

# CRISES OF INEQUALITY

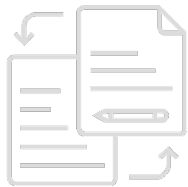
## Shifting Power for a New Eco-Social Contract

- Chapter 1

### **Overcoming Inequalities in Times of Crisis: Toward a New Eco-Social Contract – Introduction and Overview**

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The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) is an autonomous research institute within the United Nations system that undertakes interdisciplinary research and policy analysis on the social dimensions of contemporary development issues. Through our work, we aim to ensure that social equity, inclusion and justice are central to development thinking, policy and practice.

## Abstract

The world has entered the decade of action of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in a state of fracture, confronted with severe crises and unraveling social contracts. The failure of the global economic model to account for the natural boundaries of the planet has led to environmental destruction and human precarity. And despite considerable advances in human development for more than half a century, progress has been uneven and volatile, while past gains have been partially reversed as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. Inequality has been both a root cause and an amplifier of multiple crises—economic, social, political and ecological. The age of neoliberal globalization and related policy choices are at the heart of the present challenges, having prepared the way for the current model of unsustainable hyperglobalization, which creates an inescapable gravity toward inequality and crises. Deep fractures run through our societies and economies, manifesting in inequalities, social exclusion, polarization and conflict. The set of aspirations, norms and institutions commonly referred to as the social contract have been hollowed out by market fundamentalism and increasingly fail both people and the planet. Key global trends, presenting both opportunities and challenges, have shaped inequalities and challenged social contracts over the last decades: neoliberal globalization, technological change, migration, ageing, urbanization and shifting global power structures. To overcome inequalities, address multiple crises and harness the opportunities of a changing global context, we need a new eco-social contract that unites people in the fight for social and environmental justice and sustainable development.

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# 1 Overcoming Inequalities in Times of Crisis: Why We Need a New Eco-Social Contract

## 1.1 Entering the decade of action: A challenging context for achieving the SDGs

The Covid-19 pandemic is without a doubt the crisis that has defined this century. The period has been marked by severe economic downturn, extensive loss of life, the rolling back of many human development indicators and an overall increase in poverty. Yet, at the same time, it has also brought significant gains for a very small group of people, as wealth concentration at the top has intensified since the pandemic began. The juxtaposition of an extreme increase in human suffering alongside an extreme increase in profit and privilege is not only deeply troubling but is also indicative of the way in which the current world order is bent toward injustice. With a central focus on inequality, this report starts from the premise that a system in which a global health crisis can double the wealth of the 10 richest men in the world (Oxfam 2022) while sending more than 120 million people into extreme poverty (UN 2021) signals a broken social contract, leaving behind far too many people and failing to protect our planet.

In 2015, the international development community agreed on an ambitious agenda to “transform our world,” with an unprecedented broad and transformative development vision enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN 2015). This report comes seven years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with only eight years remaining, yet the context for achieving it has never been more daunting. It is a context marked by disparate progress in reducing poverty; high and rising levels of wealth and income inequality; the persistence of other multidimensional inequalities, including gendered forms; climate change and environmental destruction; insecurity and conflict; migration; precarious work; as well as accelerating demographic and technological change—all of which challenge the capacity of policy makers to steer the course of development to the benefit of all people and our planet.

The current sense of crisis and insecurity contrasts with a picture of considerable development gains throughout the world since the second half of the twentieth century, including expansion in human development for the majority of the earth’s people, reduced poverty, greater longevity, advances in gender equality, progress in reducing various forms of discrimination, enhanced capabilities and widespread access to technology, for example (UN DESA 2017; UNDP 2019). The reasons for the sense of crisis and insecurity are threefold: for one, development has been skewed, not benefiting all equally and even pushing some further behind. Second, the world has become more volatile and unpredictable for many (as will be explored in chapter 2), confronting people with new risks and shocks, including economic, health and environmental ones that threaten lives and livelihoods. Thirdly, some challenges such as climate change and environmental destruction have evolved in parallel, or even as a consequence of, socioeconomic progress, without prompting the necessary political will and policy responses needed to address them.

