

Decent Work And Social Justice In Global Transition: Knowledge Management, Public Policies, And Case Studies

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Abstract

This article presents a systematic literature review on decent work and social justice, based on 59 academic articles indexed in Scopus and ScienceDirect between 2000 and 2024. Three key dimensions are analyzed: (1) Knowledge management on indicators used to measure decent work, (2) public policies aligned with social justice, and (3) case studies documenting its implementation. The applied methodology included structured search strategies, qualitative analysis, and the development of conceptual cartographies. The findings reveal that decent work has evolved from a normative approach promoted by the ILO to a multidimensional analytical category, linked to sustainability, gender equity, and subjective well-being. Regionally, the studies cover experiences in Latin America (Brazil, Colombia, Peru), Africa (Nigeria, South Africa), Asia (India, China, Indonesia), Europe (United Kingdom, Spain, Switzerland, Russia, Belarus), North America (United States), and the Middle East (Yemen). Advances are identified in contextualized measurement and policy design, but also methodological gaps, structural inequalities, and limitations in applying social justice principles in informal or precarious environments. The review concludes with recommendations to strengthen participatory, intersectional, and sustainable approaches in the study and practice of decent work on a global scale.

Keywords: Decent work, Social justice, Perspectives on Knowledge Management, Public policies.

INTRODUCTION

Decent work, formulated by the International Labour Organization (ILO) at the end of the twentieth century, has established itself as a key category in studies on employment, labour rights and social justice. Based on four pillars – job creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue – it has been incorporated as the core of SDG 8 of the 2030 Agenda, acquiring normative, ethical and political value (Rasak, Shaharudin & Hamid, 2023).

The academic literature has delved into its multidimensional normative and analytical nature, relating it to social sustainability (Rasak et al., 2023), subjective well-being (Conigliaro, 2021), distributive justice (Golovina & Tomashevski, 2023), gender equity (Rai, Brown & Ruwanpura, 2019) and challenges of digital platforms (Baxi, 2024). The bibliometric analysis by Ralph and Arora (2024) reflects a sustained increase in publications since 2015, focused on economic development, equality, governance and labour policies.

At the same time, social justice has gained renewed centrality as a structural principle of equitable labor policies, demanding decent working conditions, redistribution of opportunities, and recognition of contextual diversity (Reynaud, 2018; Berg, 2015). This is expressed in institutions such as collective bargaining or the minimum wage, and seeks to balance the interests of capital and labor (Golovina & Tomashevski, 2023; Dodd, Hooley & Burke, 2019). However, relevant gaps persist in the systematization of knowledge on the link between decent work and social justice. Academic production reveals thematic fragmentation, methodological disparities, and underrepresentation of studies from the Global South (Yeh & Wang, 2024; Ralph & Arora, 2024). In addition, tensions are identified in the face of emerging challenges such as digitalization, informality, and job insecurity in developing economies (Cooke, Xu, & Bian, 2019; Silva, 2022).

Against this backdrop, a systematic review of the literature is presented as an ideal approach to map the state of the art, identify consensus and dissent, and offer a comparative vision to guide public and research decisions (Xiao & Watson, 2017; Linnenluecke, Marrone & Singh, 2019). This article adopts such a methodology to examine the recent scientific literature on decent work and social justice, focusing the analysis on three dimensions: measurement indicators, public policies, and case studies.

The question that guides this study is: What are the main challenges identified in the global scientific literature in relation to Knowledge Management on measurement, implementation of public policies and the systematization of case studies on decent work and its link to social justice? To answer it, three specific objectives were established: (1) to examine methodological approaches and indicators in terms of knowledge management; (2) explain public policies consistent with decent work and social justice; and (3) systematize relevant case studies.

The main contribution of this work is to offer a structured and critical view of theoretical, normative and empirical advances around decent work, based on the analysis of 59 academic articles indexed in Scopus and ScienceDirect (2000–2024). Using a conceptual cartography based on Tobón (2012), the findings are systematized, considering their regional, disciplinary and methodological diversity.

• THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

.1. Decent work and its multidimensional nature.

Decent work, formulated by the ILO, is a key axis to guarantee fair, safe and dignified working conditions at the global level, based on four pillars: job creation, rights at work, social

protection and social dialogue (Rasak, Shaharudin & Hamid, 2023). These pillars form a normative framework that allows decent work to be integrated into the SDGs and long-term social justice commitments. The academic literature has approached it from various theoretical and methodological perspectives, highlighting its multidimensional nature and its importance in the face of current labor, social, and environmental challenges (Silva, 2022; Rombouts & Zekić, 2020).

Since its inclusion in the international agenda, decent work has been recognized as a human right and a strategic objective that links fair working conditions with sustainable development (Rombouts & Zekić, 2020), evolving to address contemporary challenges from labour law and human rights approaches, in accordance with the ILO Centenary Declaration and the 2030 Agenda. This normative dimension has been enriched by theoretical proposals such as that of Rasak et al. (2023), who develop a conceptual model that demonstrates how the four pillars of decent work – job creation, social protection, rights at work and social dialogue – have a direct impact on social sustainability, also suggesting a connection with the psychology of work. Likewise, Conigliaro (2021) highlights its multidimensional nature and its link with subjective well-being, proposing the Partially Ordered Sets method as a tool to integrate social justice, quality of life, and human development without losing the complexity of the concept in its evaluation.

