

# **Mind the gap: The Structural Dilemma of Urban Migrant's Integration in Eastern China**

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## **Abstract**

By designating individuals as agricultural or non-agricultural, hukou system regulates access to employment, education, healthcare, and so on. In the context of rapid urbanization, large numbers of rural residents have become urban migrants, relocating to cities in search of better opportunities. However, without local hukou, these urban migrants face persistent institutional barriers that limit their integration.

Governments at various levels have introduced policies aimed at improving the integration of urban migrants, focusing on hukou, labour market access, and public service provision. Despite these efforts, a significant gap remains between the intentions of policies and the lived experiences of urban migrants. This gap is conceptualized as the Structural Dilemma (SD), which captures the tension between integration policies and the reality.

This study focuses on Eastern China, a region characterized by a large inflow of urban migrants and active experimentation with integration policies. Through topic modelling, entropy method and relative gap method, the development of a Structural Dilemma Index (SDI) has been developed. and examines Three key dimensions has been examined: hukou, labour force access and public service access. Findings indicate that (1) Policies closely tied to the hukou system are more likely to exhibit structural dilemmas; (2) Among these three policy aspects, topics that receive relatively high policy attention often exhibit lower SDI scores, indicating a comparatively weaker structural dilemma; (3) Public Service Provision aspect exhibited the lowest overall SDI values, indicating the weakest structural dilemma.

**Keywords:** Urban Migrants; Structural Dilemma; Eastern China; Integration

## I. Introduction

Hukou system, a unique population registration system in China, divides individuals into two types: agricultural (rural) hukou and non-agricultural (urban) hukou based on their birthplace and family occupation (Cheng, 1991; Chan and Zhang, 1999; Wang, 2002; Cheng and Selden, 1994; Colas and Ge, 2019). Coupled with new urbanization, a consistent and important proposition for social development in China, urban-rural differences such as unequal job opportunities naturally encourages individuals move to cities (Lee, 1966; Sicular, Ximing, Gustafsson, et al., 2007; Ma, Liu, Fang, et al., 2020). This has led to the formation of a special type of internal migrants, urban migrants, who move from rural areas or smaller towns to urban areas. At this moment, hukou system is not only an institutional distinction between urban and rural populations, but also an institutional distinction for obtaining corresponding rights in the city, like healthcare, education, housing, and employment (Christiansen, 1990; Wang, 2017; Cui and Cho, 2020). In other words, urban migrants without destination cities' hukou are excluded from the job market, public service provision, even to get the destination's hukou to integrate in the destination cities (Zhang, 2007; Hu, 2023; Wang and Fan, 2012; Liu, Chen, and Li, 2019; Huang, 2022).

To cope with the integration issues caused by these three types of integration barriers linked with hukou system tightly, proclaimed many urban migrants' integration policies are proclaimed from central and local governments (State Council, 2014; State Council, 2019; General Affairs Office of Guangzhou Municipal People's Government, 2017; Zhejiang Institute of Talent Development, 2018). However, the obstacles in their integration still alive when relevant policies are introduced, leading to the mismatch between policy and reality (Chan, 2010; Wang, 2010; Zhang, Chen, Ding, et.al, 2019). The gap between policies and reality is more and more tangible, which is necessary to be defined well. In this paper, it is defined as Structural Dilemma (SD), the policy-reality gap in urban migrant integration, caused by institutional obstacles and their resultant challenges.

Since the reform and opening, China's eastern region has become a core area of population and industrial agglomeration with its superior geographical location and policy advantages (Guan, Wei, Lu, et.al, 2016; Ye, Wu and Tan, 2016; Tang and Meng,

2021). At the same time, Eastern China have long been a test field for policy innovation and institutional reform. This region has conducted several explorations in hukou system reform, labour force access and public service provision, which have accumulated rich policy practice experience (Li and Chen, 2024). After researching the key topic structures of integration policies at different levels of government, Eastern China underscores a strategic emphasis on economic integration, particularly through employment stabilization. It is obvious that Eastern China has both many urban migrants and a good policy environment, making it the best case study for studying SD. Given this context, this article is aimed to analyse the structural dilemma in Eastern China, including conceptualization and operationalization. Specifically, the research question is: What is the structural dilemma looks like about three aspects in Eastern China?

To answer this question, the remainder of this article is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a literature review to conceptualize SD, including synthesizes prior research on urban migrant integration after policy enactment and identifies the limitations of existing concepts relevant to SD. Section 3 outlines the research methodology, detailing how SD is operationalized, the data sources used, methodological approaches adopted, and the criteria for analytical evaluation. Section 4 presents the empirical findings and analysis, demonstrating region-specific manifestations of SD, with a focus on the eastern region. Finally, Section 5 offers conclusions and discussions, reflecting on the theoretical implications, policy relevance, and possible pathways to reconcile the tensions between policy and practice in China's urban integration landscape.

There are three findings from research, which are: (1) Policies closely tied to the hukou system are more likely to exhibit structural dilemmas; (2) Among these three policy aspects, topics that receive relatively high policy attention often exhibit lower SDI scores, indicating a comparatively weaker structural dilemma; (3) Public Service Provision aspect exhibited the lowest overall SDI values, indicating the weakest structural dilemma.

## II. Literature Review: Beyond the Policy Gap

Due to both objective limitations—such as insufficient policy resources, including fiscal capacity, the availability of civil servants, and institutional support—and subjective constraints—such as limited implementation capacity, unclear responsibility delineation, and irrational institutional design—certain policies have encountered significant limitations. Objectively, resource shortages often undermine policy continuity and effectiveness, while institutional fragmentation impedes coordination. Subjectively, ambiguous responsibilities and bureaucratic inefficiencies weaken implementation efforts and reduce administrative accountability. These factors jointly contribute to a widening gap between policy intent and actual outcomes (Flisher, Lund, Funk et al., 2007; Omar, Green, Bird et al., 2010; Qiu & Wu, 2024). The limitations caused by these policies can be divided into two dimensions. The first shortage is the declining in governance functions, marked by a diminished capacity to advance relevant infrastructure and public services, shortened policy implementation cycles, and a divergence from originally intended policy objectives. The second is the decline in social stability, as seen in the erosion of social equity, growing crises of public trust, and the emergence of broader societal tensions (Bar-Gill and Fershtman, 2005; Flisher, Lund, Funl, et.al., 2007; Dani and Haan, 2008; Omar, Green, Bird, et.al., 2010; Schirmer and Michailakis, 2012; Christensen and Lægreid, 2023; Li, 2023; Qiu and Wu, 2024).

The above situation has been described by many scholars using concepts such as policy gap, implementation gap, and other related terms (Stewart, 2002; Zhu, 2012; McPherson, Halperin, Henry, et al., 2018; Martin, Ellström, Wallo, et al., 2024). At its core, this phenomenon refers to the misalignment between policy intentions and actual practices, as well as the deviation between the objectives of policy design and the outcomes of policy implementation (Hill and Hupe, 2021; Martin, Ellström, Wallo, et al., 2024).

The policy gap can be interpreted as the dynamic outcome of an organization's dual learning tasks: on one hand, adapting to existing policies, and on the other, exploring new practices. This dynamic illustrates the ongoing trade-off and adjustment between institutional consistency and contextual adaptability under established policy

frameworks (Ahlers and Schubert, 2015; Basten and Haamann, 2018; Martin, Ellström, Wallo, et al., 2024; Zhao, Zhu, Vornane, et al., 2024).