The unprecedented concentration of wealth and income among individuals, groups and corporations is a defining feature of the present moment (Credit Suisse 2021; Oxfam 2018), one marked by interconnected and compounding crises which can be understood as endogenous to the current economic system (chapter 2). In the past three decades, the top 1 percent of humanity has captured nearly 20 times the amount of wealth as the bottom 50 percent (Oxfam 2022). The share of global income earned by workers has declined from 53.7 percent in 2004 to 51.4 percent in 2017, while the share of capital income has increased from 46.3 percent to 48.6 percent (ILO 2019). This wealth

and income concentration at the top is both a result and a driver of elite power. Elite capture of political processes and institutions is halting possibilities for change at every turn (Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012; Lupu and Warner 2022), while multinational companies are further concentrating wealth and power, often aided by rapidly evolving technology that creates new divides both within and between countries (UNCTAD 2020). On the other side of the spectrum, countervailing powers such as trade unions and the extent to which they can engage in centralized collective bargaining have been weakened as a result of unemployment, informalization, privatization and the rise of non-standard forms of work (Gernigon et al. 2000).

As inequality continues to increase within and among countries as a result of neoliberal policies and recent crises, vulnerable groups are being especially hard hit (Hujo and Carter 2019; Oxfam 2021; see chapter 3). Race, ethnicity, caste, citizenship status, gender identity, sexual orientation, age and a number of other factors continue to play a crucial role in determining people's capabilities and social outcomes. For example, young workers, those aged between 15 and 24, are twice as likely to live in extreme poverty than adult workers and rural areas are home to 85 percent of people without access to electricity, which impacts outcomes related to education, health and prosperity (UN 2021).

Meanwhile, national politics in several countries have swung toward nationalism, isolationism and xenophobia, pitting nations, ethnicities and religions against each other. Political extremism, in particular right-wing extremism, has taken hold across the globe, gaining prominent footholds in political institutions and spearheading a backlash against egalitarian and human rights discourses and movements (Radačić and Facio 2020; Roggeband and Krizsán 2020; see chapter 2). Such trends are setting back gains in gender equality, racial justice and LGBTIQ+ rights to name a few and even inciting renewed violence and discrimination toward marginalized groups.

A chronic gap in public finance, aggravated by the cyclical recurrence of austerity policies in response to crises, are undermining already fragmented and insufficient social protection systems and public provision, mainly as a result of privatization, commercialization or cost-saving measures in health, education or social protection schemes. This retrenchment of the state and public expenditure leaves more and more people vulnerable to the ravages of markets and life course risks (Hujo 2020; Ortiz et al. 2020).

The climate crisis and biodiversity loss are destroying ecosystems, changing the face of our planet (Dasgupta 2021; IPCC 2021, 2018; UNDP 2020), rendering it ever more inhospitable, destroying homes and lives, and disproportionately affecting those already living at the margins. The period 2010–2019 was the warmest decade on record, bringing with it destructive wildfires, hurricanes, droughts and other climate-related disasters, increasing poverty and hunger (UN DESA 2020a) and displacing millions, with 2020 seeing 30.7 million new displacements due to disasters (IDMC 2021). According to the Emission Gap Report (UNEP 2020) the world is still heading for a steep temperature rise in excess of 3°C this century, far beyond the Paris Agreement goals of limiting global warming to well below 2°C and pursuing 1.5°C. Responsibility for emissions is highly skewed: the world's richest 1 percent emit more than twice as much CO<sub>2</sub> as the poorest 50 percent of the world's population (Oxfam 2022). Economic incentives at all levels—global, country, firm and individual—are focused on extracting maximum value from economic processes rather than investing in strengthening systems that are resilient and sustainable in economic and social terms.

Unsustainable consumption and production patterns, mainly driven by a small group of industrialized countries, have led to a depletion of natural resources, pollution and environmental deterioration (UN 2021). Research shows that deforestation and threats to biodiversity associated with the dominance of supply chain production increase the likelihood of future epidemics (Sachs et al. 2020). According to the Dasgupta Review (Dasgupta 2021), global assets have not been managed sustainably. Estimates show that between 1992 and 2014, produced capital per person doubled

and human capital per person increased by about 13 percent globally, but the stock of natural capital per person declined by nearly 40 percent. Such growth, which furthermore was unevenly distributed across countries and people, has come at a devastating cost to nature and to the opportunities for future generations. The report estimates that the resources of 1.6 earths would be required to maintain the world's current living standards (Dasgupta 2021).

