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Impact of Social Policies on Multidimensional Poverty in Guayaquil
Empirical Evaluation of Public Programs and Urban Well-Being

Impacto de las políticas sociales en la pobreza multidimensional en Guayaquil

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the impact of social policies on multidimensional poverty in the city of Guayaquil, Ecuador, focusing on the effectiveness of public programs implemented during the last decade. A quantitative, non-experimental and cross-sectional research design was applied, using secondary data from official national surveys and institutional reports. The Multidimensional Poverty Index was employed as the main analytical framework, considering dimensions such as education, health, housing conditions, employment, and access to basic services. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used to examine variations in poverty levels and their association with selected social policies. The results indicate a moderate reduction in multidimensional poverty, particularly in dimensions related to access to basic services and education; however, persistent deprivations remain in employment quality and housing conditions. The discussion highlights that while social policies have contributed positively to improving certain living standards, their impact has been uneven across population groups and urban areas, revealing structural limitations in program targeting and sustainability. The study concludes that social policies in Guayaquil have generated partial improvements in multidimensional poverty reduction, but stronger intersectoral coordination, continuous monitoring, and a territorial approach are required to achieve more equitable and lasting outcomes. These findings provide relevant evidence for policymakers and contribute to the academic debate on urban poverty and social policy effectiveness in developing contexts.

RESUMEN

El presente estudio analiza el impacto de las políticas sociales en la pobreza multidimensional en la ciudad de Guayaquil, Ecuador, con énfasis en la efectividad de los programas públicos implementados durante la última década. Se adoptó un enfoque cuantitativo, con un diseño no experimental y de corte transversal, utilizando datos secundarios provenientes de encuestas nacionales oficiales y reportes institucionales. El análisis se basó en el Índice de Pobreza Multidimensional, considerando dimensiones como educación, salud, condiciones de vivienda, empleo y acceso a servicios básicos. Se aplicaron técnicas estadísticas descriptivas e inferenciales para identificar variaciones en los niveles de pobreza y su relación con las políticas sociales seleccionadas. Los resultados evidencian una reducción moderada de la pobreza multidimensional, especialmente en las dimensiones vinculadas al acceso a servicios básicos y educación; no obstante, persisten privaciones significativas en la calidad del empleo y las condiciones habitacionales. La discusión señala que, aunque las políticas sociales han contribuido a mejorar ciertos indicadores de bienestar, su impacto ha sido desigual entre distintos grupos poblacionales y territorios urbanos, lo que refleja limitaciones estructurales en el diseño y focalización de los programas. Se concluye que las políticas sociales en Guayaquil han generado avances parciales en la reducción de la pobreza multidimensional, siendo necesario fortalecer la articulación institucional, el seguimiento continuo y el enfoque territorial para lograr resultados más equitativos y sostenibles.

1. Introduction

Poverty constitutes one of the main social challenges in Latin America, particularly in urban contexts characterized by high levels of structural inequality. Within this framework, multidimensional poverty has gained relevance as an analytical approach that goes beyond traditional income-based measurement by incorporating deprivations associated with fundamental dimensions of human well-being, such as education, health, housing, employment, and access to basic services. In cities such as Guayaquil, these deprivations manifest in a heterogeneous manner, reflecting complex territorial, social, and economic dynamics that require comprehensive responses from the State.

Over recent decades, the Ecuadorian State has implemented various social policies aimed at reducing poverty and improving the living conditions of vulnerable populations. Cash transfer programs, expansion of basic services, investment in education and health, as well as social inclusion initiatives, have formed part of the public strategy to address this phenomenon. However, the effectiveness of these policies in reducing multidimensional poverty in specific urban contexts remains the subject of academic and political debate, due to uneven results and limitations in policy design and targeting.

The specialized literature indicates that, although social policies may generate significant progress in certain dimensions of well-being, their impact is not always homogeneous or sustainable over time. In the case of Guayaquil, it is necessary to deepen empirical analysis in order to assess the extent to which these interventions have effectively contributed to reducing multidimensional deprivations and to identify the dimensions in which the greatest lags persist.

Within this context, the objective of the present study is to analyze the impact of social policies on multidimensional poverty in the city of Guayaquil, identifying the progress achieved, persistent limitations, and remaining challenges for the design of more effective and equitable public policies in the urban sphere.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Poverty as a Multidimensional Phenomenon

2.1.1. Evolution of the Concept of Poverty

For much of the twentieth century, poverty was primarily understood as the insufficiency of income to cover a minimum set of basic needs. This monetary approach, although useful for macroeconomic comparisons, proved limited in explaining the multiple forms of deprivation experienced by individuals and households, particularly in complex urban contexts (Sen, 1999).