This leads to a second level of explanation: the policy gap also arises from the contradiction between the normative orientation of policy and the diversity of actual, non-normative practices. Specifically, it reflects the real-world state of adaptive modifications in policy implementation across various localities, departments, frontline staff, and target groups. These adaptations often emerge in response to the practical challenges faced in implementing a policy text originally designed for an “ought” state (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Geng, 2020).

At the same time, a third explanatory layer emerges: the policy gap is also rooted in the information asymmetry between policy makers and implementers. This refers to the imbalance and disconnection in understanding, execution, and feedback mechanisms between the two groups, which often results in an inability of the policy to effectively address real problems on the ground (Boaz and Pawson, 2005; Sedlačko and Staroňová, 2015; Cohen, Moffitt, and Goldin, 2020; Yin, Xiao, and Qian, 2023). This form of policy gap, caused by ambiguity and conflicting expectations, typically appears as a vertical implementation gap, which refers to disjunctions between different policy levels—such as the implementation of central government policies at the local level—and may include over-implementation, under-implementation, or other forms of divergence (Kostka and Hobbs, 2012; Ran, 2013; Wu, Zuidema, et al., 2017; Gugerell and Cai, 2018; Hudson, Hunter, and Peckham, 2019; Shao, 2023).

In addition, there also exists the horizontal group coverage gap, wherein policy design fails to adequately respond to the lived experiences and social realities of the target population (Chen, 2011; Holler and Ohayon, 2024). In this context, the concept of implementation gap becomes more applicable. When analysed from multi-dimensional perspectives—such as organizational structure and power dynamics—these various forms of policy gaps are often grouped under the broader, value-laden notion of policy failure. As contemporary governance increasingly emphasizes dynamic policy adjustments across different levels and heightened attention to the roles of street-level bureaucrats during implementation (Hupe, Hill, and Buffat, 2015; De Winter, 2022), local deformations or resistance to policy directives are often understood

as natural phenomena. This indicates that the implement gap is not merely a technical problem, but one that involves multiple intersecting dimensions, including political, institutional, and socio-cultural factors (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973; Goggin, 1986; Hupe and Hill, 2016; Hill and Hupe, 2021).

In China, many researchers also have their own interpretation about the gap between policies and reality. They are focusing on various fields, like demographic sociology, public policy, Marxist philosophy, political sociology, grassroots governance in rural sociology and so on (Sun, 2021; Chen and Sun, 2023; Qian, 2001; Li, 2017; Zhou and Li, 2009; Zhou, 2009; Zhou, 2007; Zhou, 2012; Ouyang, 2010). Their general thought is that policy makers' misunderstanding of policy objectives, policy implementers' misunderstandings, and the public's misunderstanding of policies are the direct reasons for the existing gap. The above is explained from a micro perspective. Not only that, Sun (2021) argues from the macro perspective. He thinks that the stimulating and constraining significance of social systems and structures on people is a prominent feature of macro analysis.

Specifically, when concentrating on China urban migrants' integration policies, policy limitations still exist. Series of policies from central government to local governments have been proclaimed to promote the urban migrants' integration in the destination cities, which can be divide into three categories: hukou system, labour force access and public service provision. From these policies, hukou system is the root of labour force access and public service provision, it controls the other two aspects. It can be said that hukou system remains a fundamental impediment to the effective integration of urban migrants in China. The other two aspects in China remain tightly linked to the hukou system, effectively excluding non-local residents from accessing better work chance or public services (Yuan, 2020; Zhou, Zhan, An, et al., 2022). Even though the integration of urban migrants has been given so much attention by the central and local governments in terms of policy, their integration process is still not as smooth as the policy expect due to the hukou system- the structural barrier. In other words, there is a gap between integration policy and integration reality.

Due to hukou-based institutional restrictions, migrants are systematically excluded from equal access to employment opportunities, social security benefits, housing

support, and other forms of public welfare, resulting in what scholars' term as a state of "semi-urbanization" (Dou, 2014; Yuan, 2020). For instance, urban migrants are often confined to short-term or informal employment, lack access to housing subsidies and health insurance, and are vulnerable to exploitation by employers (Zhang, 2017; Yuan, 2020; Yang & Qu, 2020; Yuan, 2022). Moreover, the high cost of urban living and persistent cultural barriers hinder their deeper social and psychological integration (Zhang & Lei, 2008).

Although hukou reform has been a central theme in policy discussions and has broadened the scope, disparities in job and welfare entitlements tied to hukou have yet to be fully resolved, critical resources such as education and healthcare are still largely distributed along hukou lines, creating an implicit "invisible barrier" (Xu & Wu, 2016; Gu & Yeung, 2020). For instance, integration challenges are particularly acute in first-tier cities, where high housing prices and strict hukou policies present substantial barriers compared to smaller urban centres (Liu & Feng, 2016). Another example is education. While school enrolment rates for migrant children have improved, access to high-quality educational resources remains primarily limited to those with local hukou status (Liu, 2014). Furthermore, social capital—particularly networks based on native-place associations—continues to play a central role in migrant employment, with formal policies failing to fully substitute these informal support systems (Liu, Ruan & Lai, 2013; Xie, Cao, Li, et al., 2022). Urban migrants with lower levels of education often struggle to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving urban labour market, revealing a "capability gap" inadequately addressed by existing policies. Additionally, current policy frameworks tend to overlook the heterogeneity of the urban migrant population. Specific needs of subgroups—such as urban-to-urban migrants or those with limited educational attainment—remain insufficiently integrated into policy design and implementation (Liu, Wang, Liu, et al., 2023; Chen, Wang, He, et al., 2024).

All in all, the concepts can reflect the disconnect and barriers to effective policy coverage. Policy gap refers more broadly to a wide range of macro-level issues (Scott, 1999; Martin, Keith, Zoë, et.al., 2019; Chen, Chen, Feng, et al, 2020), including implementation failures, outcome discrepancies, and other systemic factors. On the other hand, the implementation gap focuses more specifically on failures embedded

within the political system that hinder proper policy execution (Tsoi, Loo and Banister, 2021; Guo, 2023).

However, in the face of the structural barrier posed by the hukou system, the structural contradictions—such as inherent tensions between policy goals and structural conditions—have not been sufficiently explored within these conceptual frameworks when examining urban migrants' integration in China. Moreover, traditional concepts are often biased toward technical explanations and governance failures, neglecting the social consequences of such structural contradictions. Not only that, but these concepts also cannot fit the current situation of China well. For instance, policy evolution does not match actual needs. Urban migration policy has gone through many changes in China, from four periods of “freedom of population mobility- population mobility control” to “relaxation of population mobility- population mobility control- acceleration of population mobility- deepening of population mobility” (Zhang, 2019). However, these policy changes have not fully met the needs of the urban migrants. The second is the management mode is out of touch with the actual situation. For instance, the current urban migrants' management mode still relies too much on hukou system to regulate the migration size, while ignoring the actual needs and rights protection of them (Song and He, 2008; Xuan, 2009; Zhang, 2017). the management mode is out of touch with the actual situation. For instance, the current urban migrants' management mode still relies too much on hukou system to regulate the migration size, while ignoring the actual needs and rights protection of them (Song and He, 2008; Xuan, 2009; Zhang, 2017).