The Covid-19 pandemic has added to this list of troubles, exacerbating the corrosive effects of the current system and the inequality it has wrought (Oxfam 2021, 2022). For the first time since the 1990s, absolute poverty rates are on the rise and the impacts of Covid-19 are expected to set back progress toward ending extreme poverty by at least three years. In 2020, Covid-19 pushed up to 124 million more people into extreme poverty (UN 2021). The number of persons suffering from hunger and food insecurity is also on the rise, a process that started before the outbreak of the pandemic, driven by agrarian stagnation and the fallout of the financial, energy and food crises of 2007/2008, and is now accelerating. Almost 690 million people were undernourished in 2019, up by nearly 60 million from 2014. About two billion people were affected by moderate or severe food insecurity in 2019, and the estimated figure for chronic hunger in 2020 rose by more than 130 million people as a result of Covid-19 (FAO et al. 2020).

The result of these multiple challenges is a world in a state of fracture, and at the heart of it is inequality. Inequality describes a relationship between the haves and the have-nots, the included and the excluded. It manifests vertically (inequality among individuals), as the gap between the rich and the rest grows wider every day, as well as horizontally (inequality among groups), as people's capabilities and life chances are deeply affected by characteristics such as gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, citizenship status, race, ethnicity and much more (Stewart 2013, 2016). There is also a third way in which inequality operates, and that is at the intersection of vertical and horizontal inequality: poverty continues to be the greatest obstacle to people's participation, well-being and enjoyment of rights and exacerbates other forms of disadvantage (UNRISD 2010).

Unequal power relations, driven by economic dominance, lead to different types of exclusion: unequal power is manifested in the home, the community, the workplace and national and international governance, underpinned by social norms that attach value and visibility to some groups and activities while devaluing others and rendering them invisible (Fraser 2016; Mazzucato 2017; Razavi 2007). The impact of increasing inequalities tends to negatively affect those who are already marginalized or discriminated against, particularly children and women living in poverty, people with disabilities, older persons, refugees and migrants, Indigenous peoples and people in other minority groups.

These cleavages have eroded social cohesion, citizenship practices and trust in public institutions, leaving deep fault lines that manifest economically, politically, socially and spatially. Consequently, many governments lack the will or capacity to foster inclusive development and to protect the well-being and rights of their citizens, while some turn toward exclusionary policies and "othering" to consolidate their political base, resulting in divisive political polarization (Roman-Alcalá 2022). As the power of economic and political elites grows and societal gaps widen, institutions representing the public good and universal values are increasingly disempowered or co-opted, and visions of social justice and equity are sidelined. This reality contrasts with the vision of a social contract that considers all persons as equals, holds decision makers and individuals to account for respecting an agreed social order and promotes social justice (see box 1.1).

**Box 1.1. The social contract: The origins of the idea**

The social contract idea goes back to fundamental questions of political philosophy, reflected among others in Islamic, African and Indigenous communitarian thinking. It is, however, most often associated with post-war European welfare states as well as Enlightenment philosophy as represented by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, deliberating about political authority, state legitimacy and social order. The moral and political obligations that free individuals accept voluntarily among themselves and vis-à-vis their government in order to escape the state of nature were described as a social contract. An influential contemporary representative is John Rawls, arguing in his *Theory of Justice* (1971) that citizens who, under a “veil of ignorance,” do not know about their position in society would agree to basic standards of freedom and equality to guarantee a level playing field for all. Scholars distinguish between the social or rights-based variant of social contract theory associated with Rousseau and Rawls, and liberal or interest-based contracts going back to Hobbes and Locke (Hickey 2011), with the former moving beyond concerns of creating social order toward actively promoting social justice. Real-world social contracts rarely lived up to theoretical or normative standards (see chapter 4), for example, by excluding large parts of the population (such as women, slaves or persons without property) from decision-making processes shaping social contracts or failing to grant equal rights and opportunities.

Source: UNRISD 2021; chapter 4.

**1.2 Inequality: Why and when is it a problem?**

Empirical evidence shows that inequality along all dimensions is highly detrimental for our societies and economies, undermining economic development, well-being and health, democracy and participation, as well as social, environmental and economic sustainability (see, for example, Berg and Ostry 2011; Chancel 2017; Dorling 2019; Mounk 2018; Stiglitz 2012; Therborn 2013; UNDP 2019; UNRISD 2010; Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). The Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated that the combination of inequality and a pandemic has deadly consequences beyond those of the virus itself (Oxfam 2022; Spotlight by Winnie Byanyima). A highly unequal world is ill-prepared to address a global health crisis efficiently and equitably, amplifying divides and leaving it unable to contain the disease and to shield the most vulnerable from its adverse impacts.