The bibliometric analysis by Ralph and Arora (2024) shows a sustained increase in academic production on decent work since 2015, focused on five key themes: economic development, corporate social responsibility, gender equality, governance and social justice, although it also shows a significant gap in the representation of low- and middle-income countries, highlighting the need to strengthen research from the Global South. Along the same lines, Yeh and Wang (2024) identify three stages in the evolution of the concept of decent work—economic, identity, and cultural—and propose an empowerment model aimed at supporting decision-makers in improving working conditions, recognizing the dynamic nature of work and its political implications.

In particular, gender equity has been one of the most debated issues, as highlighted by Rai, Brown, and Ruwanpura (2019), who criticize the SDG 8 approach for its emphasis on economic growth measured by GDP, without adequately considering unpaid reproductive work, which generates tensions with SDG 5 and underscores the need to incorporate gender justice into the pillars of decent work. From a critical and socio-legal perspective, Baxi (2024) stresses that the law must adapt to new forms of employment, such as work on digital platforms, to guarantee decent conditions. It argues that decent work can only be effective if it is articulated with justice, and that legal systems must actively include the most vulnerable to avoid structural exclusions.

Finally, Silva (2022) analyzes the construction of the human-centered agenda led by the ILO in its Future of Work initiative. Although this agenda was conceived as a progressive response, the author notes how it was reconfigured towards pro-business positions by some state and business actors. This tension highlights the challenges of articulating decent work and social justice.

Thus, decent work is a complex concept, with solid theoretical foundations in international labour law, human rights and social sustainability. Its multidimensional nature is expressed in the four pillars defined by the ILO: job creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue. The literature reviewed demonstrates that these pillars have been addressed in a comprehensive manner from conceptual, methodological and empirical frameworks, recognizing the need to promote fair, inclusive and sustainable work. However, challenges

related to gender equality, informality, technological innovation, and the representation of less developed contexts in the global debate persist.

2. Social justice at work.

In labor law, social justice has been conceived as an axiological principle that balances individual and collective interests through rights such as fair remuneration, equal opportunities, non-discrimination, and collective organization, going beyond formal equality to incorporate substantive equity according to context, capacities, and needs (Golovina & Tomashevski, 2023). This principle has been recognized as an essential value in policy-making, especially in the framework of decent work, by integrating the principles of equity, human dignity, and fair redistribution of opportunities. From a legal and public policy perspective, its implementation has been expressed in laws, institutions, and practices aimed at guaranteeing decent working conditions, accessible employment, and effective protection.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has consolidated this value in its normative system through declarations such as the 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and the 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, linking social justice directly to decent work as an integrating narrative of four strategic dimensions: rights at work, employment, social protection and social dialogue (Reynaud, 2018).

Social justice is embodied through labour market institutions, such as collective bargaining and social protection systems. These structures not only guarantee fair working conditions, but also mitigate structural inequalities and promote social cohesion (Berg, 2015). The weakening of these institutions has been correlated with the increase in inequality, so their strengthening is a requirement for just societies.

The notion has made it possible to operationalize the principle of social justice in a contextualized way. In the case of the United Kingdom, empirical studies have explored the measurement of decent work through individual perception scales, revealing how workers interpret and value their work experience from a justice perspective (Dodd, Hooley & Burke, 2019). For their part, in Russia and Belarus, the harmonization of labor law has focused on integrating the values of social justice and humanism into legislation and into the very structure of labor law (Golovina & Tomashevski, 2023).

In the case of China, the achievement of decent work requires ideological and cultural transitions, as well as overcoming institutional limitations such as weak trade union function and weak regulatory capacity, which has been approached from a multidisciplinary and multilevel approach that considers historical, political, ideological and cultural factors (Cooke, Xu & Bian, 2019). This perspective is part of a broader evolution of the academic literature, which has moved from predominantly economic approaches to others focused on identity and culture, expanding the paradigm of social justice and incorporating subjective dimensions of employment such as emotional well-being, recognition and autonomy (Yeh & Wang, 2024), which has made it possible to make visible new forms of precariousness and traditionally excluded populations.

Despite the global adoption of the concept of decent work, its effective implementation faces significant challenges, especially in contexts characterized by informal economies or weak institutions. Overcoming these obstacles requires profound regulatory and cultural adaptation, as well as constant vigilance in the face of reforms that make the labor market more flexible without social safeguards (Berg, 2015; Cooke et al., 2019). Social justice in the workplace is an ethical and legal aspiration aimed at guaranteeing decent employment. Its implementation has been supported by solid labor institutions and the development of decent work as an

integrating framework; however, its effectiveness depends on an adequate contextualization to socio-political, cultural and economic realities, and on institutional strengthening.