To address these conceptual limitations, the author proposes the concept of “Structural Dilemma (SD)” to examine the gap between urban migrants' integration policies and their reality outcomes. The term structural refers to the broader institutional framework of policies-led by the hukou system and followed by labour market access and public service provision-designed to address integration challenges (Yin, 2012; Li and Mao, 2017; Wang and Sheng, 2008). Dilemma refers to the issues arising from inconsistencies in the application of various policies. Thus, Structural Dilemma (SD) is defined as the policy-reality gap in urban migrant integration, caused by institutional obstacles and their resultant challenges.

SD is not merely about implementation failure but rather emphasizes the institutional problems underlying the policy-reality gap, specifically the structural inequalities stemming from the hukou system, labour market access, and public service



provision for urban migrants. Thus, this study uses Structural Dilemma to research the urban migrants’ integration policy-reality gap in National and Eastern China.

III. Methodology

This study aims to quantitatively evaluate the degree of structural dilemma across hukou system, labour force access and public service provision concerning urban migrants’ integration in Eastern China. To achieve this, a quantitative composite approach combines the Entropy Method and the Relative Gap Method. is adopted. The following sections elaborate on the data source, method and operationalization of the structural dilemma

III.1 Data source

The data is divided into two parts in this study, one is to reflect the policy condition, the other one is to reflect the reality of implantation. For data that can reflect policy conditions, it is the policy texts from governments’ official websites, including Beijing, Shanghai as well as Guangdong provincial governments from Eastern China. The data for this part have already been processed in the first empirical chapter. In previous chapter, topic modelling from policy textual analysis via LDA model has done, got the result of topic name as well as token proportion of every region of China from three policy aspects, including Eastern China. In detail, the data source choice is based on economic zoning and city group distribution. China is divided into four major economic zones according to its economic level (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021), among them Eastern China contains 10 provinces. In parallel, among 10 developed city groups, 5 are in the eastern region. To ensure balanced representation across zones, it selects provinces that host key city groups in each zone. Three provinces are selected from each zone, Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong were selected to represent Eastern China. The set criteria about keywords are from literatures and the manual scan of governments’ website. In this paper, the time frame is from 2012 to 2021, a period during which the hukou system reform has accelerated. The total account of policy texts of Eastern China is 2,268. After topic modelling, there were 5 topics in hukou system aspect, 6 in labour force access and 5 in public service provision. Table 1 shows the details.

Table 1 The Result about the policy condition of Eastern China

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	<i>hukou</i> system	labour force access	public service	Total
The Number of Policy Texts	777	695	796	2,268
The Result about the Number of Topics	5	6	5	11

Since policy implement and effects have the lag (Friedman, 1961; Jovanovski and Muric, 2011), the year choice is one year later than the policy data when selecting data that reflects reality. Relevant indicators from four kinds of Yearbook including “China Statistical Yearbook”, “China Population and Employment Statistical Yearbook”, “Provincial Statistical Yearbook” from Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong province, “China Labour Statistical Yearbook” and REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE GOVERNMENT in 2014 and 2023 are selected. Table 2-4 shows the details of the reality of implement data.

Table 2 Reality of Policy Implement Condition- Hukou system

Topic	Provinces	Detailed Indicator	Year	
			2023	2014
I	Beijing	The difference in the decline of administrative approval items this year (item)	248	622
	Shanghai	The difference in the decline of administrative approval items this year (item)	434	153
	Guangdong	The difference in the decline of administrative approval items this year (item)	60	508
		Number of elderly care institutions (units)	614	420
		Beds in elderly care institutions (ten thousand)	11.3	8.2926
	Beijing	Number of medical and elderly care integration institutions (units)	215	23
II		Number of medical and elderly care integrated beds (in ten thousand)	5.9	0.3409
		Hospice care beds (number)	650	0
		Number of elderly care institutions (units)	729	631
		Beds in elderly care institutions (ten thousand)	16.36	10.8364
	Shanghai	Number of medical and elderly care integration institutions (units)	96	25
		Number of medical and elderly care integrated beds (in ten thousand)	2.6584	0.4471
		Hospice care beds (number)	1224	0
	Guangdong	Number of elderly care institutions (units)	1886	2394
		Beds in elderly care institutions (ten thousand)	22.02	14.4274

III	Beijing	Number of medical and elderly care integration institutions (units)	422	14
		Number of medical and elderly care integrated beds (in ten thousand)	/	0.1869
		Hospice care beds (number)	/	0
		Number of undergraduate and junior college graduates (persons)	154382	148689
		Graduate students with master's or doctoral degrees	114422	73357
		Graduate signing rate (%)	90	86
		Number of job fairs (times)	264	83
		Provide employment positions (tens of thousands)	/	18.4
		Participating employers (units)	/	6799
		Proportion of employment in Beijing (%)	56.4	
		Number of undergraduate and junior college graduates (persons)	<b>147 299</b>	133794
		Graduate students with master's or doctoral degrees	62750	35669
	Shanghai	Graduate signing rate	>90	65.88
		Number of job fairs (times)	/	/
		Provide employment positions (tens of thousands)	/	15.2
		Participating employers (units)	/	/
		Proportion of employment in Shanghai (%)	79.4	78
		Number of undergraduate and junior college graduates (persons)	63.38	41.23
	Guangdong	Graduate students with master's or doctoral degrees	45084	24353
		Graduate signing rate	57.90%	63.96%
		Number of job fairs (times)	989	77
		Provide employment positions (tens of thousands)	/	30
		Participating employers (units)	208400	15000
		Proportion of employment in Guangdong (%)	/	80
IV	Beijing	Beds in children's welfare and rescue protection institutions (ten thousand)	0.3	0.1444
		Centralized care for orphans (10,000 people)	0.1	0.1121
		The number of people enjoying welfare benefits for the disabled (ten thousand)	20.8	1.9725
		Number of vocational training institutions for the disabled (units)	93	62

V	Beijing	Number of people with disabilities undergoing vocational training/employment (Person-times)	4123	10500
		The number of people with disabilities employed (in ten thousand)	40.9	0.3244
		The number of people on urban and rural minimum living allowances (persons)	106595	163264
		Beds in children's welfare and rescue protection institutions (ten thousand)	0.1	0.1
		Centralized care for orphans (10,000 people)	0.0974	/
		The number of people enjoying welfare benefits for the disabled (ten thousand)	31.68	12.5418
	Shanghai	Number of vocational training institutions for the disabled (units)	500	765
	Guangdong	Number of people with disabilities undergoing vocational training/employment and with employed (Person)	10504	92088
		The number of people on urban and rural minimum living allowances (persons)	162,400	237000
		Beds in children's welfare and rescue protection institutions (ten thousand)	0.6	0.4959
		Centralized care for orphans (10,000 people)	1.2	0.9794
		The number of people enjoying welfare benefits for the disabled (ten thousand)	50.8	66.1
		Number of vocational training institutions for the disabled (units)	/	285
		Number of people with disabilities undergoing vocational training/employment (Person-times)	9360	13000
		The number of people with disabilities employed (in ten thousand)	40.9	81.56
		The number of people on urban and rural minimum living allowances (persons)	130.62	197.2
		Changes in registered population - Non-agricultural population moving in from outside the city (persons)	139091	186990
		Permanent migrant population (in ten thousand)	825.1	802.7
		The number of new private and individual economic households registered this year (unit)	115735	46322
		Graduates of qualification and position certificate training (persons)	210558	11166091