As a response to these limitations, a broader conception of poverty emerged, grounded in the capability approach, which argues that well-being does not depend solely on income but rather on the real opportunities individuals have to lead a dignified life. From this perspective, poverty manifests as a deprivation of fundamental capabilities, such as access to education, health services, decent employment, and adequate living conditions.

2.2. Poverty as a Multidimensional Social Phenomenon

2.2.1. Conceptual Evolution of Poverty and Its Contemporary Understanding from an Integrated Perspective

Poverty has historically been one of the central concepts in the social sciences and in development analysis, although its definition and analytical approaches have varied significantly over time. Throughout much of the twentieth century, a reductionist conception of poverty prevailed, understanding it fundamentally as the insufficiency of income to meet a minimum set of basic needs. This monetary approach was based on the construction of poverty and extreme poverty lines

derived from the cost of a basic basket of goods and services, allowing the phenomenon to be quantified and compared across countries and historical periods (ECLAC, 2018).

Although this approach proved functional for the design of income transfer policies and macroeconomic analysis, its explanatory capacity was progressively questioned. Numerous studies demonstrated that monetary income alone does not guarantee effective access to adequate living conditions nor ensure the full exercise of fundamental social rights. In complex urban contexts, particularly in Latin America, households above the monetary poverty line were observed to continue facing severe deprivations in areas such as education, health, housing, security, and access to basic services, highlighting the limitations of a unidimensional approach (UNDP, 2010; ECLAC, 2019).

This recognition led to a profound conceptual reformulation of poverty. In this process, the capability approach proposed by Amartya Sen represented a fundamental theoretical turning point. From this perspective, poverty ceases to be conceived as a simple lack of economic resources and is instead defined as a deprivation of the real freedoms people have to choose and pursue valued life projects (Sen, 1999). Well-being, therefore, is not measured solely by income levels but by individuals' effective capacity to transform resources into valuable functionings, such as being educated, maintaining good health, accessing decent employment, living in adequate conditions, and participating actively in social life.

This conceptual shift made it possible to recognize poverty as an inherently multidimensional phenomenon, in which multiple deprivations interact simultaneously and cumulatively. Contemporary literature emphasizes that these deprivations do not occur in isolation but tend to reinforce one another, generating persistent and difficult-to-reverse trajectories of social exclusion (Alkire & Foster, 2011; Alkire et al., 2015). In this way, poverty is configured as a dynamic and structural process closely linked to historical, institutional, and territorial inequalities.

From a human-rights-based approach, this expanded understanding is further deepened by considering poverty as a reflection of structural failures in the guarantee of fundamental social rights. Poverty is not merely an individual condition but the outcome of unequal development models and the inability of states to ensure equitable access to public goods, basic services, and social protection mechanisms (ECLAC, 2019). In Latin America, these dynamics are particularly evident in urban spaces, where residential segregation, labor informality, and unequal infrastructure distribution generate territorial concentrations of multidimensional poverty.

Within this context, the territorial dimension plays a central role in poverty analysis. Empirical evidence shows that poverty-related deprivations tend to cluster spatially, forming urban areas characterized by persistent deficits in housing, services, mobility, and economic opportunities. These territorial concentrations not only reproduce material inequalities but also generate processes of social stigmatization and symbolic exclusion, reinforcing the marginalization of specific groups and urban spaces (ECLAC, 2019).

In response to this complexity, recent literature has emphasized the need to incorporate visual approaches as a fundamental complement to multidimensional analysis. Research published in *The Visual Review* argues that visual representations—including social cartographies, urban data visualization, ethnographic photography, and spatial analysis—allow for the capture of poverty dimensions that are not always visible through traditional statistical indicators (Díaz & Gómez, 2021). These visual tools help reveal patterns of socio-spatial exclusion and enable poverty to be understood as a lived and territorially embedded experience.

It has also been argued that poverty should not only be measured but also represented, as visualization formats directly influence how the problem is interpreted by policymakers and society at large (Martínez & Rojas, 2022). From this perspective, poverty acquires a symbolic and communicative dimension in which images and visual representations play a key role in the visibility—or invisibility—of specific deprivations and territories.