• METHODOLOGY

The research was developed through a systematic review of the literature, following the methodological guidelines of Linnenluecke, Marrone, and Singh (2019) and Xiao and Watson (2017), who propose a structured approach in stages such as the formulation of the question, definition of criteria, search design, selection of sources, analysis, and synthesis of results. The guiding question was: What are the main challenges identified in the global scientific literature in relation to Knowledge Management on measurement, implementation of public policies and case studies on decent work and social justice? To respond, three objectives were established: to analyze approaches to measurement indicators in terms of knowledge management, to explain public policies consistent with decent work and social justice, and to systematize relevant case studies. The process followed is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Methodological process of systematic literature review

Stage	Description applied in the article
<i>Problem Formulation</i>	Knowledge management on decent work faces methodological and contextual limitations that prevent comparable measurements across countries. Indicators do not adequately reflect social justice and effective policy implementation, and case studies are fragmented and poorly replicable.
<i>Establishment of criteria</i>	Inclusion: peer-reviewed academic articles, in English, Spanish, or Portuguese, indexed in Scopus or ScienceDirect, within the areas of social sciences, economics, psychology, business, or the arts. Exclusion: duplicates, documents without a relevant thematic focus or without empirical or conceptual analysis.
<i>Search strategy</i>	Application of formulas with Boolean operators in Scopus and ScienceDirect. It was filtered by language, document type and subject area.
<i>Review and selection</i>	Detailed reading of titles, abstracts and full texts. Application of filters to preserve only relevant documents and eliminate duplicates or irrelevant ones.
<i>Analysis and synthesis</i>	Classification of articles according to the three axes of analysis. Qualitative evaluation of the content, identification of trends, tensions and gaps.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Linnenluecke, Marrone, and Singh (2019) and Xiao and Watson (2017).

The documentary search was carried out mainly in two databases: **Scopus** and **ScienceDirect**. In Scopus, two different formulas were applied. The first was broader and yielded a total of 108 results. A more refined formula with specific exclusion criteria was then applied, allowing the sample to be reduced to 50 relevant articles. In parallel, a search was conducted on ScienceDirect using a specific formula that combined the categories of decent work, social

justice, public policies, indicators, and case studies. Of the 16 documents obtained, 9 were selected that met the established criteria. The synthesis of these search strategies and results is detailed in the following table 2:

Table 2 Search strategies, formulas used and results

Database	Search formula used	Results obtained	Final result after exclusion
Scopus (initial search)	TITLE-ABS-KEY (decent AND work AND social AND justice) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "ECON") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "PSYC") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "ARTS")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English") OR LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "Spanish") OR LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "Portuguese"))	108	—
Scopus (Cleaned Out Formula)	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("decent work" AND "social justice") AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "ECON") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "PSYC") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "ARTS")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English") OR LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "Spanish") OR LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "Portuguese"))	—	50
ScienceDirect	"decent work" AND "social justice" AND "public policy" AND indicators AND "case studies"	16	9

Total articles included in the analysis	—	—	59
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Source: Authors.

Therefore, this systematic review made it possible to consolidate a set of 59 scientific articles that were qualitatively analyzed to extract the main findings related to indicators, public policies and case studies on decent work in different regions of the world. However, in the analysis and synthesis phase of the systematic review, the methodological strategy of **Conceptual Cartography** was incorporated, following the model proposed by Tobón (2012), as a key tool to interpret the findings.

Given that this research is oriented towards three specific objectives—(1) to examine knowledge management on methodological approaches and indicators of decent work, (2) to identify public policies consistent with social justice, and (3) to systematize relevant case studies—Conceptual Mapping was used as a strategy to classify, connect, and qualitatively analyze the selected literature. Three cartographies were developed, one for each axis, using the following components: notion, exemplification, categorization, characterization, differentiation, subdivision, linkage and applied methodology. The expected results of this strategy are summarized below using the following table 3:

Table 3 Methodological structure of conceptual cartography applied to analysis

Axes of conceptual cartography	Decent work indicators	Public policies consistent with social justice	Case studies on decent work implementation
Notion	Set of variables that allow quantifying the fulfillment of decent work	A set of public decisions aimed at guaranteeing decent work with equity	Contextualized experiences to assess the actual implementation of decent work
Exemplification	ILO indicators, informality rates, wage gaps	Formalization programs, youth employment plans, comprehensive labor policies	Cases in India, Colombia, Brazil, South Africa
Categorization	Tools for measuring compliance with labour rights	State instruments to guarantee rights in the world of work	Empirical practices located in specific territories
Characterization	Objective, comparable, context-sensitive, multidimensional	Comprehensive, focused, intersectoral, sustainable	Contextualized, participatory, multi-actor, measurable
Differentiation	They differ from abstract goals or discursive narratives without data	They differ from subsidies, partial reforms or measures without a rights-based approach	They differ from theoretical models, trials or non-evaluated pilot programs

Subdivision	Quantitative and qualitative indicators; Minimum and Extended	Universal, targeted, sectoral programmes	Successful, limited or replicable cases
Linkage	Relationship with labour rights, human development, SDG 8, global justice	Articulation with constitutions, NDPs, social inclusion strategies	Interaction with public policies, social actors, trade union movements, international cooperation
Methodology	National surveys, documentary analysis, databases of international organizations	Public policy analysis, legislative review, impact studies	Comparative case study, desk review, interviews, triangulation

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Tobón (2012) and research objectives.

• RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Global Scientific Trends on Decent Work and Social Justice

This section presents the results derived from the systematic review applied to 59 scientific articles selected by a search in the **Scopus** (50 articles) and **ScienceDirect** (9 articles) databases. In coherence with the methodology proposed, the data presented here allow us to map the development of the field and recognize gaps and epistemic biases that condition the scope of scientific knowledge produced in this field.