		Number of training institutions and schools (units)	567	2360
		Changes in registered population - Non- agricultural population moving in from outside the city (persons)	211700	121200
		Permanent migrant population (in ten thousand)	1006.26	990.01
	Shanghai	The number of new private and individual economic households registered this year (unit)	81506	97615
		Graduates of qualification and position certificate training (persons)	/	/
		Number of training institutions and schools (units)	426	725
		Changes in registered population - Non- agricultural population moving in from outside the city (persons)	1212700	97800
		Permanent migrant population (in ten thousand)	/	/
	Guangdong	The number of new private and individual economic households registered this year (unit)	2440100	643070
		Graduates of qualification and position certificate training (persons)	738900	406900
		Number of training institutions and schools (units)	145	243

Table 3 Reality of Policy Implement Condition- Labour Force Access

Topic	Provinces	Detailed Indicator	Secondary indicators	Year	
				2023	2014
I	Beijing	Number of full-time teachers (persons)	higher education	76730	69625
			secondary education	85230	68175
			primary education	60484	48726
		Per-student general public budget expenditure (CNY)	higher education	82415.78	74247.74
			secondary education	228284.97	161152.82
			primary education	45320.17	31656.85

II	Shanghai	Number of employment training center institutions (units)	4	16
		higher education	5.04	4.03
		secondary education	7.54	6.11
		primary education	6.54	4.98
		higher education	53527.73	54043.72
		secondary education	154380.9	102152.3
	Guangdong	primary education	31910.77	25935.46
		Number of employment training center institutions (units)	/	/
		higher education	13.59	9.11
		secondary education	57.26	48.6733
		primary education	60.2	43.75
		higher education	37728.93	20232.26
	Beijing	secondary education	76197.16	29339.89
		primary education	16606.41	8224.4
		Number of employment training center institutions (units)	41	135
		The number of unemployed people participating in employment training (person-times)	371	23575
		The proportion of employed people with a college degree or above (%)	24.1	51.4
		The number of people obtaining professional qualification certificates (person-times)	346	181397
Shanghai		The number of full-time teachers in colleges and universities (in ten thousand)	7.673	6.9625
		The number of unemployed people participating in employment training (person-times)	/	/

III	Guangdong	The proportion of employed people with a college degree or above (%)	53.7	35.05	
		The number of people obtaining professional qualification certificates (person-times)	423	304073	
		The number of full-time teachers in colleges and universities (in ten thousand)	5.04	4.03	
		The number of unemployed people participating in employment training (person-times)	2014	51907	
		The proportion of employed people with a college degree or above (%)	27.5	14.21	
		The number of people obtaining professional qualification certificates (person-times)	4682	1212342	
	Beijing	The number of full-time teachers in colleges and universities (in ten thousand)	13.59	9.11	
		Financial subsidy for the Employment Training Center (in ten thousand yuan)	3635	1000	
	Shanghai	Financial subsidy for the Employment Training Center (in ten thousand yuan)	/	/	
	Guangdong	Financial subsidy for the Employment Training Center (in ten thousand yuan)	7600	2000	
	IV	Beijing	Number of teachers at the Employment Training Center (persons)	87	542
			The number of people receiving vocational guidance	1003468	636012
The number of people receiving entrepreneurship services			152988	636012	
Shanghai		Number of teachers at the Employment Training Center (persons)	/	/	
		The number of people receiving vocational guidance	24465	38279	
		The number of people receiving entrepreneurship services	89940	82781	
Guangdong	Number of teachers at the Employment Training Center (persons)	1303	3489		
	The number of people receiving vocational guidance	1021225	713675		
	The number of people receiving entrepreneurship services	271204	151822		

V	Beijing	The number of unemployed people participating in employment training (person-times)	371	23575
	Shanghai	The number of unemployed people participating in employment training (person-times)	/	/
	Guangdong	The number of unemployed people participating in employment training (person-times)	2014	51907
	Beijing	The number of people who have participated in employment training	2309	55704
		The number of participants in the employee basic endowment insurance (in ten thousand)	1539.6	1091.3
The number of participants in the basic medical insurance for employees (in ten thousand)		1900.5	1354.8	
The number of participants in the unemployment insurance fund (in ten thousand)		1391.4	1025.1	
The number of participants in work-related injury insurance (in ten thousand)		1337	920	
The number of participants in maternity insurance (in ten thousand)		1077.5	41.1	
VI			The number of people who have participated in employment training	/
	Shanghai	The number of participants in the employee basic endowment insurance (in ten thousand)	1123.7	992.4
		The number of participants in the basic medical insurance for employees (in ten thousand)	1989.6	1394.1
		The number of participants in the unemployment insurance fund (in ten thousand)	1014.7	625.7
		The number of participants in work-related injury insurance (in ten thousand)	1072	904
		The number of participants in maternity insurance (in ten thousand)	/	22
	Guangdong	The number of people who have participated in employment training	92848	499548
		The number of participants in the employee basic endowment insurance (in ten thousand)	4431.9	3761.7



The number of participants in the basic medical insurance for employees (in ten thousand)	11153.2	3473
The number of participants in the unemployment insurance fund (in ten thousand)	3751.1	2702.2
The number of participants in work-related injury insurance (in ten thousand)	4083	3057
The number of participants in maternity insurance (in ten thousand)	4061.98	45

Table 4 Reality of Policy Implement Condition- Public Service Provision

Topic	Provinces	Detailed Indicator	Secondary indicators	Year	
				2023	2014
I	Beijing	Supply of policy-based/affordable housing (ten thousand units)	54	16.2	
		Improvement of old residential areas/housing (units)	981	110	
		Minimum living standard (yuan/month)	1320	580	
	Shanghai	Supply of policy-based/affordable housing (ten thousand units)	24.8	10.3	
		Improvement of old residential areas/housing (units)	11000	11000	
		Minimum living standard (yuan/month)	1420	640	
	Guangdong	Supply of policy-based/affordable housing (ten thousand units)	81	13.89	
		Improvement of old residential areas/housing (units)	150	/	
		Minimum living standard (yuan/month)	1125	540	
	Beijing	Number of labour dispute cases accepted during the current period (cases)	130266	65051	
II	Shanghai	Number of grassroots trade union organizations	35678	32518	
		Number of labour dispute cases accepted during the current period (cases)	59705	68106	
		Number of grassroots trade union organizations	48313	56480	
	Guangdong	Number of labour dispute cases accepted during the current period (cases)	256919	91965	
		Number of grassroots trade union organizations	146423	247173	
		account (unit)	21	24	
III	Beijing	Public Library	Total collection (thousands of volumes or items)	7819	2072
			Seats for viewing (unit)	23359	16002
			account (unit)	357	346

IV	Shanghai	Mass Art Museum Cultural Center Cultural Station	Number of exhibitions held	1224	22353
			Organize cultural and artistic activities (times)	30971	29787
		Added value of cultural industry (billion CNY)		4700.3	1754.2
		Per capita entertainment expenditure of residents (CNY)		1145.4656	2133.3
		Public Library	account (unit)	20	25
			Total collection (thousands of volumes or items)	8239.8	7239
			Seats for viewing (unit)	28401	22593
			account (unit)	237	239
	Guangdong	Mass Art Museum Cultural Center Cultural Station	Number of exhibitions held	84.76	3247
			Organize cultural and artistic activities (times)	29596	36164
		Added value of cultural industry (billion CNY)		2852	2003
		Per capita entertainment expenditure of residents (CNY)		1074.0187	1822.1
		Public Library	account (unit)	150	137
			Total collection (thousands of volumes or items)	14253.5	2640
			Seats for viewing (unit)	155195	75838
			account (unit)	1761	1746
	Beijing	Mass Art Museum Cultural Center Cultural Station	Number of exhibitions held	7872	8176
			Organize cultural and artistic activities (times)	72639	41121
		Added value of cultural industry (billion CNY)		6987	5002
		Per capita entertainment expenditure of residents (CNY)		776.608	871.6
		The number of insured residents for basic medical insurance (in ten thousand)		404.3	160.1
		The number of insured residents for basic medical insurance (in ten thousand)		365.8	256.4
		The number of insured residents for basic medical insurance (in ten thousand)		6297.2	5706.8
		Accumulated balance of basic medical insurance for residents (billions of CNY)		80	8.8
V	Shanghai	Accumulated balance of basic medical insurance for residents (billions of CNY)		19.1	6.3