Whether societies consider inequality to be a problem depends not only on the level, type and evolution of inequality but also on other factors, for example, to what extent prevailing ideologies and social norms legitimize differences or whether the distribution of opportunities is seen as fair, allowing for social mobility (Kwame Sundaram and Popov 2022). It is often claimed that ensuring equality in opportunity is more feasible and legitimate than equality of outcome (World Bank 2006). Addressing inequality of opportunity tends to be the preferred approach of liberal or libertarian political forces, who shy away from greater income distribution activities by the state (see box 1.2). However, achieving equality of opportunity in practice is difficult given historic injustices leading to and compounding differences in opportunities afforded by one’s place of birth, individual and family-related assets, and endowments or social networks. Therefore, in order to guarantee a dignified life for all and in line with human rights conventions, the state is supposed to assume responsibilities to ensure a basic level of social outcomes by guaranteeing a minimum income or a social protection floor for all, alongside investments that level the playing field, for example, in public health, education and other basic services.

Some inequality in outcomes can be considered unavoidable due to variations in ability, talent, initiative and fortune, which make them compatible with prevailing notions of justice. However, current inequalities and disparities enjoy little such legitimacy (Kwame Sundaram and Popov 2022). At least three factors indicate when inequalities become an issue of economic and social justice and fairness (Hujo and Carter 2022):<sup>1</sup> first, when inequality is the result of discrimination and systematic

<sup>1</sup> As the UK Commission on Social Justice established as one of its principles: Not all inequalities are unjust, but unjust inequalities should be reduced and where possible eliminated (Commission on Social Justice 1993:16).

disadvantage such as fewer opportunities, lack of access to essential services, basic living standards, decent work or meaningful participation in public life, which often relates to group-based inequalities that are based on historical injustices; second, when inequalities are growing at rapid rates, leading to power concentration on the one hand and disempowerment on the other, creating multiple fractures and biases in our political and economic systems that undermine societal progress; and third, when social discontent and perceptions of unfairness are expressed in mounting (violent) protest, political radicalization and “othering” (see Ortiz et al. 2022; Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies 2021; Roman-Alcalá 2022), which erodes social cohesion, solidarity and democracy.

### Box 1.2. Approaching inequality from a justice perspective

Approaching inequality from a justice perspective requires some considerations about key concepts and questions in the debate, for example, what the difference is between justice, fairness, equality and equity; what can be considered a just society, just institutions or procedures; and how they can be advanced. Inequality can be related to a range of root causes and is not per se associated with injustice. It can turn into a justice issue under certain conditions, for example, when it deprives persons of basic capabilities and life chances.

While fairness implies equal and impartial treatment of every person without bias, justice approaches can imply unequal treatment in line with agreed rules and moral standards, for example, policies for elderly or disabled persons to enhance their capabilities, or affirmative action to enhance gender or racial justice. Equity is often used as a synonym for justice or fairness. There is a certain ambiguity between the terms justice, equity and fairness, as definitions vary and overlap, in particular in daily use (Biermann and Kalfagianni 2020). In popular discourse, fairness is often used when referring to subjective perceptions, whether a person considers an action toward herself or others or an outcome as fair. It is an imagining of what is considered just (the term is often used in opinion surveys), not necessarily tied to a predefined theoretical approach, legal framework or institutional accountability mechanism. Promoting justice or addressing injustice, in contrast, requires some previous public reasoning and formulation of what exactly is considered just or unjust, so that public institutions can administer conflicting claims and assign rewards and punishments. Justice has multiple dimensions and can be understood as distributive justice (a fair share for everyone), procedural justice (unbiased processes) and restorative justice (healing wounds and repairing harm done).

Notions of justice vary according to different ideologies and world views. It is important to be transparent about the normative foundations that underpin public policies in different contexts. This is even more necessary when existing social contracts are contested and new ones are proposed, which might be based on different value concepts (chapter 4). Among different theoretical approaches, four justice concepts have received particular attention (Biermann and Kalfagianni 2020). **Liberal egalitarianism** is grounded in a notion of justice as fairness (Rawls 1971) in the sense that all citizens are treated equally by the state in terms of rights and duties and enjoy equal opportunities to live the life of their choice regardless of original position and status. It implies that the most disadvantaged should be supported through public welfare institutions. This approach is extended from the national level to the global level in **cosmopolitan theories**, where the justice question is how to fairly distribute benefits and costs in a globalized world (Beitz 2005). Mechanisms to advance global justice are global institutions and policies for redistribution such as international taxation (Pogge 1989). The **capabilities approach** (Sen 1992, 2009) evaluates institutions based on their impact on the capabilities people have to live a dignified life of their choice. It focuses on ends (capabilities) rather than on means (for example income), as people have different abilities to convert resources into achievements based on personal characteristics and context. The **libertarian approach** (Nozick 1974) sees differences in income and wealth as legitimate if gained by lawful activities. If this is the case, redistribution is considered unjust and the role of government should be limited to protecting liberty, private property and the enforcement of contracts. Finally, different strands associated with **critical theory** focus on human emancipation from structural injustices and oppression, for example, based on class, race or gender. Addressing structural injustices in this approach requires a multi-tiered strategy of strengthening recognition, representation and redistribution (the triple-R framework, now expanded to the 5-R framework adding reducing unpaid work and rewarding care workers, ILO 2018) to address injustices and promote the political agency of subaltern groups (Fraser 1998, 2008).