The distribution of documents by year shows a sustained growth in academic interest in the subject since 2016, with a notable rebound in 2020 (coinciding with the global health crisis of COVID-19) and a significant continuity in the following years. The fact that more than 50% of the articles are concentrated between 2020 and 2024 shows that decent work has been thematized in academia as a key category to interpret the structural changes of the labor market in contexts of uncertainty and global transition according to Figure I:

Figure 1. Documents by year of publication

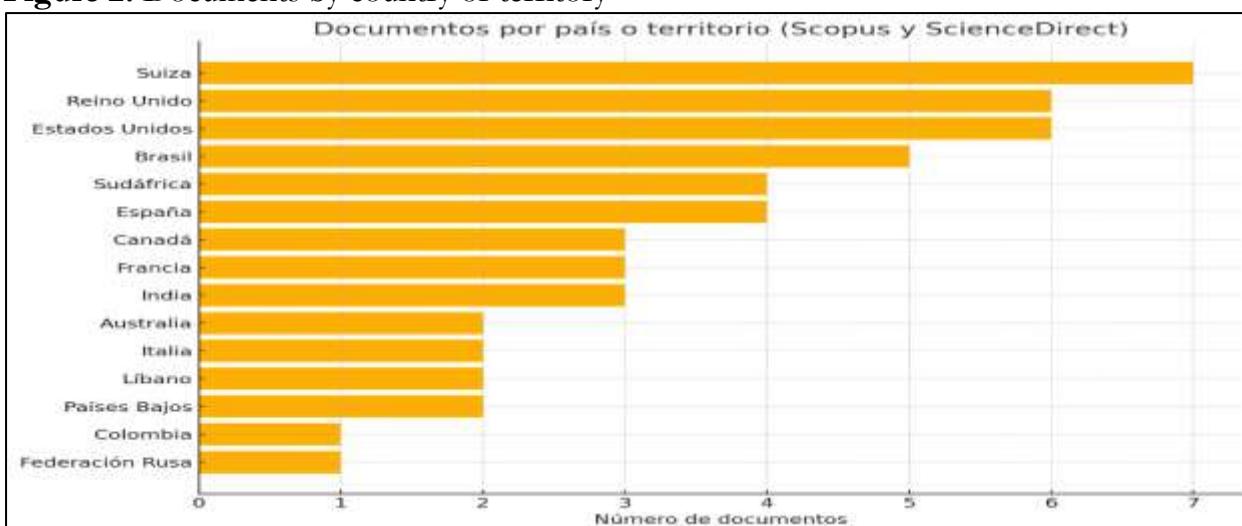


Source: Authors' elaboration based on Scopus and ScienceDirect (2024). In the original Spanish language.

This behavior shows how the pandemic marked a turning point in the visibility of precarious working conditions and in the positioning of decent work as a cross-cutting issue for the analysis of structural inequalities. The continuity of subsequent publications indicates that it was not a circumstantial concern, but rather the consolidation of a new axis of interdisciplinary analysis with a focus on labor rights.

The analysis of institutional affiliations reveals a significant concentration of academic production in countries of the global north such as Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, although the participation of countries of the global south such as Brazil, South Africa, India and Colombia is also highlighted. This diversity reflects the global nature of the debate on decent work, but also shows persistent asymmetries in terms of research infrastructure and editorial visibility as shown in Figure II:

Figure 2. Documents by country or territory



Source: Authors' elaboration based on Scopus and ScienceDirect (2024). In the original Spanish language.

The specific weight of Switzerland can be explained by the institutional centrality of the International Labour Organization (ILO), while the Brazilian case accounts for the progress of regional academic networks that have incorporated the concept of decent work in the analysis of public policies, informality and exclusion. However, the map reveals the urgency of generating mechanisms for scientific cooperation that expand the participation of countries historically marginalized from the international debate.

Decent work has become a cross-cutting object of study, approached from various disciplines. Social Sciences lead production, followed by Economics, Psychology, Arts and Humanities and Management. This shows that the concept has transcended strictly legal or normative frameworks, being adopted as an analytical category in the study of structures, perceptions, values and subjectivities linked to work, according to the following table 4:

Table 4 Documents by subject area

Thematic area	Documents	Approximate %
<i>Social Sciences</i>	27	45.8 %
<i>Arts & Humanities</i>	9	15.3 %
<i>Economics, Econometrics and Finance</i>	8	13.6 %

<i>Administration, Business and Accounting</i>	6	10.2 %
<i>Psychology</i>	6	10.2 %
<i>Environmental Sciences</i>	2	3.4 %
<i>Energy</i>	1	1.7 %
<i>Medicine</i>	1	1.7 %
Total	59	100.0 %

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Scopus and ScienceDirect (2024)

The psychological approach has been useful to explore the link between decent work, subjective well-being and a sense of purpose in employment, while from the Economics perspective, debates on productivity, social protection and labor segmentation have been deepened. The Arts and Humanities, for their part, have contributed with normative and ethical analyses of the concept, which has opened up questions about distributive justice and the global governance of work.

.2. Knowledge management and organizational justice as foundations for decent work and its multidimensional measurement

Knowledge management (KM), organizational justice, and decent work converge as interdependent analytical fields that articulate micro dynamics of labor cooperation with macro systems of normative and statistical measurement. Empirical research indicates that procedural, distributive, and interpersonal justice enables collaborative behaviors that reduce the concealment of knowledge and strengthen the quality of the work environment (Cugueró-Escofet et al., 2019; Kim & Park, 2017; Mahmood et al., 2023). The theory of social exchange explains this dynamic: perceptions of equity and recognition increase affective commitment and willingness to cooperate. Ethical leadership appears as a key modulator, enhancing trust and rationalizing the effect of distributive justice on knowledge transfer (Le & Nguyen, 2022). In this framework, personal knowledge management places the worker as a cognitive agent whose intellectual capital constitutes a source of recognition and dignified treatment (Podgorny, 2018). This approach acquires redistributive expression in public sectors, where KM contributes to retaining talent, anticipating professional needs, and sustaining specialized care ecosystems (Colnar et al., 2019). Epistemic co-production between practitioners, communities, and educators reinforces social justice through relationships of trust and collaboration, transforming knowledge into social infrastructure (Kanjilal & Arnall, 2025).