### III.2 Method

#### (1) Entropy method

In information theory, entropy is a measure of the degree of chaos in the system, while information is a measure of the degree of order. The larger the degree of variation of an index value is, the smaller the entropy is, and the larger the information is. Furthermore, the greater the influence of the index on the comprehensive evaluation, the greater its weight should be. The main steps of entropy method are as follows (Golan and Maasoumi, 2008; Zhang, 2019):

##### 1) Transform the data matrix to be dimensionless

In the original data matrix  $X = (x_{ij})_{m \times n}$ , the number of evaluation schemes and evaluation indicators is  $m$  and  $n$ , respectively. To be dimensionless, the matrix should be transformed as

$$X_{ij} = \frac{x_{ij} - d}{D - d} \times 10 \quad (1)$$

Where  $D$  is the maximum value of all elements of indicator  $j$  and  $d$  is the minimum value.

##### 2) Normalize the matrix

This step is done by dividing the element  $x_{ij}$  by the sum of all  $x_{ij}$  for the specific indicator  $j$ .

$$P_{ij} = x_{ij} / \sum_{i=1}^m x_{ij} \quad (i = 1, 2, \dots, m; j = 1, 2, \dots, n) \quad (2)$$

##### 3) Calculate the entropy value of the indicator $j$

$$e_j = -k \sum_{i=1}^m p_{ij} \ln p_{ij} \quad e_j \geq 0, \quad k = \frac{1}{\ln m} \quad (3)$$

##### 4) Calculate the difference coefficient of the indicator $j$

$$g_j = 1 - e_j \quad (4)$$

Where  $g_j$  is the difference coefficient of indicator  $j$ . The larger the  $g_j$  is, the more important the indicator  $j$  is.

##### 5) Calculate the weight of the indicator $j$

$$w_j = g_j / \sum_{j=1}^n g_j \quad (5)$$

Table 6-9 displays the results of Entropy Method. In these tables, x1-x5, y1-y6 and z1-z5 represent different topics in Hukou System, Labour Force Access and Public Service Provision.

Table 6 Results of Entropy Method-Hukou System

Province	Year	x1	x2	x3	x4	x5
Beijing	2014	622.000	0.280	0.541	0.024	0.595
Shanghai	2014	153.000	0.535	0.214	0.394	0.180
Guangzhou	2014	508.000	0.600	0.476	0.711	0.405
Beijing	2023	248.000	0.366	0.418	0.180	0.191
Shanghai	2023	434.000	0.154	0.383	0.312	0.148
Guangzhou	2023	60.000	0.709	0.589	0.914	0.816
Eastern China	2014	427.667	0.472	0.411	0.377	0.393
	2023	247.333	0.410	0.463	0.469	0.385

Table 7 Results of Entropy Method-Labour Force Access

Province	Year	y1	y2	y3	y4	y5	y6
Beijing	2014	0.423	0.425	1000.000	0.960	23575.000	0.125
Shanghai	2014	0.228	0.206	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.005
Guangdong	2014	0.646	0.729	2000.000	0.433	51907.000	1.000
Beijing	2023	0.401	0.073	3635.000	0.624	371.000	0.063
Shanghai	2023	0.164	0.337	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.016
Guangdong	2023	0.644	0.709	7600.000	1.000	2014.000	1.000
Eastern China	2014	0.432	0.454	1000.000	0.464	25160.667	0.376
	2023	0.403	0.373	3745.000	0.541	795.000	0.360

Table 8 Results of Entropy Method-Public Service Provision

Province	Year	z1	z2	z3	z4	z5
Beijing	2014	0.679	0.000	0.262	160.100	8.800
Shanghai	2014	0.535	0.113	0.262	256.400	6.300
Guangdong	2014	0.283	1.000	0.817	5706.800	187.600
Beijing	2023	0.588	0.145	0.257	404.300	80.000
Shanghai	2023	0.483	0.068	0.134	365.800	19.100
Guangdong	2023	0.517	1.000	0.847	6297.200	879.500
Eastern China	2014	0.499	0.371	0.447	2041.100	67.567
	2023	0.529	0.404	0.413	2355.767	326.200

## (2) Relative Gap Method

The relative gap method constructs an optimal set of indicators as a benchmark, calculates the total gap between each object and the benchmark, and uses this to sort or classify (Handcock and Morris, 1998). It is better suited to measuring long-term changes in inequality, the gap between policy and reality, and other similar fields (Tsui, 1999; Low and Low, 2006; Lugo, 2007). The formula of relative gap method is as followed:

$$Relative\ Gap_i = \frac{Expected_i - Actual_i}{Expected_i}$$

### III.3 Operationalization of the Structural Dilemma

#### (1) Developing the Topic-based Policy Index (TPI) System

To quantify the structure of policy text, this study develops a Topic-based Policy Index (TPI) derived from topic modelling techniques applied to the corpus of official policy documents. From previous study, topic modelling- Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) model was employed to extract latent topics, with the optimal number of topics determined using coherence scores. After topic modelling the hukou, labour force access and public service provision three aspects' policy texts collected by keywords from 2012-2021, the proportion of each topic keyword in the overall policy text can be found. This percentage reflects the relative salience of each topic within the policy texts and thus serves as an indicator of policy attention and orientation. Each policy document was subsequently represented as a probability distribution over the identified topics. These topic proportions capture the relative emphasis of each thematic concern embedded within the policy text.

By aggregating these distributions across the corpus, Topic-based Policy Index (TPI) is constructed to reflect the structural composition of policy priorities. The TPI system thereby enables quantitative comparisons between the topic orientation of policy and reality indicators.

#### (2) Developing the Reality Attainment Index (RAI) System

To evaluate the degree to which policy priorities are realized in the lived experiences of urban migrants, this study constructs a Reality Attainment Index (RAI), using official statistical indicators that align with the major policy topics identified

through topic modelling. The goal of the RAI is to quantify the reality outcomes of urban migrants' integration-related policies across multiple domains.

#### Step 1: Topic-Indicator Matching and Data Collection

For each topic generated through topic modelling, corresponding reality indicators were selected from non-survey datasets. For central government, the datasets are national ones. Three provinces-Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong represent Eastern China's situation. Two time points: 2014 and 2023 are used to track change over time. Each indicator reflects the practical implementation or outcome of a specific policy topic.

#### Step 2: Regional Aggregation (Just for Eastern China)

For each topic-specific indicator, arithmetic averages are computed across the three provinces to obtain a composite representation of the Eastern region. This aggregation captures a regional-level pattern of policy performance while smoothing over local-level fluctuations.

