclusion to labour market participation, tax contributions, and social contribution. By 2025, productive deservingness was visible among major actors. The debate shifted from whether refugees deserved protection to how they should participate in the welfare community and which contributions justified continued support. In SAC terms, this marks a transformation from predominantly need-based belonging to more reciprocal, contribution-based membership.

This parallels broader transformations in contemporary welfare states, where access to support is increasingly linked to activation, labour market participation, and social contribution. The Polish case shows that similar logics can also emerge within refugee governance, turning humanitarian protection into conditional welfare membership. Refugees were increasingly recognised not only as persons in need of protection but also as participants expected to contribute to the host community's social and economic functioning.

Exclusionary affective logics remained persistent. The Confederation challenged not only particular welfare provisions but also the legitimacy of extending welfare membership beyond narrowly defined national boundaries. Through narratives of costs, resentment, gratitude deficit, emotional fatigue, and national priority, refugees were positioned as potential competitors for scarce social resources. This speaks to scholarship on welfare chauvinism, deservingness, and boundary-making by showing how affective narratives can restrict welfare inclusion and reinforce distinctions between insiders and outsiders (Holzberg et al., 2018; Krzyżanowska & Krzyżanowski, 2018).

Yet exclusion did not become the dominant framework of refugee governance. Even as debates increasingly focused on reciprocity, fairness, and sustainability, most mainstream actors continued to defend support for Ukrainian refugees. What changed was not the principle of support itself–it was the affective conditions under which it was justified. Belonging remained possible, but it became increasingly contingent on expectations of contribution, responsibility, and participation.

The Polish case is valuable for SAC for three reasons. First, the scale and speed of refugee reception generated an unusually strong mobilisation of solidarity across political and social actors. Second, protracted displacement transformed emergency response into a debate about long-term welfare inclusion and membership. Third, refugee reception became highly politicised, producing competing narratives of reciprocity, deservingness, welfare sustainability, and national priority. Together, these conditions make Poland a revealing case for tracing how affective conditions of belonging evolve and how welfare boundaries are negotiated through competing emotional repertoires.

This trajectory was not unique to Poland, although the Polish case makes it particularly visible. Across Europe, the reception of Ukrainian refugees was shaped by a broader shift from emergency openness toward more institutionalised and conditional forms of inclusion. At the EU level, displaced Ukrainians were constructed as deserving subjects of protection through references to gendered vulnerability, Europeanness, cultural proximity, and geopolitical alignment with host societies (Dück et al., 2025). This legitimised the exceptional response, but also embedded Ukrainian protection within differentiated hierarchies of deservingness.

Similar tensions appeared in Central Europe. Comparative research on Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary shows that these recent immigration destinations faced related pressures: rapid legalisation, emergency assistance, limited institutional preparedness, pressure on housing and public services, and the challenge of transforming temporary protection into more durable integration arrangements (Pędziwiatr & Magdziarz, 2022). Hungary illustrates the importance of national

political context: the reception of Ukrainians differed from earlier securitised approaches to non-European migration, yet it remained shaped by domestic political calculations, selective reception, limited integration infrastructure, and established migration-policy narratives (Korkut & Fazekas, 2023).

Germany represents another configuration. Ukrainian temporary protection holders were incorporated into a more developed welfare and labour-market activation system, but uncertainty persisted. Research on Ukrainian refugee women shows how migration and integration policies shaped refugees' decision-making, future planning, and dependence on state-defined categories of protection and support (Lazarenko, 2024). Studies of private hosting in Berlin further demonstrate the limits of solidarity-based accommodation under protracted displacement, showing how initial hospitality may become strained by dependency, emotional burden, housing insecurity, and the absence of stable institutional support (Lazarenko, 2025).

This comparative analysis clarifies the specificity of the Polish case. Poland serves as a revealing example because the transition from solidarity to conditionality occurred after Ukrainians had already been integrated, primarily as labour migrants rather than as members of the welfare community. Post-2022 policies transformed a longstanding labour migration presence into a protection-oriented and emotionally legitimised form of welfare inclusion. In the context of prolonged displacement, this inclusion has been continually renegotiated through narratives emphasising reciprocity, contribution, fairness, welfare sustainability, and national welfare boundaries.

Overall, the article contributes to the study of Ukrainian refugee reception in Poland and to the development of Social-Affective Citizenship as a framework. It demonstrates how SAC can be operationalised empirically through discourse analysis and affective coding, tracing the emotional mechanisms through which welfare boundaries are expanded, stabilised, contested, and reconfigured. Beyond the Polish case, this framework may be applied to other contexts involving refugee reception, migration governance, poverty policies, or family welfare programmes, supporting a comparative agenda on the emotional constitution of welfare membership in contemporary societies.

7. Conclusion

This article examined how Polish political actors constructed the affective conditions of welfare inclusion for Ukrainian refugees between 2022 and 2025 through the lens of Social-Affective Citizenship. By analysing political discourse surrounding refugee reception, welfare provision, and public responsibility, the study explored how belonging, deservingness, and welfare membership were emotionally negotiated during one of the largest refugee movements in contemporary Europe.

The analysis identified three interconnected affective regimes – humanitarian belonging, reciprocal deservingness, and conditional membership – which structured political representations of refugee inclusion throughout the analysed period. These regimes coexisted and interacted, with their prominence varying across actors and over time. The findings demonstrate that refugee reception was not organised around

a single emotional logic but around competing affective interpretations of who belonged within the welfare community and under what conditions.

The study's central finding is that conditionality did not emerge in response to declining solidarity. Elements of reciprocity, fairness, state responsibility, and welfare sustainability were already embedded within the initial architecture of refugee reception, while exclusionary narratives concerning costs, resentment, and national priority were present from the outset among particular political actors. The subsequent evolution of political discourse, therefore, reflected the reconfiguration and intensification of existing affective logics, not just a simple transition from solidarity to exclusion. These findings contribute to the development of Social-Affective Citizenship theory by demonstrating that welfare inclusion is shaped not only by legal status and institutional arrangements but also by affective evaluations of deservingness, reciprocity, responsibility, and contribution. More specifically, the analysis suggests that solidarity, reciprocity, and conditionality should be understood as interconnected mechanisms through which welfare membership is negotiated and legitimised. In this sense, conditionality became one of the mechanisms through which solidarity was redefined and sustained within the welfare community.

Beyond the Polish case, the article contributes to broader debates on refugee reception, welfare conditionality, and the moral boundaries of political communities. As refugee governance increasingly intersects with questions of welfare sustainability, social cohesion, and political belonging, understanding the affective foundations of inclusion becomes an important task for migration and social policy research. Future comparative studies could apply the Social-Affective Citizenship framework across different refugee populations, welfare regimes, and policy domains to examine how affective conditions of belonging are constructed, contested, and transformed in diverse political contexts.

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