At the macro level, the measurement of decent work translates normative principles into comparable instruments that seek to capture dimensions such as job security, adequate income, social protection and social dialogue (Mehran et al., 2002). However, operationalization faces deficits: not all dimensions are quantifiable, data are fragmented, and institutional capacities vary. Multidimensional approaches based on Alkire-Foster have demonstrated the feasibility of integrating stability, employment, equal treatment, and social security to detect vulnerabilities (Elmetwally, 2022), although this process is not neutral: the production of indicators has been a field of political dispute within the ILO that prevented the construction of a universal evaluation framework (Berten, 2022), evidencing its nature as global governance. Empirical evidence confirms persistent deficits in social dialogue, job security, and equitable treatment, not attributable to statistical failures but to productive structures that reproduce inequality (Senkrua, 2024). This diagnosis situates measurement as a device that encodes power relations. Its integration with KM creates an epistemological bridge: organizational cultures based on trust and ethical leadership generate more robust data to evaluate decent work

(Cugueró-Escófet et al., 2019; Le & Nguyen, 2022), while measurement systems that prioritize equality and stability encourage knowledge circulation practices (Kim & Park, 2017; Mahmood et al., 2023).

The methodological approaches that underpin these approaches include psychometric studies on the meaning of work (Duffy et al., 2017; Martins et al., 2024), institutional normative proposals in the ILO (Ghai, 2003; Mehran et al., 2002), transnational comparative analyses (Zhang & Tan, 2021; Ralph & Arora, 2024), qualitative studies on work experiences and vulnerability (Dodd et al., 2019), partial ordering models for multivariate assessment (Conigliaro, 2021), and bibliometric analyses of research trends (Ralph & Arora, 2024). Measurements based on national surveys allow structural heterogeneities to be observed (Ara, 2021; Zhang & Tan, 2021), while the critical literature underscores the impossibility of a universal indicator and the need to contextualize measurement and governance (Standing, 2002; Nizami & Prasad, 2017). In addition, the incorporation of subjective dimensions—such as the meaning of work and perceived justice—is essential to capture real work experience (Pouyaud, 2016; Blustein et al., 2022).

Table 5 shows how decent work indicators convert normative principles into empirical variables that capture real employment conditions. They articulate micro, meso and macro dimensions, integrating organizational justice, knowledge management and structural inequality. They are not neutral: they codify power relations and allow us to observe practices that enable or inhibit decent work. Its mixed methodological design reveals the lived work experience and guides public policies for social justice.

Table 5 *Conceptual mapping of decent work indicators from knowledge management and organizational justice*

Axle	Description
1. Notion	Decent work indicators are knowledge devices that convert ILO normative principles into comparable empirical variables aimed at assessing real working conditions – security, social protection, adequate income and social dialogue (Mehran et al., 2002; Ghai, 2003). Their nature is epistemic rather than merely statistical: they represent the relationship between workers, institutions, and markets , and not just the numerical behavior of employment (Standing, 2002).
2. Exemplification	They include formal indicators of decent work from the ILO (Mehran et al., 2002), informality indices derived from national surveys (Ara, 2021), comparative metrics such as contractual stability and equal treatment (Zhang & Tan, 2021), as well as distributive variables of well-being and labor turnover detected in qualitative studies (Dodd et al., 2019). In organizational contexts, these metrics also capture epistemic behaviors such as sharing or hiding knowledge (Cugueró-Escófet et al., 2019; Kim & Park, 2017; Mahmood et al., 2023).
3. Categorization	The indicators are classified according to three analytical levels: micro (subjective experience of labor justice, relational perception of ethical leadership, sense of work) (Duffy et al., 2017; Le & Nguyen, 2022), meso (organizational dynamics, knowledge circulation, talent retention) (Podgorny, 2018; Colnar et al., 2019), and macro (measurement systems, statistical comparability, and regulatory frameworks) (Mehran et al., 2002; Zhang & Tan, 2021; Ralph & Arora, 2024). This