#### Step 3: Entropy Method for Composite Indexing

After regional aggregation, the indicator values for each topic and year are standardized to eliminate scale differences. The Entropy Method is then applied to compute a weighted composite score for each policy domain in both 2014 and 2023, including eastern region. The entropy weight reflects the information content and variability of each indicator, assigning higher weights to indicators with greater distinguishing power.

#### Step 4: Calculating the Reality Attainment Index (RAI)

For each topic area, the RAI is calculated as the relative rate of change between the weighted composite score in 2023 and that in 2014, using the following formula:

$$RAI_j = \frac{C_{j,2023} - C_{j,2014}}{C_{j,2014}}$$

Where  $C_{j,t}$  denotes the entropy-weighted composite value for topic  $j$  in year  $t$ . This ratio captures the extent and direction of change in reality conditions over time, serving as a proxy for the actual attainment level of policy goals in each domain.

Through this four-step process, the RAI provides a standardized, empirically grounded basis for comparing the gap between policy intention and practical realization, across multiple topic areas and over a near-decade period.

### (3) Developing the Structural Dilemma Index (SDI) System

To quantify the gap between policy emphasis and reality, Structural Dilemma Index (SDI) for each major policy topic is constructed. It is the last step to operationalize the concept of Structural Dilemma.

The SDI is constructed by comparing the Topic-based Policy Index (TPI), reflecting the relative policy salience of each topic with the Reality Attainment Index (RAI), representing the observed improvement in corresponding reality indicators over time.

#### Step 1: Topic-level Alignment

For each topic  $j$  under the three policy categories, both TPI and RAI are already available as normalized values. These values are aligned by topic and matched on the same policy domain and spatial-temporal scale.

#### Step 2: Gap Calculation

It is calculated using the following formula:

$$SDI_j = \frac{TPI_j - RAI_j}{TPI_{j,2014}}$$

where:

$TPI_j$  is the normalized topic salience in the policy corpus;  $RAI_j$  is the relative change rate in reality outcomes from 2014 to 2023;  $SDI_j$  reflects the magnitude of disalignment between policy emphasis and actual attainment for topic .

### III.4 Interpretation of the Structural Dilemma

It can be interpreted that a higher SDI indicates a larger structural gap, i.e., high policy focus but low or negative practical realization-implying a more severe structural dilemma. An SDI close to zero suggests that reality progress has closely tracked policy intentions. A negative SDI would imply that reality has improved even more than what policy attention might predict, suggesting less structural dilemma. Specifically, the Structural Dilemma Index (SDI) is categorized into five levels. This classification draws upon the threshold-based approach of the United Nations Human Development

Index (HDI) (UNDP, 2020; National Bureau of Statistics, 2023), adapting its logic to reflect varying degrees of alignment or divergence between policy discourse and empirical achievements in the context of urban migrant integration. The detailed classification criteria are as follows:

Table 9 SDI Classification Framework

SDI Range	Level	Interpretation
$SDI < 0$	Very Low Structural Dilemma	Reality has improved beyond policy expectations. This may indicate strong external drivers of change or a lag in policy articulation.
$0 \leq SDI < 0.550$	Low Structural Dilemma	A relatively strong alignment between policy intentions and real-world outcomes; structural tension is minimal.
$0.550 \leq SDI < 0.700$	Moderate Structural Dilemma	Policy implementation has made progress, but noticeable gaps remain between stated goals and actual achievements.
$0.700 \leq SDI < 0.800$	High Structural Dilemma	Significant mismatch exists between policy emphasis and real-world progress; implementation may be inconsistent or insufficient.
$SDI \geq 0.800$	Very High Structural Dilemma	Reality falls far short of policy priorities, reflecting severe barriers in implementation or systemic governance challenges.

According to the rules above, the SDI of each policy aspect is calculated, and Table 10-12 shows the detail.

Table 10 Operationalization of the Structural Dilemma- Hukou System

Index	x1	x2	x3	x4	x5
RAI	-1.000	-1.000	-1.000	-1.000	-1.000
TPI	0.161	0.163	0.195	0.194	0.287
SDI	7.211	7.135	6.128	6.155	4.484

Table 11 Operationalization of the Structural Dilemma- Labour Force Access

Index	y1	y2	y3	y4	y5	y6
RAI	-0.067	-0.178	2.745	0.166	-0.968	-0.044
TPI	0.210	0.142	0.123	0.239	0.104	0.182
SDI	1.319	2.256	-21.317	0.305	10.312	1.240

Table 12 Operationalization of the Structural Dilemma- Public Service Provision

Index	z1	z2	z3	z4	z5
RAI	0.061	0.090	-0.077	0.154	3.828
TPI	0.268	0.158	0.147	0.215	0.211
SDI	0.773	0.431	1.521	0.283	-17.141



## 4. Results

This section presents the results of the Structural Dilemma analysis across key policy domains relevant to the urban migrants' integration about Eastern China situation. The policy topics are from topic modelling, reflecting both foundational and developmental aspects of urban integration. The SDI quantifies the degree of the gap between policy intent and real-world implementation, enabling a comparative assessment of structural challenges across policy areas.

### 4.1 Result of Eastern China situation in Hukou system

Table 13 SDI Result of *Hukou* System in Eastern China

Topic	Topic Name	SDI Value	Structural Dilemma Level
I	Government Affairs Promotion	3.619	Very High
II	Elderly Care and Medical Services	1.812	Very High
III	Graduate Issues	0.345	Low
IV	Vulnerable Groups Protection	-0.264	Very Low
	Entrepreneurship Cultivation and Settlement		
V	Guarantee	1.077	Very High

Table 13 shows the SDI result about *hukou* system in Eastern China.

Topic I, Government Affairs Promotion, registered the highest SDI value (3.619), indicating a very high structural dilemma. This result underscores a substantial gap between formal policy commitments to administrative integration and the actual experience of urban migrants in accessing destination city's hukou. Despite reforms such as points-based hukou system and policy frameworks aimed at increasing service accessibility (Dong and Goodburn, 2019), many urban migrants continue to face procedural obstacles, like still cannot enjoy citizenship rights equal to local residents, new forms of educational stratification and so on (Guo and Liang, 2017; Wang, 2020). The ongoing influence of the hukou system emerges as a key institutional constraint, blocking urban migrants' integration.

Topic II also demonstrated a very high structural dilemma, with an SDI score of 1.812. While policy documents emphasize the goal of equal access to healthcare and pensions, urban migrants particularly those with elderly dependents struggle with the portability of benefits across cities (Wang and Fan, 2012; Chan and O'Brien, 2019).

Inconsistent policies and lack of continuity of services across cities reflect a fragmented implementation environment, which obstacles the realization of equitable access to basic services.

In contrast, Topic III- Graduate Issues recorded a much lower SDI value (0.345), which falls into the low structural dilemma category. This suggests that targeted interventions directed at young, educated migrants are achieving a relatively high level of coherence between policy goals and outcomes. First-tier cities have introduced innovative and responsive mechanisms to attract and retain skilled migrant youth, contributing to a more effective integration (Li, Ma, Tan, et.al., 2022; MacLachlan and Gong, 2022).

Notably, Topic IV (vulnerable groups protection) yielded a negative SDI value (-0.264), suggesting a very low structural dilemma. In this case, observed outcomes appear to have exceeded policy expectations. This may be attributed to the active role of grassroots networks, informal support systems or implemented supplementary measures from local governments that operate beyond the formal policy apparatus (Wen and Hanley, 2016; Wang, 2016; Liu, 2017; Ouyang, Wang, Tian, et.al., 2017; Bo and Wang, 2025). Such actors have potentially filled institutional gaps in areas such as urban migrant children's education, housing stabilization, and other areas, thereby enhancing the overall protection landscape for disadvantaged urban migrants (Bo and Wang, 2025).