### 1.3 The objectives of the report

This report provides evidence on the unprecedented rise in economic inequalities and the entrenched nature and reproduction of social and political inequalities we have witnessed since the 1980s and how they have led to and been amplified by multiple crises in a vicious cycle. It explores the root causes of this development, which we argue are mainly related to policy choices supported by powerful elites, and provides examples of the societal consequences, from adverse impacts on social outcomes and the environment, to disparities in economic development, to discontent, protest and an unraveling of social contracts.

Inequality has been both a root cause and an amplifier of multiple crises—economic, social, political and ecological. To understand how we got to this moment, the report will analyse how the age of neoliberal globalization and related policy choices are at the heart of the present challenges, having paved the way for the current model of unsustainable hyperglobalization (see box 1.5), which creates an inescapable gravity toward inequality and crises. It reveals how deep fractures run through societies and economies, manifesting in inequalities, segregation and polarization, conflict and social exclusion, and what their root causes are; and it explores how social contracts can be reformed to overcome current challenges and protect people and the planet (box 1.1; chapters 4 and 5).

The report explores both vertical and horizontal inequalities and their intersections, as well as the power relations underpinning them. Through the lens of crises, the report combines structural analysis and case studies to expose the way in which inequalities and the policies and institutions (re-)producing them pose the greatest barriers to achieving a sustainable, inclusive and just future. It then explores ways to combat inequalities at different levels and through a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches. Taking an intersectional approach, the report will unpack cumulative disadvantage, using an intergenerational and life course perspective to connect past, present and future, and political economy analysis to shed light on power asymmetries and their consequences for equality and social justice outcomes (box 1.3; chapter 3).

#### **Box 1.3. Useful concepts: A multidimensional approach to inequality and power**

Responses to inequality need to address economic, social and political disadvantage and discrimination, which is deemed unjust and not compatible with norms of equity, human rights and social justice (see box 1.2). To understand the drivers and consequences of inequalities, we must pay specific attention to intersecting inequalities and their compounded effects. Vertical inequality ranks individuals according to their relative position in the income and wealth distribution, as measured, for example, by the Gini coefficient (see chapter 3). Horizontal inequality refers to social groups as a measure of differentiation (Stewart 2013), for example, along lines of age, gender, sex, ethnicity, race, religion, disability or geographical location, establishing patterns of exclusion and segmentation (Therborn 2010). In sociology and social sciences, both vertical inequality and horizontal inequalities are associated with class, status, power and hierarchy, emphasizing the relational character of inequalities (Bourdieu 1979; Foucault 1976; Spicker 2020; Weber 1922).

Income inequality and inequality related to group identity, when intersecting, reinforce each other (Crenshaw 1991; Kabeer 2014; Stewart 2013; UNRISD 2010). Poverty often exacerbates the structural violence and discrimination already suffered by individuals who belong to one or more marginalized categories. Overlapping privilege is the other side of the coin, allowing us to explore how a small minority, the top 1 percent or 0.1 percent of wealth owners and income earners, accumulate disproportionate levels of resources and power.

Further conceptual entry points are an intergenerational perspective that factors in demographic change and climate change (Malhotra and Kabeer 2002; Stewart 2020; UN 2002, 2003, 2013), and a life course approach showing that inequalities tend to increase over a person's life if no action is taken to reverse them (Cecchini et al. 2015; ISSA 2019; UN 2003). A political economy lens is applied for analysing processes of contestation and bargaining, focusing on key actors and relationships, power asymmetries, and institutions and norms that reproduce and reinforce inequalities (see for example Amable et al. 2019; Folbre 2020).