	classification goes beyond the linear technocratic vision and allows us to understand the structural nature of decent work (Standing, 2002).
4. Characterization	Indicators are multidimensional and context-sensitive : they should include objective measures (employment, wages, social protection) along with subjective dimensions such as perceived fairness and psychosocial well-being (Pouyaud, 2016; Blustein et al., 2022). The literature shows that there are no universal metrics, but rather systems that must be adapted to differentiated institutional and productive capacities (Nizami & Prasad, 2017; Elmetwally, 2022). Its function is not to measure "gross" employment, but the relational quality of work : dignity, stability and recognition (Cugueró-Escofet et al., 2019).
5. Differentiation	Indicators are distinguished from normative principles or targets because they require empirical verifiability , data generation and reproducible methodologies. They are not neutral entities: their production is crossed by political disputes within the ILO , particularly between unions and employers, preventing universal consensus (Berten, 2022). For this reason, indicators do not only reflect working conditions: they codify power relations and make visible structural inequalities that do not emerge in the normative discourse (Senkrua, 2024).
6. Subdivision	The indicators can be classified as: (a) quantitative : employment, wages, formality, social affiliation (Mehran et al., 2002); (b) qualitative : work experiences, perception of dignity, cognitive capital, and interpersonal justice (Dodd et al., 2019; Podgorny, 2018); (c) minimum : basic labor compliance metrics under the ILO approach (Ghai, 2003); (d) expanded : psychological well-being, epistemic co-production, and talent retention (Kanjilal & Arnall, 2025; Colnar et al., 2019). Workplace dignity cannot be reduced to a single type of metric .
7. Bonding	The indicators connect three structural purposes: 1) Knowledge management : voluntary circulation of knowledge, trust, ethical leadership, and recognition of the worker as a cognitive subject (Podgorny, 2018; Le & Nguyen, 2022). 2) Measuring decent work : translating normative dimensions into comparable metrics that make it possible to assess inequality and vulnerability (Mehran et al., 2002; Elmetwally, 2022). 3) Social justice : structural transformation through epistemological redistribution and reduction of labor inequalities (Standing, 2002; Senkrua, 2024).
8. Methodology	Measuring decent work requires mixed approaches: quantitative (national surveys and statistical bases) (Ara, 2021; Zhang & Tan, 2021), qualitative (sectoral studies and experience analysis) (Dodd et al., 2019), and psychometric (sense of work and perceived justice) (Duffy et al., 2017; Martins et al., 2024). Comparative methods allow the identification of transnational patterns (Ralph & Arora, 2024), while multivariate models such as Alkire–Foster identify accumulated vulnerabilities (Elmetwally, 2022). Evaluation should be iterative ,

contextual, and sensitive to state and institutional capacities (Nizami & Prasad, 2017).

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Tobón (2012)

Studies agree that the production and use of indicators is crossed by political and institutional tensions that condition their scope and legitimacy (Berten, 2022). The struggle between its technical conception and its normative function has hindered consistent and universal standardization processes (Mehran et al., 2002), to which are added persistent gaps in the capture of specific realities of women (Orcasita et al., 2022), ethnic communities (Williams et al., 2023) and youth in labor transition (Masdonati et al., 2021).

At the methodological level, the difficulty of reconciling quantitative measurements with qualitative and psychosocial approaches that seek to understand the meaning of work and subjective agency persists (Pouyaud, 2016; Blustein et al., 2022). Although tools such as the Decent Work Scale (DWS) have advanced in the individual measurement of decent work (Duffy et al., 2017; De Andrade et al., 2023), its transfer to contexts of structural inequality continues to be problematic and requires interpretative and cultural adjustments (Martins et al., 2024).

The panorama shows that the construction of indicators is in a phase of conceptual and methodological maturation: there are quantitative, qualitative and mixed proposals, but all face challenges of international comparability, contextual sensitivity and adequate integration between subjective and structural dimensions.

In the face of these challenges, it is essential to conceive of the measurement of decent work not as an isolated technical exercise, but as a deliberative process that incorporates historically excluded actors, fosters the generation of accessible and relevant data, and strengthens labor governance. In this way, indicators should be understood as political, ethical and social devices that make it possible to make inequalities visible, guide public policies and materialize decent and fair working conditions.

.3. Public policies consistent with social justice and decent work.

This section analyzes the results obtained in the framework of a systematic review of the literature, whose purpose was to identify and compare the public policies implemented in different countries to promote decent work, evaluating their coherence with the principles of social justice. The analysis of the studies reviewed shows a wide diversity of approaches and degrees of progress in terms of public policies aimed at promoting decent work. The conceptual cartography constructed to classify and understand these findings is presented below:

Table 6 Conceptual mapping of public policies consistent with social justice

Axes	Public policies consistent with social justice
Notion	A set of public decisions aimed at guaranteeing decent work with equity (Ryder, 2015; Silva, 2022; Diller, 2020).
Exemplification	Labour formalisation programmes (Laird, 2017), policies for digital platform workers (De Stefano & Aloisi, 2018), youth insertion strategies (Solberg et al., 2021) and cross-sectoral social protection plans (Koehler, 2011).
Categorization	State instruments aimed at guaranteeing fundamental rights at work (Blackett, 2020; Barquín, 2017).

Characterization	They are characterized by their comprehensiveness, intersectoral approach, regulatory sustainability, and inclusion of vulnerable populations (ILO, 2024; Chigbu & Nekhwevha, 2023).
Differentiation	They differ from welfare measures or partial reforms, since they incorporate a rights-based approach and structural justice (Vosko, 2002; Bianchi & de Man, 2021).
Subdivision	They include universal programs such as national employment systems, focused programs such as subsidies for women or youth, and sectoral programs such as collective agreements or protection in informal work (Cooke et al., 2019; González, 2020).
Linkage	Articulated with Constitutions, National Development Plans, SDG 8 and agendas for labor inclusion and protection against risks (Sultana, 2022; Golovina & Tomashevski, 2022).
Methodology	They include legislative analyses, impact studies, and deliberative processes in consultation with social actors (Tshoose, 2022; Cholewinski, 2020).

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Tobón (2012) and systematic review of 27 academic articles (2020–2024).

Among the consensuses found, the widespread recognition of decent work as a human right and the axis of social cohesion (Shier & Graham, 2015; Somavía, 2002). However, important disagreements are also identified about the means to achieve it. For example, while authors such as Silva (2022) and Reich (2002) warn about the instrumental use of the discourse of decent work in favour of business interests, other studies such as that of McMahon and Watson (2020) value the role of professions and vocational guidance in their promotion.