The Visual Review has made a significant contribution to this debate by developing a critical approach to the use of visual tools in urban social studies. Recent research highlights that visual analysis not only complements quantitative approaches but also integrates qualitative, territorial, and experiential information, enriching the understanding of poverty as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon (López & Herrera, 2023). In particular, the visualization of urban inequalities strengthens public policy analysis by facilitating the identification of structural gaps and priority intervention areas.

Overall, the evolution of the concept of poverty reflects a transition from unidimensional, income-centered approaches toward integrated conceptions that recognize the multiplicity of deprivations affecting human well-being. Multidimensional poverty thus emerges as a fundamental analytical category for understanding contemporary inequalities, especially in urban contexts. The incorporation of visual approaches, such as those developed in *The Visual Review*, reinforces this understanding by enabling a deeper, situated, and critical reading of poverty, providing valuable inputs for both academic analysis and the design of more comprehensive and territorially sensitive public policies.

2.3. The Multidimensional Poverty Approach

2.3.1. Theoretical, Epistemological, and Methodological Foundations of the Multidimensional Well-Being Approach

The multidimensional poverty approach emerged as a theoretical and methodological response to the inherent limitations of unidimensional measures of human well-being. Recognizing that monetary income does not adequately reflect real living conditions, this approach proposes a broader conception of well-being, understood as the result of multiple interrelated dimensions that shape individuals' and households' real opportunities to lead dignified lives (Alkire & Foster, 2011).

From an epistemological perspective, the multidimensional approach is based on the idea that poverty is a complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a single variable and requires the integration of social, economic, territorial, and institutional dimensions. Poverty is thus conceived as a set of simultaneous deprivations affecting individuals differently depending on their social and spatial context. This perspective breaks with income-based compensatory logic and allows poverty to be analyzed as a structural and cumulative experience (Alkire et al., 2015).

The United Nations Development Programme consolidated this approach by systematically incorporating it into the Human Development Reports, establishing that development should focus on expanding capabilities and opportunities beyond aggregate economic growth (UNDP, 2010). From this standpoint, dimensions such as education, health, housing, employment, social protection, and access to basic services play a central role in well-being measurement and inequality analysis.

Specialized literature highlights that one of the main strengths of the multidimensional approach lies in its ability to identify populations that, although not monetarily poor, experience severe deprivations in fundamental aspects of daily life. This situation is particularly evident in urban contexts, where unequal access to public services, housing precariousness, and labor informality generate forms of poverty that remain hidden when income-based indicators are used exclusively (ECLAC, 2019).

Methodologically, the multidimensional approach enables these deprivations to be operationalized through specific and comparable indicators, facilitating territorial and temporal poverty analysis. However, several authors note that quantitative measurement alone, while indispensable, is insufficient to capture the full complexity of the phenomenon unless complemented by qualitative and territorial approaches that help understand how deprivations are experienced (Alkire et al., 2015).

In this framework, visual analysis has gained increasing relevance in multidimensional poverty studies. Research published in *The Visual Review* argues that visualizing social and territorial data allows the identification of exclusion patterns that are not always evident in traditional statistical analyses (Díaz & Gómez, 2021). Visual representations of deprivation facilitate understanding poverty as a spatially localized phenomenon, reinforcing the territorial dimension of the multidimensional approach.

It has also been argued that visual tools help integrate multiple analytical scales, from the household level to urban and metropolitan levels, enabling a more articulated reading of social inequalities (Martínez & Rojas, 2022). From this perspective, the multidimensional well-being approach goes beyond identifying deprivations to understanding their spatial distribution and relationship with broader urban processes such as residential segregation and informal settlement expansion.

2.4. The Multidimensional Poverty Index as an Integrated Measurement Tool

2.4.1. Origins, Conceptual Foundations, and Methodological Contributions of the Multidimensional Poverty Index

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) emerged as one of the principal methodological tools for the empirical measurement of poverty from an integrated perspective, in response to the limitations of approaches focused exclusively on income. Its development is situated within the capability approach and the recognition that human well-being cannot be reduced to a single economic dimension. In this context, the MPI was proposed by Sabina Alkire and James Foster as a methodology that identifies, aggregates, and decomposes multiple deprivations affecting households, thereby providing a more comprehensive and realistic view of poverty (Alkire & Foster, 2011).

From a conceptual standpoint, the MPI is grounded in the idea that poverty should be understood as a multidimensional condition, characterized by the coexistence of diverse deprivations that simultaneously affect individuals. Unlike traditional monetary indicators, the MPI does not merely identify who is poor; it also makes it possible to examine the depth and intensity of poverty, acknowledging that not all poor households experience the same deprivations or to the same degree (Alkire et al., 2015). This represents a substantial advance in well-being measurement by capturing the complexity of people's living conditions.