In terms of methodological approaches, the report combines an interdisciplinary problem analysis of the drivers and impacts of inequalities and crises with empirical case studies of positive examples of policies that have addressed inequalities and led to transformative outcomes, those that reflect structural and long-term improvements in economic, social, environmental and political domains (see box 1.4).

Building on the work of the 2016 UNRISD flagship report, which proposed an “eco-social turn” as a way forward, this report will take a closer look at how we might propel such a turn by building a new contract for social, economic and climate justice, an *eco-social contract*, bringing together all stakeholders and defining rights and obligations, promoting greater equality and solidarity, building crisis resilience, and ensuring legitimacy, credibility and buy-in for radical transformations. Inequality is not destiny but is largely the result of political and policy choices. Multiple examples exist showing that inequalities can be tackled if political will and citizen mobilization come together to promote transformative change.

By providing in-depth analysis of inequality in its various forms, policy recommendations supported by case studies, and principles and pathways for building a new eco-social contract—all drawing on empirical evidence and new conceptual thinking developed by UNRISD and its international network of scholars, activists and practitioners over the past years—this report makes a key contribution to the debate on how to address inequality, break the cycle of multiple and interlocking crises, and work toward a more equal, just and sustainable future.

The report explores ways to overcome inequality, address multiple crises and build a new eco-social contract by:

- analysing how inequalities drive economic, social, environmental and political crises and how inequalities are amplified as a result of crises, undermining resilience and threatening to undo past gains, as the Covid-19 pandemic revealed (chapter 2);
- unpacking intersecting inequalities, entrenched disadvantages related to economic and social inequalities, their impacts, and the asymmetric power structures and political inequalities that underpin them (chapter 3);
- scrutinizing varieties of social contracts as well as critical junctures when social contracts have been renegotiated, examining current stakeholder views in social contract debates and presenting principles for a new eco-social contract grounded in social and climate justice (chapter 4);
- suggesting a new eco-social paradigm for equality, equity and sustainability, building on three pillars—alternative economies, transformative social policies, and renewed multilateralism and solidarities—and promoting an integrated approach for social, climate and gender justice (chapter 5).

#### **Box 1.4. UNRISD’s definition of transformative change**

Transformative change involves changes in social and economic structures and relations, including overcoming patterns of stratification related to class, gender, ethnicity, religion or location that can lock people (including future generations) into disadvantage and constrain their choices and agency. It also means changing norms and institutions, both formal and informal, that shape the behaviour of people and organizations in the social, economic, environmental and political spheres. The achievement of desirable development outcomes through just, participatory and democratic processes is ultimately a political project, at the core of which lies power configurations at household, local, national, regional and global levels, which inevitably involve a contestation of ideas and interests between different groups and actors. Policy discourse that highlights the goal of transformation often ignores the deep-seated changes that are required in regulation, and in economic, social and power relations. Transformative change understood in this way is therefore a long-term process, requiring both individual agency and collective action by societies. Its means and results would include visible and measurable economic and political empowerment of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups; greater gender equality in all

spheres; more equal redistribution of income and wealth; active citizenship with greater agency of civil society organizations and social movements; changes in North–South power relations and global governance institutions; empowerment of small enterprises, rural producers and informal workers; and an alternative economic model that reverses the current hierarchies of norms and values that subordinate social and environmental goals to economic objectives of profit maximization and efficiency over equity and sustainability.

Source: UNRISD 2016: chapter 1.

The report has the following key messages:

- Our world is in a state of fracture, confronted with severe crises, increasing inequalities and unravelling social contracts. Now is the time to act to secure our future and co-construct a new eco-social contract that delivers for people and planet.
- Today’s extreme inequalities, environmental destruction and vulnerability to crisis are not a flaw in the system, but a feature of it. Only large-scale systemic change can resolve this dire situation.
- Inequality has been a driver, amplifier and consequence of multiple and overlapping crises—economic, social, political and ecological. The result is a vicious cycle which is disrupting the basis for human life on this planet and eroding prospects for a dignified and peaceful life for all. Vulnerable and marginalized groups, who face multiple intersecting inequalities, are worst affected, falling further behind. Elites can largely shield themselves from adverse impacts of crises and often even exploit crises for their own gain.
- We can create pathways toward a new eco-social contract based on a vision of justice, equality and sustainability. To do this, we need a new development model with three key pillars: alternative economic approaches that centre environmental and social justice and rebalance state–market–society–nature relations; transformative social policies based on a fair fiscal compact; and reimagined multilateralism and strengthened solidarities.
- Those in power work to preserve and perpetuate a system that benefits the few at the expense of the many. Only if we rebalance existing power structures and create new alliances can we achieve transformative change. Progressive political leaders, inclusive coalitions, active citizens and social movements need to come together to co-create a new eco-social contract for climate and social justice.