Topic V, the entrepreneurship cultivation and settlement guarantee scored 1.077, once again falling within the range of a very high structural dilemma. While many Eastern cities have introduced programs to encourage entrepreneurial activity and facilitate urban migrants' settlement, these initiatives often fail to translate into practical support, like the hukou discrimination, financial literacy training and so on (Cheng, Wang and Li, 2022; Wen, Cheng and Tani, 2024). These barriers are further exacerbated by the lack of hukou-based entitlements, highlighting the gap between policy ambition and on-the-ground feasibility.

Collectively, the SDI analysis reveals a heterogeneous policy environment in which some domains-particularly those targeting younger or vulnerable migrant groups-show signs of responsiveness or overperformance. Meanwhile, foundational

domains such as administrative integration and public service access remain encumbered by deep-seated institutional and systemic constraints. These disparities suggest a need for differentiated policy strategies that recognize the specific barriers within each domain and the varying capacities of local governments to implement reform.

#### 4.2. Result of Eastern China situation in Labour Force Access

Table 14 SDI Result of Labour Force Access in Eastern China

Topic	Topic Name	SDI Value	Structural Dilemma Level
I	Education and Employment Training	1.319	Very High Structural Dilemma
II	Human Resources Development	2.256	Very High Structural Dilemma
III	Official Assisted Employment Development	0.305	Low Structural Dilemma
IV	Employment and Entrepreneurship Services	10.312	Very High Structural Dilemma
V	Re-employment Promotion	-21.317	Very Low Structural Dilemma
VI	Employment and Social Security	1.24	Very High Structural Dilemma

Table 14 displays the result of SDI in the aspect of labour force access. From it, SDI of Topic I is 1.319, categorizing it as a very high structural dilemma. This indicates that despite significant policy delivery in promoting equal training access for urban migrants, real-world outcomes remain far from expectations. Urban migrants often face exclusion from skill development programs due to high entry barriers, limited information channels, or misalignment between training content and the demands of urban labour markets (Liu and Zhu, 2016; Jiang, Zhang, Qi, et.al., 2016; Zhu, Feng, Wang, et.al., 2017). As such, education-based interventions may be too standardized or disconnected from the socio-economic realities facing them.

With an SDI score of 2.256, Topic II Human Resources Development also falls into the very high structural dilemma category. This suggests that efforts to institutionalize long-term capacity building for urban migrants through workforce planning or talent reserves are hampered by fragmented coordination and limited accessibility (Luo, Yang, Xu, et.al., 2016; Xue and Li, 2019; Wang, Wang and Huang, 2019). Migrants may not be effectively reached by programs aimed at broader labour

system optimization, especially when such policies are formulated with local hukou populations as the implicit target group (Jiang, Zhang, Qi, et.al., 2016).

In a notable departure from the broader pattern, Topic III Official Assisted Employment Development reported a significantly negative SDI of -21.317, falling into the very low structural dilemma category. This suggests that policy outcomes in this topic have substantially exceeded expectations, despite receiving relatively limited policy attention in official documents. This outcome may be attributed to several interrelated factors. First is the policy decentralization. Eastern China have often prioritized employment placement mechanisms, such as job fairs, public labour market platforms, and municipal employment centres (Shanghai Hongkou District Government, 2024). These require fewer administrative barriers, making them more accessible to urban migrants regardless of hukou status (Finn, 2020; Wang, 2020). The second is the low institutional barriers. Unlike welfare- or registration-based services, official job referral systems tend to operate with minimal eligibility requirements, allowing migrants to participate without complex verification. All in all, these dynamics reflect a topic where practical, low-cost interventions which are though less emphasized in central planning yield high-impact results on the ground.

Topic IV exhibits an SDI of 0.305, placing it in the low structural dilemma category. While some cities have introduced support schemes for urban migrant entrepreneurship, this relatively favourable SDI suggests moderate alignment between policy design and outcomes. Programs such as simplified registration may have begun to reach segments of the urban migrants (Zou, Yao, Lan, et.al., 2023). However, significant disparities persist between cities in terms of policy intensity and urban migrants' integrations (Zhou, Qiao and Guo, 2024).

Topic Re-employment Promotion records the highest SDI among all six topics, at 10.312, indicating a very high structural dilemma. Despite strong policy attention to re-employment, particularly for laid off or displaced migrant workers, the actual feasibility of re-entry into the urban labour market remains low. Structural barriers such as skill mismatch, employer discrimination, and lack of access to upskilling platforms continue to impede effective re-employment outcomes (Ren, Gao, Cai, et.al., 2018; Ke and Bian,

2023), suggesting that policy frameworks in this area are insufficiently responsive to the real constraints faced by migrant workers.

The SDI of topic VI stands at 1.240, again pointing to a very high structural dilemma. Although official policies have increasingly called for the integration of urban migrants in urban pension, unemployment, medical insurance systems and so on, the actual rate of enrolment remains low. Institutional fragmentation, contribution requirements (Zheng, Ji, Chang, et.al., 2020), and the lack of cross-regional portability of benefits continue to marginalize urban migrants from these protections.

All in all, the findings reveal significant imbalances across the topic structures, with five out of six falling into the “high” or “very high” structural dilemma categories. It indicates substantial misalignment between policy intentions and real-world implementation. Notably, areas such as Re-employment Promotion and Human Resources Development exhibit strong policy emphasis but limited practical effectiveness. In contrast, Official Assisted Employment Development demonstrates a reverse pattern, with relatively low policy visibility yet unexpectedly strong performance on the ground.

#### 4.3. Result of Eastern China situation in Public Service Provision

Table 15 SDI Result of Public Service Provision in Eastern China

Topic	Topic name	SDI Value	Structural Dilemma Level
I	Housing and Assistance Construction	0.773	High Structural Dilemma
II	Work-related Guarantee	0.431	Low Structural Dilemma
III	Cultural Construction	1.521	Very High Structural Dilemma
IV	Healthcare and Social Security	0.283	Low Structural Dilemma
V	Medical Insurance Management	-17.141	Very Low Structural Dilemma

Table 15 shows the SDI values of the effectiveness of public service provision (PSP) policies targeting urban migrants in Eastern China.

Topic I records an SDI of 0.773, indicating a high structural dilemma. While affordable housing provision and support for urban migrants’ rental access have become more visible in urban policy agendas, structural obstacles remain substantial. Urban migrants often face exclusion from public rental programs, limited access to low-

cost housing zones, and zoning or eligibility rules tied to local hukou (Huang and Ren, 2022). Although policies may be in place, the mechanisms of delivery remain fragmented and inadequately targeted. This leads to a separation between formal inclusion policy and lived residential insecurity.

Topic Work-related Guarantee yields an SDI of 0.431, categorized as a low structural dilemma. This suggests that employment-linked guarantees, such as occupational safety oversight, legal contract protection, and wage delay prevention, are relatively better aligned with actual outcomes. Urban migrants in many Eastern China have benefited from increasingly standardized labour supervision and employer accountability systems (Huang, 2022; Zhang and Tang, 2022). The institutionalization of labour dispute arbitration mechanisms and the implementation of digital wage platforms likely contributed to this policy-performance alignment.