Methodologically, the MPI combines two fundamental components: the incidence of multidimensional poverty, which expresses the proportion of individuals or households whose number of deprivations exceeds a defined threshold, and the intensity of poverty, which reflects the average number of deprivations experienced by those identified as multidimensionally poor. This dual measurement not only quantifies the scale of the phenomenon but also assesses its severity, providing key information for social analysis and public policy design (Alkire & Foster, 2011).

The index is structured around a set of well-being dimensions commonly associated with education, health, living conditions, employment, and access to basic services, each operationalized through specific indicators with assigned weights. The selection of dimensions and indicators responds to normative and contextual criteria, which gives the MPI a flexible character adaptable to different national and local realities without losing methodological consistency (Alkire et al., 2015). This flexibility has facilitated its adoption by international organizations and national governments as an official poverty measurement tool.

The United Nations Development Programme incorporated the MPI as a central indicator in the Human Development Reports, consolidating it as a global benchmark for the analysis of well-being and social inequalities. From this perspective, the MPI aligns with a people-centered conception of development focused on expanding capabilities beyond aggregate economic growth (UNDP,

2010). In Latin America, its application has helped reveal persistent structural gaps that were not fully captured by traditional monetary measurements (ECLAC, 2019).

In urban contexts, the MPI has proven particularly useful for identifying intra-urban inequalities and territorial concentrations of multidimensional poverty. Empirical evidence shows that deprivations related to education, housing, basic services, and employment tend to cluster in specific neighborhoods or urban peripheries, producing spatial patterns of exclusion that require territorially targeted interventions (ECLAC, 2019). In this sense, the MPI not only measures poverty but also supports the analysis of its spatial distribution and its relationship to broader urban processes such as residential segregation and informality.

However, several authors emphasize that the MPI's analytical potential is strengthened when complemented with qualitative, territorial, and visual approaches. Recent literature notes that numerical indicators, while indispensable for comparison and time-series monitoring, do not always capture the complexity of poverty experiences or the spatial dynamics that shape them (Alkire et al., 2015). In this context, visual analysis becomes a key tool for enriching the interpretation of the MPI.

Research published in *The Visual Review* argues that visualizing multidimensional poverty indicators through thematic maps, social cartographies, and graphical representations makes it possible to identify territorial patterns of deprivation more clearly and to understand poverty as a spatially localized phenomenon (Díaz & Gómez, 2021). These visual representations translate complex statistical information into accessible analytical inputs, strengthening the dialogue between academic research and public policy formulation.

It has also been noted that integrating the MPI with urban visualization tools helps capture the coexistence of multiple deprivations within a single territory, highlighting the overlap of deficits in housing, services, education, and employment that characterizes urban multidimensional poverty (Martínez & Rojas, 2022). From this perspective, the MPI ceases to be merely an aggregated indicator and becomes an analytical instrument capable of revealing territorial dynamics of exclusion.

The Visual Review has contributed to methodological debates by emphasizing that the visualization of the MPI is not only descriptive but also interpretive and political. Visual representations of multidimensional poverty influence how the phenomenon is perceived by decision-makers and the public, contributing to the visibility of structural inequalities and the prioritization of public interventions (López & Herrera, 2023). In this sense, the combination of multidimensional measurement and visual analysis reinforces the strategic character of the MPI as a tool for poverty reduction.

Overall, the Multidimensional Poverty Index constitutes a fundamental advance in the measurement of human well-being by capturing multiple deprivations and enabling a deeper analysis of poverty's intensity and distribution. Its articulation with visual and territorial approaches, such as those promoted in *The Visual Review*, expands its explanatory capacity and consolidates it as a central tool for the study of urban poverty and for the design of more comprehensive, targeted, and territorially sensitive social policies.

2.5. Social Policies as an Instrument of Intervention Against Multidimensional Poverty

2.5.1. Scope, Approaches, and Links Between Social Policies and Multidimensional Poverty in Urban Contexts

Social policies constitute one of the primary instruments through which the state intervenes to address social inequalities and guarantee effective access to fundamental rights. From a broad perspective, social policies encompass the set of actions, programs, and strategies aimed at improving living conditions, reducing social gaps, and promoting well-being, including areas such

as education, health, housing, employment, social protection, and access to basic services (ECLAC, 2018). Within poverty studies, social policies are especially relevant because they directly affect the dimensions that shape human well-being.