## **2 Long-Term Development Trends: Opportunities, Challenges and Implications for Inequality**

This report explores inequality in times of crisis, understanding the various crises facing humanity and the planet and the inequalities they compound not as separate and distinct but as deeply interlinked and constitutive of and constituted by a crisis of the system, one that we have been building toward for decades. This moment of crisis has not arrived in a vacuum but has emerged in the wake of various trends that on the one hand have presented opportunities for human progress in terms of growth, poverty reduction and well-being, and on the other have in many cases produced highly unequal outcomes within and between countries and with regard to different social groups, as well as new risks and profound environmental impacts. This report argues that this outcome is partly due to how long-term trends were shaped by policy approaches associated with the neoliberal shift that swept the globe in the early 1980s, which created a context and vicious cycle of rising inequalities, instability and crisis. In this process, benefits were distributed unequally, while costs

were offloaded onto subaltern groups, global South countries and the environment, hollowing out social contracts and destroying the global commons.

We therefore understand these problems as inevitable outcomes of a system in which profit is exploited and extracted from every possible source until it is used up and then discarded, and all that does not create economic value is deemed not worth protecting and upholding. This is the reigning logic of the current economic model that has elevated profit making and individual gain over people and planet. This economic system has not only resulted in increasing inequalities, it has also fueled multiple crises—from economic and financial, to climate and environmental, care, political and finally Covid-19. The pandemic combined many features of the other crisis types and is the most recent example of the fragility, inherent risks and lack of resilience of our global system (see chapter 2).

In this section we will focus on selected long-term trends we deem particularly relevant for understanding the current context: globalization, technological progress, demographic change—such as ageing, migration and urbanization—and shifting global power structures. Each of these trends has evolved over decades, influencing economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development across the globe. Each applies across boundaries and societal limits and will persist over time, evolving as it builds upon itself and interacts with the other trends as well as other changes in societies in complex ways (UN 2020). Identifying key development trends is important as they indicate processes of change relevant for citizens, workers and business actors and to which policy makers must respond in order to steer them toward desired outcomes, minimizing potentially negative effects. Long-term trends and crises are not inevitable natural facts or agentless processes but are actively shaped by different actors and their interests. Long-term trends bear the seeds of both challenges and solutions; they are interlinked and can reinforce each other or lead to mitigation of certain effects.

## **2.1 Globalization**

Globalization, global integration fueled by technological innovation and based on free-market policies, and dominated by profit-maximizing private corporations, has shaped the global economy over the last four decades, making it more unequal and unstable. It has profoundly influenced social relations and institutions that constituted the bedrock of the post-war welfare state model and its associated social contract, both in global North and global South countries. The different crises we analyse in more depth in chapter 2, from the climate and care crises to Covid-19, are in one way or another connected to how globalization in the neoliberal era has shaped economies and societies.

Globalization in its narrow definition comprises reductions in restrictions on trade and finance leading to growing trade integration and global financial flows and is often praised for its positive development impacts in terms of greater efficiency, productivity, growth and poverty reduction (Dollar and Kraay 2002; Ortiz-Ospina 2017). Indeed, the accelerated integration of global trade coincided with a phase of catching up of developing countries while the Western world lost its manufacturing monopoly (Subramanian and Kessler 2013); millions of people managed to emerge from poverty; key social indicators such as life expectancy, infant mortality and access to primary education improved; and a growing number of people gained access to a wide range of consumption goods, technology, international transport and improved medication and vaccines. Several former authoritarian and socialist countries democratized, and many people gained larger freedoms and protection of their human rights, access to information and political participation. These change processes have led to an ever more interconnected world and increases in cross-national flows of information, goods, capital and people (Independent Group 2019). However, migration flows have

not increased to the same extent as trade and finance in the contemporary globalization period. Whereas migration was an important feature of the first wave of globalization, starting around 1820 and lasting for almost a century until the First World War, the current period does not allow the free movement of people to the same extent as the movement of goods and capital, in particular for low-skilled workers from low-income countries (see section 2.4; Quiggin 2005). Indeed, restrictions on migration increased over this period.