At the regional level, advanced policies were found in Europe (De Stefano & Aloisi, 2018), South Africa (Tshoose, 2022), Asia (ILO, 2024; Koehler, 2011), Latin America (Laird, 2017; Barquín, 2017) and countries such as China and India (Cooke et al., 2019; Baxi, 2024). The strategies most consistent with social justice are those that incorporate: 1) principles of gender equity and the fight against informality (Chigbu & Nekhwevha, 2023), 2) long-term normative actions (González, 2020), and 3) mechanisms for social and union participation (Peláez et al., 2023).

In contrast, regulatory gaps are identified in sectors such as work on digital platforms, where the lack of regulation has generated job insecurity and evasion of rights (De Stefano & Aloisi, 2018; Bianchi & de Man, 2021). The effectiveness of SDG 8 in its current formulation is also questioned, due to its ambiguity and economicistic orientation (Kreinin & Aigner, 2021).

On the other hand, some texts propose paradigmatic reforms towards a model of "sustainable economic degrowth" that replaces the current approach of growth with inclusion with a model more focused on the sustainability of employment (Kreinin & Aigner, 2021; Bozeman et al., 2023).

The review shows that the public policies most consistent with social justice are those that understand decent work as a comprehensive right, beyond employability or economic growth. These policies are deeply linked to axiological principles such as equity, dignity, solidarity and participation. However, its effective implementation requires overcoming ideological tensions, structural inequalities and institutional weaknesses.

4. Case studies on decent work implementation

The systematic literature review methodology allowed for a classification, qualitative analysis, and synthesis of empirical and conceptual research, evaluating its tensions, scope, and articulation with institutional, social, and normative actors.

The studies reviewed come from diverse contexts, such as India, Nigeria, Brazil, Peru, Indonesia, the United States and Latin American countries. The review revealed the existence of contrasting experiences that allow us to understand the real impact of decent work on the transformation of labor structures, as well as its structural, normative and cultural limitations. The following table summarizes the conceptual cartography developed based on Tobón (2012), integrating the findings of the studies analyzed:

Table 7 Conceptual mapping of case studies on decent work implementation

Axes	Case studies on decent work implementation
Notion	Experiences show the possibility of evaluating the actual implementation of decent work through the interaction between international regulations, local public policies, and organizational practices (Yange et al., 2016; Rantanen et al., 2020).
Exemplification	Experiences in India stand out (Bardhan, 2019; Ahn & Ahn, 2012), Peru (Quiroz-Niño & Blanco-Encomienda, 2019), Brazil (Schleich & Wenceslau, 2022; Rosenfield & Mossi, 2020), Nigeria (Yange et al., 2016), Indonesia (Amalia & Rachmawati, 2021), and the United States (Pliley, 2024).
Categorization	The cases analyzed are framed in concrete empirical practices: national programs (Brazil), organizational analyses (Indonesia, Peru), union processes (India), dynamics of informality (Nigeria), and participation mechanisms (Nepal, Yemen in Alsop et al., 2006).
Characterization	These are participatory experiences (Quiroz-Niño & Blanco-Encomienda, 2019), multi-stakeholder experiences (Amalia & Rachmawati, 2021), contextualized in specific regions (Rosati & Rossi, 2003) and with measurable results (Alsop et al., 2006).
Differentiation	Unlike theoretical models, these studies report practices verified through interviews, statistics, and empirical observation (Yange et al., 2016; Ribeiro, 2021). Purely speculative works are excluded.
Subdivision	Successful cases are identified (Alsop et al., 2006; Ahn & Ahn, 2012), limited (Yange et al., 2016; Schleich & Wenceslau, 2022), and with potential replicability (Quiroz-Niño & Blanco-Encomienda, 2019; Amalia & Rachmawati, 2021).
Linkage	There is interaction with public policies (Brazil, India), collective bargaining (Spain, De La Puebla Pinilla, 2020), international cooperation (Nepal and Yemen in Alsop et al., 2006) and trade union movements (Ahn & Ahn, 2012).
Methodology	Case study approaches, interviews, documentary review, qualitative and quantitative triangulation, narrative coding (Ribeiro, 2021), and normative analysis (Pliley, 2024; Schleich & Wenceslau, 2022).

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Tobón (2012)

The most successful experiences share certain common elements: community participation, inter-institutional articulation, consistent regulatory frameworks, and empowerment strategies adapted to the territory (Alsop et al., 2006; Ahn & Ahn, 2012; Quiroz-Niño & Blanco-Encomienda, 2019). On the other hand, the most recurrent limitations lie in the precariousness of informal employment, the weakness of local institutions, and the lack of a gender approach in the implementation of measures (Yange et al., 2016; De la Puebla Pinilla, 2020).

• DISCUSSION.

This systematic review analysed 59 scientific studies on decent work and social justice, approached from diverse approaches and multiple regions. It was evident that the concept of decent work has evolved from a normative formulation to a multidimensional analytical category, capable of integrating indicators, public policies and case studies in terms of sustainability, equity and rights. This transformation has been intensified by the Sustainable Development Goals, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and current challenges such as informality, automation, and working on digital platforms. However, epistemological and methodological gaps persist that limit the ability to explain the processes and not just describe them.