In Latin America, social policies have historically had a compensatory character, intended to mitigate the effects of profound structural inequalities derived from exclusionary development models. Despite advances in expanding basic service coverage and scaling up social programs, the region continues to exhibit high levels of inequality and persistent multiple deprivations, particularly in urban contexts (ECLAC, 2019). This has highlighted the need to rethink the design and evaluation of social policies through more integrated and multidimensional approaches.

The adoption of the multidimensional poverty approach has contributed significantly to this rethinking by enabling a deeper understanding of the deprivations affecting households and of the mechanisms through which social policies can influence them. Unlike traditional income-centered approaches, multidimensional poverty underscores that poverty reduction requires simultaneous interventions across several well-being dimensions, which poses substantial challenges for intersectoral coordination and public management (Alkire et al., 2015).

From this perspective, the relationship between social policies and multidimensional poverty is direct and structural. Education policies influence human capabilities and labor-market opportunities; health policies affect quality of life and productivity; housing and basic services policies shape material living conditions; and employment policies determine economic stability and social protection. Empirical evidence indicates that policies able to articulate these dimensions tend to generate more sustained impacts on the reduction of multidimensional poverty (UNDP, 2010).

In urban contexts, this articulation is particularly complex. Cities concentrate economic opportunities and services, but they also exhibit profound territorial inequalities. Residential segregation, labor informality, the expansion of precarious settlements, and unequal infrastructure distribution create scenarios in which deprivations overlap and reinforce each other (ECLAC, 2019). Under these conditions, sectoral social policies implemented in isolation often face limitations in addressing multidimensional poverty effectively.

Contemporary literature emphasizes the need to adopt territorial approaches in the design and implementation of urban social policies. Such approaches recognize that poverty is not distributed homogeneously across urban space but tends to concentrate in specific neighborhoods or peripheral zones where multiple social and material deficits converge. Territorial analysis therefore enables the identification of priority intervention areas and the adaptation of policies to the specific characteristics of local contexts (Alkire et al., 2015).

At this point, visual analysis has gained increasing importance as a complementary tool for studying and evaluating social policies. Research published in *The Visual Review* suggests that the visualization of social and territorial data enables a clearer understanding of the relationship between public policies and urban inequalities by revealing the spatial distribution of deprivations and the differentiated effects of state interventions (Díaz & Gómez, 2021). These visual representations facilitate the identification of territorial gaps and contribute to a more integrated reading of multidimensional poverty.

It has also been argued that visual tools strengthen social policy evaluation processes by enabling intuitive comparisons of the evolution of deprivations across territories and over time. From this standpoint, visualization is not only descriptive but also analytical and strategic, supporting decision-making and the allocation of public resources (Martínez & Rojas, 2022). In complex urban contexts characterized by heterogeneous social dynamics, these tools are particularly valuable.

The Visual Review has contributed to debates on social policies by highlighting that visual representations influence how social problems are perceived and prioritized by decision-makers.

Recent studies note that graphical visibility of multidimensional poverty can enhance the legitimacy of certain policies and promote integrated and territorial approaches, in contrast to fragmented or purely assistential interventions (López & Herrera, 2023).

From a critical perspective, it is also noted that the use of visual tools in social policy analysis must adhere to rigorous ethical and analytical standards, avoiding excessive simplifications or stigmatizing representations of poor territories. In this sense, integrating multidimensional measurement, territorial analysis, and social visualization requires a reflective approach that acknowledges the complexity of the phenomenon and the diversity of poverty experiences (Martínez & Rojas, 2022).

In sum, social policies play a central role in reducing multidimensional poverty because they directly affect the dimensions that shape human well-being. However, their effectiveness depends on the state's capacity to articulate intersectoral interventions, adopt territorial approaches, and use analytical tools that capture the complexity of urban deprivations. The incorporation of visual approaches, such as those developed in *The Visual Review*, reinforces this process by facilitating the identification of spatial inequalities and by providing strategic inputs for the design, implementation, and evaluation of more comprehensive and equitable social policies.

2.5.2. Social Policies and Multidimensional Poverty in the Urban Context of Guayaquil

Analyzing multidimensional poverty in specific urban contexts makes it possible to understand more precisely the limitations and scope of implemented social policies. In the case of Guayaquil, accelerated urban growth and persistent socioeconomic inequalities have shaped a fragmented urban structure in which areas with high levels of development coexist with peripheral zones that concentrate multiple deprivations (UNDP, 2010).