Topic III (Cultural Construction) records an SDI of 1.521, representing a very high structural dilemma. While some policies are presented, such as promoting multiculturalism, urban identity, and community participation, governance practical implementation often lags. Public cultural infrastructure (e.g., libraries, community centres, recreational facilities) remains unevenly distributed, and urban migrants often lack the time, awareness, or social embeddedness to access these services (Ouyang, Wang, Tian, et.al., 2017). This suggests that the symbolic inclusivity promised in planning documents has not translated into functional cultural integration, leaving urban migrants on the external of urban social life.

The SDI of Topic IV is 0.283, classified as a low structural dilemma as well. This implies relatively favourable alignment between policy goals and the actual service reach among urban migrants. Especially in more developed cities, basic public health interventions (e.g., vaccination programs, maternal-child health services) have begun to adopt integration-oriented targeting strategies (Fu, Liu and Yang, 2020; Chen, Huang and Zhou, 2023), extending coverage to urban migrants regardless of residency status.

In stark contrast to the overall trend, Topic V Medical Insurance Management demonstrates a strong negative SDI of -17.141, placing it in the category of very low structural dilemma. This suggests that policy outcomes have significantly outpaced

expectations, even though this domain may not be the first prominent in policy discourse.

The SDI analysis of public service provision reveals considerable variation in the effectiveness of integration policy implementation. While employment-related guarantees and health services show signs of alignment with stated goals, domains such as cultural construction and housing provision remain characterized by institutional rigidity and functional exclusion. Remarkably, medical insurance reform emerges as a domain of policy overperformance, underscoring the transformative potential of systemic reforms and indirect policy instruments in improving migrant inclusion. These findings emphasize the need for targeted, scalable, and evidence-driven adjustments in public service governance to bridge the remaining gaps in urban migrant integration.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

Structural dilemma is conceptualized and operationalized in this article. Combining the policy topic modelling data from LDA model and corresponding non-survey data from three kinds of Yearbook and REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE GOVERNMENT, entropy method and relative gap method is utilized to construct the Structural Dilemma Index (SDI) to operationalize the Structural dilemma.

This section synthesizes the findings derived from the Structural Dilemma Index (SDI) analysis across three major policy dimensions concerning the integration of urban migrants in Eastern China. The discussion identifies patterns of structural effectiveness and institutional rigidity across different functional domains. The subsequent conclusion distils these findings into key insights, reflects on broader governance implications, while acknowledging its limitations.

### 5.1 Discussion

The Structural Dilemma Index (SDI) analysis across three policy aspects demonstrates a recurring disjunction between policy ambition and real-world effectiveness. Topics such as Re-employment Promotion and Government Affairs Promotion in LFA reveal high SDI scores, indicating strong discursive commitment but inadequate delivery. These patterns reflect a broader issue of policy-reality decoupling, where institutional goals are not sufficiently grounded in administrative feasibility or

interdepartmental coordination (Shen and Li, 2022). Conversely, areas with relatively low formal policy intensity, such as Official Assisted Employment Development (LFA) or Medical Insurance Management (PSP), exhibit unexpectedly low or negative SDI scores, implying overperformance. These outliers highlight that effective service delivery can occur outside of policy centrality, particularly when local actors innovate within less politically constrained domains (Ouyang, Wang, Tian, et.al., 2017).

On the other hand, a clear distinction persists between symbolic integration, typically articulated in policy and strategic frameworks, and substantive access, which depends on the tangible availability, accessibility, and usability of services by urban migrants. For example, while the topic of Cultural Construction and Housing and Assistance emphasize community participation and residential stability, their high SDI scores suggest these objectives remain largely aspirational. Urban migrants continue to encounter systemic forms of exclusion, shaped by barriers such as hukou restrictions, limited administrative portability, and insecure or informal housing arrangements (Li and Rose, 2017; Huang and Ren, 2022; Hu, 2023). This disconnect highlights a critical insight: policy legitimacy, while necessary, is insufficient to achieve meaningful integration. The success of integration depends not merely on declarative commitments, but on a policy's capacity to institutionalize enforceable rights, and position urban migrants as active co-creators of urban life rather than passive recipients of top-down planning (Beks, 2022; Anthony Jr, 2024).

Meanwhile, high SDI scores in structurally rigid topics such as housing, re-employment, and entrepreneurship support, underscore the limitations of integration under China's hierarchical governance system (Liang, 2018; Lao and Shen, 2015; Lin and Zhu, 2016; Wang, 2019). The enduring influence of the hukou system generates layered access barriers that overly disadvantage urban migrants. Nevertheless, instances of strong performance in low-SDI contexts point to the potential of local discretion and gradual institutional adaptation to offset these structural constraints. Cities that streamline administrative procedures, extend universal services to urban migrants via digital platforms are more likely to achieve functional alignment between policy intentions and lived outcomes (Lekka and Souitaris, 2023; Wang, Qi and Liu, 2023; Jia, 2024).



## 5.2 Conclusion

The findings highlight following conclusion:

Policies closely tied to the hukou system are more likely to exhibit structural dilemmas. For instance, topics such as Elderly Care and Medical Services, as well as Entrepreneurship Support and Settlement Security under the Hukou System aspect, report very high SDI scores. This suggests that despite receiving considerable policy attention, these areas remain constrained by enduring institutional barriers (Wang, 2017). Urban migrants continue to face difficulties in accessing core public welfare, largely due to the persistent structural influence of the hukou system (Johnson, 2017; Christiansen, 1990; Cui and Cho, 2020). These persistent forms of exclusion reflect deeper structural path dependencies embedded within the urban governance system. As such, the high SDI scores in these domains should not be viewed merely as failures of implementation, but as manifestations of entrenched institutional inertia.

Furthermore, among these three policy aspects, topics that receive relatively high policy attention often exhibit lower SDI scores, indicating a comparatively weaker structural dilemma. This pattern suggests that the risk of mismatch between policy and reality can be significantly reduced if policy priorities are accompanied by concrete implementation mechanisms. For instance, Topic Graduate Issues in Hukou System aspect, Topic Employment and Entrepreneurship Services in Labour Force Access aspect, Topic Healthcare and Social Security in Public Service Provision aspect, are all higher policy attention with lower structural dilemma. These cases suggest that strong policy priorities, coupled with operational feasibility and administrative clarity, may enhance consistency.

What's more, Public Service Provision aspect exhibited the lowest overall SDI values, indicating the weakest structural dilemma. This reflects the strengths of a mature administrative system. Although this policy area remains linked to the hukou system, it is governed by national standardized procedures and a specific local policy framework (Lin, Wu, Wang, et.al., 2023). The emphasis on administrative efficiency and functional service delivery suggests that rule-based, hierarchy governance system is better positioned to produce equitable and reliable outcomes in the context of urban migrants' integration.

While this study offers valuable insights into the structural dilemmas embedded in urban migrant integration policies in Eastern China, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the analysis relies on the Structural Dilemma Index (SDI), which, although effective in identifying the misalignment between policy intentions and outcomes, does not fully capture the complex, multilayered causality behind such misalignments. Second, the data used in this study are derived primarily from policy documents and secondary indicators. While this enables a broad, systematic evaluation across multiple policy domains, it may overlook the lived experiences and perceptions of migrant populations themselves. Future research could combine the urban migrants' own feelings about the integration policy from the specific survey and their integration situation, where structural dilemma and integration may match.

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