The sustained increase in publications between 2020 and 2024, driven by the COVID-19 crisis, confirms that decent work has gone from being a peripheral issue to becoming a structuring axis of labour policies in contexts of global transition (Ralph & Arora, 2024). This displacement not only responds to economic dynamics, but also to a profound rereading of the meaning of work and social justice as an organizing principle of the labor order, making visible how crises reconfigure the power relations between labor and capital (Berg, 2015). In this scenario, knowledge management acquires strategic relevance: organizations capable of building trust, cooperation and recognition reduce the concealment of knowledge and generate environments where decent work becomes an experiential experience and not only a contractual one.

However, the comparative examination of measurement systems reveals persistent tensions between technical and regulatory approaches (Berten, 2022; Mehran et al., 2002) and between objective dimensions – stability, income, security – and subjective dimensions such as dignity, belonging and social valuation (Blustein, Lysova & Duffy, 2022; Conigliaro, 2021). These methodological tensions are also epistemic: indicators tend to capture what is easy to count, not what is central to workplace dignity; and to ignore the invisible knowledge infrastructures that underpin well-being, such as ethical leadership, organizational justice, and collaborative cultures.

Evidence shows that moving towards context-sensitive metrics requires incorporating the voice and experience of historically excluded actors—women, youth, informal workers, and ethnic communities—preventing indicators from reproducing structural silences (Orcasita et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2023). Knowledge management allows precisely this displacement: it democratizes the production of labor knowledge and turns workspaces into epistemic communities where workers are cognitive subjects with agency, not interchangeable gears.

Consequently, decent work indicators must be understood not as merely technical instruments, but as political, ethical and cognitive devices: tools to make inequalities visible, guide the governance of work and articulate organizational practices that promote cooperation, recognition and social justice. Only by integrating measurement, organizational justice and knowledge management will it be possible to build evaluation systems capable of capturing the complexity of human work and driving true social transformations.

Likewise, the greatest advances in labor policies are observed in those that integrate gender equality, the fight against informality, and union participation (Chigbu & Nekhwevha, 2023; Peláez et al., 2023), while regulatory gaps in work on digital platforms (De Stefano & Aloisi, 2018; Bianchi & de Man, 2021) show the need for a new social pact adapted to technological challenges and the care economy (Kreinin & Aigner, 2021). International case studies, on the other hand, show that the effectiveness of decent work depends less on normative enunciation and more on the interaction between local policies, strong institutions, and participatory practices (Alsop, Bertelsen & Holland, 2006; Ahn & Ahn, 2012; Quiroz-Niño & Blanco-Encomienda, 2019). This finding reaffirms the importance of understanding decent work as a relational and situated construction, consolidated through multi-stakeholder social dialogue and international cooperation, transcending merely statistical analysis towards a critical and transformative interpretation of the link between work and social justice.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The corpus analyzed included studies from Latin America, Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and the Middle East, which allowed us to identify global trends and, at the same time, evidence asymmetries in epistemic representation, editorial visibility, and international cooperation. The results confirm the existence of a solid conceptual and empirical body on decent work and social justice, based on its four pillars: employment, labour rights, social protection and social dialogue. Methodological advances were observed in context-sensitive indicators, policies with an equity approach, and case studies with practices and challenges. However, disagreements persist in the operationalization of the concept, especially around the subjective dimensions of work, gender equity, and the institutional sustainability of labor policies.

Despite the contributions identified, the review has structural limitations. A concentration of scientific production in countries of the Global North (Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States) predominates, while regions of the Global South—although represented—continue to face structural barriers to positioning their experiences. Likewise, methodological gaps are detected such as the scarce integration of intersectional approaches, the lack of harmonization between quantitative and qualitative methods, and the low comparative replicability of case studies. The reviewed public policies show uneven progress and implementation challenges, particularly in environments with high informality or institutional weakness.

From a practical and theoretical perspective, the findings of this review highlight the need to promote an intersectoral, participatory and rights-based approach to guarantee decent and sustainable working conditions. At the academic level, it is proposed to move towards models that combine objective and subjective dimensions of employment, integrating aspects such as psychological well-being, social recognition and autonomy. Likewise, the potential of decent work as an articulating framework between social justice, environmental sustainability and just transition is highlighted.

Based on the results obtained in the systematic review, the main global challenges of decent work and social justice focus on overcoming structural inequalities, normative and methodological gaps, and contextual barriers that hinder the effective implementation of labor policies with a rights-based approach. The need to advance in context-sensitive indicators with an intersectional approach is evident; consolidate sustainable, participatory public policies consistent with the principles of equity; and strengthening labor institutions in environments

marked by informality and precariousness. In addition, greater integration of the subjective dimensions of work – such as emotional well-being, autonomy and recognition – is required, as well as a structural response to the impacts of digitalisation, platform work and the care economy. These challenges invite us to rethink decent work not only as a normative goal, but as a social, ethical and political construction capable of articulating social justice, sustainability and just transition at the global level.

Finally, although the methodology applied guaranteed a rigorous and systematic review of the literature indexed in Scopus and ScienceDirect, this could have excluded valuable contributions present in other repositories or in languages other than English, Spanish or Portuguese. Therefore, the following lines of future research are proposed: (1) to develop more integrative measurement models, sensitive to gender, informality and territorial diversity; (2) expand the longitudinal analysis of public policies in regions of the Global South; and (3) explore new emerging dimensions of decent work, such as digital transformation, the care economy and ecological sustainability.

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