Social policies in the city have contributed to improving basic service coverage and mitigating situations of extreme poverty; however, structural deficits persist in key dimensions such as education, employment, and housing conditions. From a multidimensional poverty perspective, these limitations indicate the need for more integrated and territorially targeted interventions capable of addressing the various deprivations affecting urban households simultaneously (ECLAC, 2019).

Applying the Multidimensional Poverty Index helps identify the spatial concentration of deprivations in specific areas of the city, reinforcing the importance of incorporating territorial approaches into social policy design. In this regard, recent literature highlights that the visualization of multidimensional indicators facilitates the identification of socio-spatial gaps and contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between public policies and urban inequalities (Díaz & Gómez, 2021).

From this perspective, contributions from *The Visual Review* are relevant in emphasizing that visual tools complement quantitative poverty measurement by enabling a clearer and more situated reading of urban deprivations. The integration of multidimensional measurement, territorial analysis, and social visualization therefore constitutes a strategic resource for strengthening the formulation and evaluation of social policies aimed at reducing multidimensional poverty in Guayaquil (Martínez & Rojas, 2022).

2.6. Multidimensional Poverty, Social Policies, and Urban Analysis: An Integrative Theoretical Articulation

Analyzing multidimensional poverty and its relationship with social policies makes it possible to understand poverty as a complex, dynamic, and structural process that goes beyond income insufficiency and manifests through multiple interrelated deprivations. From this perspective, poverty is shaped by historical, institutional, and territorial inequalities that limit the effective exercise of rights and opportunities, especially in urban contexts characterized by high social heterogeneity (Sen, 1999; ECLAC, 2019).

The multidimensional poverty approach provides a robust theoretical and methodological framework for examining these deprivations comprehensively, allowing the identification not only of the magnitude of poverty but also its intensity and composition. The use of instruments such as the Multidimensional Poverty Index has helped reveal persistent inequalities not fully captured by traditional monetary measurements, thereby strengthening the design and evaluation of evidence-based social policies (Alkire & Foster, 2011; Alkire et al., 2015).

In urban settings, this approach is particularly relevant due to the territorial concentration of deprivations and the coexistence of multiple forms of social exclusion. Social policies aimed at reducing multidimensional poverty face the challenge of articulating intersectoral and territorially targeted interventions capable of responding to the specificities of each urban context (UNDP, 2010). In this regard, the incorporation of territorial approaches is essential for improving policy effectiveness.

Complementarily, recent scholarship has highlighted the value of visual analysis as a tool for understanding and communicating multidimensional poverty. Studies published in *The Visual Review* note that visualizing social and territorial data contributes to better identification of socio-spatial inequalities and strengthens the interpretation of social policy impacts across urban territory (Díaz & Gómez, 2021; Martínez & Rojas, 2022). These tools translate complex information into accessible analytical inputs, supporting informed decision-making.

In summary, articulating the multidimensional poverty approach, social policies, and urban analysis—complemented by visual tools—provides an integrative theoretical framework for studying poverty in urban contexts. This approach not only broadens the understanding of the phenomenon but also provides solid foundations for the design of more equitable, comprehensive, and territorially sensitive public policies aimed at the sustainable reduction of multidimensional poverty.

3. State of the Art

The study of poverty has undergone a substantial transformation in recent decades, particularly with the incorporation of the multidimensional approach as an alternative to income-based measurements. In this context, recent literature emphasizes that poverty is a complex phenomenon determined by multiple interrelated deprivations that affect households differently depending on their social, economic, and territorial environments (Alkire & Santos, 2014).

At the international level, numerous studies have consolidated the use of the Multidimensional Poverty Index as a central tool for comparative well-being analysis. Research conducted by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative shows that social policies affect poverty dimensions unevenly, yielding stronger effects in education and health and more limited outcomes in employment and housing, particularly in urban contexts of developing countries (Alkire et al., 2015).

In Latin America, academic production has highlighted the role of social policies as mechanisms for mitigating structural inequalities. Studies promoted by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean indicate that, although cash transfer programs and the expansion of basic services have contributed to reducing multidimensional poverty incidence, these advances do not always translate into sustained improvements in employment quality or access to adequate housing (ECLAC, 2019).

Various empirical studies in Latin American cities agree that multidimensional poverty exhibits strong territorial concentration. Authors such as Kaztman (2018) argue that urban segregation and labor informality limit the reach of traditional social policies, generating partial and uneven impacts. In this regard, recent literature emphasizes the need for integrated approaches that articulate social policies with urban and productive development strategies.

In Ecuador, research on multidimensional poverty has increased in recent years, particularly following the official adoption of the MPI. National studies indicate an overall reduction in multidimensional poverty, mainly attributable to the expansion of basic services and education; however, significant gaps persist in formal employment and housing conditions, especially in large cities such as Guayaquil (INEC, 2022).

At the local level, literature specifically focused on Guayaquil remains limited, representing a significant gap in the state of knowledge. Existing studies tend to focus on aggregated national or regional indicators without addressing specific urban dynamics or the differentiated impact of social policies within the city. This lack of localized empirical research reinforces the relevance of the present study, as it provides contextualized evidence that contributes both to academic debate and to the design of more effective public policies.

4. Methodology

The present research was conducted using a quantitative approach, with a non-experimental, descriptive–analytical, and cross-sectional design, aimed at evaluating the impact of social policies on multidimensional poverty in the city of Guayaquil. This design made it possible to analyze relationships between variables without deliberate manipulation, using existing information and observing the phenomena at a specific point in time.

The study population consisted of urban households in the canton of Guayaquil. The sample was selected from secondary data obtained from official national surveys and administrative records of public institutions, considering inclusion criteria such as permanent urban residence and the availability of complete information on the dimensions of the Multidimensional Poverty Index. Records that were incomplete or presented statistical inconsistencies that could compromise the validity of the analysis were excluded.

Data collection relied on official statistical databases, institutional reports, and technical documents related to social programs implemented at the local level. The main analytical instrument was the Multidimensional Poverty Index, which allowed for the assessment of deprivations in dimensions such as education, health, employment, housing conditions, and access to basic services. In addition, the main social policies in force during the period of analysis were identified and classified according to their area of intervention.

Data analysis was carried out using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including frequencies, percentages, and comparative analysis across dimensions. Specialized statistical software was used for data processing, ensuring the systematization, reliability, and replicability of the results for future research.

Table 1.
Dimensions and indicators of multidimensional poverty analyzed

Dimension	Main indicator	Type of deprivation
Education	Incomplete schooling	Social
Health	Limited access to services	Social
Employment	Informal employment	Economic
Housing	Precarious materials	Housing-related
Basic services	Insufficient access	Infrastructural

Source(s): Authors' own elaboration based on official data, 2024.

5. Results

The results of the study show that the social policies implemented in the city of Guayaquil have generated differentiated changes across the various dimensions of multidimensional poverty. Data analysis reveals a gradual decline in the incidence of deprivations related to access to basic
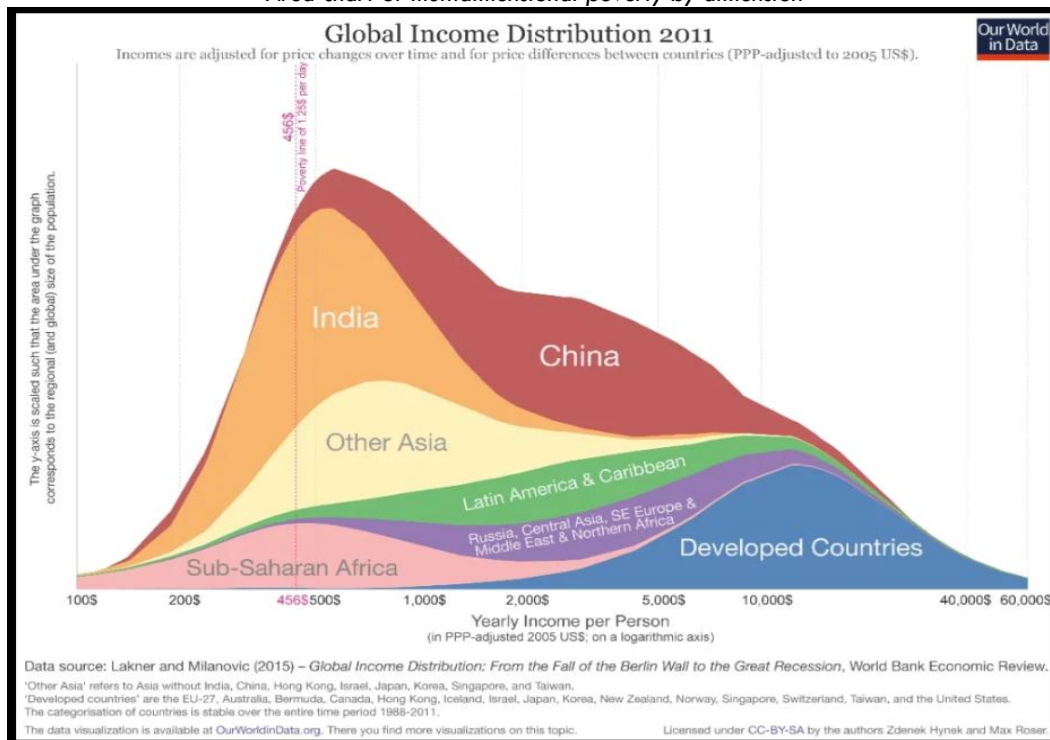
services and education, suggesting a positive contribution from public programs aimed at expanding educational coverage and urban infrastructure.

Within the educational dimension, a significant reduction is observed in the proportion of households with incomplete schooling, mainly associated with school retention policies and economic support programs targeting vulnerable families. Similarly, access to basic services such as drinking water and sanitation shows moderate improvements, particularly in urban areas prioritized by public investment initiatives.

The results also reveal persistent levels of deprivation in structural dimensions such as employment and housing conditions. Labor informality remains one of the main constraints to the comprehensive reduction of multidimensional poverty, affecting income stability and access to social protection. In addition, precarious housing conditions continue to be concentrated in specific urban sectors, highlighting territorial disparities in the effectiveness of the policies implemented.
Overall, the findings indicate that although social policies have contributed to improving certain welfare indicators, their impact has been partial and heterogeneous. These differences suggest the need to strengthen the targeting and coordination of public interventions in order to achieve a more equitable and sustainable reduction of multidimensional poverty in Guayaquil.

Figure 1.
Area chart of multidimensional poverty by dimension

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on official data, 2025.

6. Discussion

The results obtained confirm that the social policies implemented in the city of Guayaquil have had a positive, albeit limited, impact on the reduction of multidimensional poverty. The observed decline in dimensions such as education and access to basic services is consistent with the core objectives of several public programs aimed at expanding social coverage and improving minimum living conditions, thereby supporting theoretical approaches that emphasize the role of the State in the provision of essential goods and services.

The persistence of high levels of deprivation in structural dimensions such as employment and housing suggests that the social policies analyzed have not sufficiently addressed the deeper determinants of urban poverty. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that targeted interventions—particularly those based on cash transfers or partial infrastructure improvements—tend to generate short-term effects without substantially transforming labor conditions or access to adequate housing.

From a territorial perspective, the results reveal an uneven implementation of social policies across the city, contributing to the reproduction of spatial and social disparities. Limited inter-institutional coordination and the absence of comprehensive approaches oriented toward sustainable urban development may partly explain the heterogeneity of the impacts observed.

Among the main limitations of the study is the reliance on secondary data, which constrains the analysis to available information and hinders the assessment of direct causal impacts. Nevertheless, the findings provide relevant empirical evidence that supports reflection on the need to redesign social policies by incorporating strategies focused on decent employment, adequate housing, and urban planning, in order to achieve a more effective and sustained reduction of multidimensional poverty in Guayaquil.

7. Conclusions

The study made it possible to analyze the impact of social policies on multidimensional poverty in the city of Guayaquil, revealing significant yet partial progress in improving the living conditions of the urban population. The results indicate that public interventions have primarily contributed to reducing deprivations related to education and access to basic services, reflecting the effectiveness of policies aimed at expanding social coverage and investing in urban infrastructure.

However, substantial challenges persist in structural dimensions such as employment and housing, which continue to hinder a comprehensive and sustained reduction of multidimensional poverty. High levels of labor informality and precarious housing conditions in certain urban areas demonstrate that the social policies implemented have not sufficiently addressed the underlying determinants of poverty, thereby limiting their medium- and long-term impact.

In this regard, it is concluded that social policies in Guayaquil have produced targeted improvements but need to be complemented by integrated urban development strategies, the promotion of decent employment, and improved access to adequate housing. Furthermore, strengthening inter-institutional coordination, adopting a territorial approach, and enhancing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for social programs are essential.

This study provides empirical evidence that may serve as a foundation for the formulation of more effective and equitable public policies, as well as for future research aimed at deepening longitudinal analyses of multidimensional poverty and the differentiated impact of social interventions in urban contexts.

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