As with the other trends analysed in this section, long-term processes of change such as globalization create winners and losers, but benefits tend to be harnessed more easily by powerful players, which in turn tend to shape the rules of the game to their advantage (UNRISD 1995; chapter 3). As market distribution becomes more unequal, policies are less effective in producing egalitarian outcomes. Outcomes of the most recent period of globalization have been highly unequal in the distribution of profits, costs and risks, due to market outcomes and the policies and institutions chosen to govern globalization. In addition, when talking about the positive development impact of globalization where it occurred, it should be noted that much of the groundwork for success was in fact laid during the developmentalist-welfarist post-war era that preceded the neoliberal era. This period was characterized by development strategies focusing on full employment and social protection, increased fiscal capacity and a shift toward mass consumption in the global North and considerable state investments in social services and social security by post-independence governments in the global South (see chapter 4).

While neoliberal globalization is associated with increasing inequalities and economic instability, it is important to acknowledge that it has led to different outcomes for countries, sectors and individuals. Particular outcomes are associated with specific policies, institutions, behaviours and initial conditions. Neglecting the specific context and history of a country or region when analysing the impact of globalization on development can lead to erroneous conclusions.<sup>2</sup> Most importantly, globalization has led to shifts in power relations, with more power accruing to creditor countries, financial actors and international financial institutions (IFIs), large multinational companies (MNCs), capital owners and some high-skilled professional groups, to the detriment of most debtor and aid-dependent countries, unskilled workers in the formal sector and informal workers as well as vulnerable groups relying on state and solidarity mechanisms (UNRISD 1995). Figure 1.1 shows, for example, how intensifying globalization has gone hand in hand with a declining labour share in output, only temporarily reversed during the financial crisis of 2008-2009, as wages tend to fall slower than profits during a recession. As explored in greater detail in chapter 2, these negative results can be associated with the neoliberal turn in economic and social policies and the concentration of elite power (see chapter 3), as well as some of the other trends discussed in this section such as demographic and technological change, in combination with job outsourcing, loss of union power and labour market deregulation, deindustrialization, and regressive tax and social policy reforms that have resulted in rising inequalities and insecurity.

In much of the global South, globalization is associated with the triad of **Washington consensus** policy advice (Williamson 1990) of liberalization, privatization and deregulation. These policy conditionalities were imposed on debtor countries and aid recipients in the aftermath of the sovereign debt crises of the early 1980s and resulted in increased macroeconomic instability, reduced policy space and a stalled developmental project, retrenchment of the state and dismantling of public services, which weakened solidarity structures and protective and redistributive institutions. Indeed, social contracts did not simply fall victim to an agentless globalization process but were actively dismantled by neoliberal reforms (Meagher 2022).

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the contested interpretation of the Asian miracle as being the result of market-liberal approaches and low investment in social policies. See Kwame Sundaram and Popov 2022; Yi and Mkandawire 2014.

Growth has been uneven among countries and over time (Kwame Sundaram and Popov 2022), with a few large developing countries such as China sustaining high growth over several decades contributing to overall North–South convergence (Honer and Hulme 2019; Nayyar 2013; see chapter 3). Disparities within the South continued to grow as much of the rest of the world was left behind or unable to sustain growth beyond brief spurts (Popov and Kwame Sundaram 2017). Especially sub-Saharan Africa, but also much of Latin America as well as Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (FSU), have not been catching up since the 1970s. Others have fallen further behind, especially much of Africa during the last two decades of the twentieth century, Latin America during the 1980s (Ocampo et al. 2007) and the FSU in the 1990s.

One key characteristic of globalization is the growth of **global value chains (GVCs)**. GVCs locate the different stages of the production process, including design, production, marketing and distribution, across different countries. Connecting local producers in manufacturing or agriculture with GVCs has been promoted as an opportunity for farmers and workers in the global South to benefit from world markets. However, this has also resulted in exposure to risks and volatility that local communities, workers and small producers have not experienced before when operating in less connected but also more sustainable systems (chapters 2 and 3). GVCs are dominated by powerful MNCs, some of which have built their dominant market position on the invention and application of new technologies, holding dominant positions in national economies in terms of shares of GDP, trade, research and development, and employee compensation (for example, companies such as Google and Amazon in the United States) but also generating a significant share of their revenues from abroad. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2018a) estimates that MNCs account for half of global exports, nearly a third of world GDP (28 percent) and about a fourth of global employment. Much of the increase in international trade associated with globalization is therefore better recognized as intra-firm trade (Huwart and Verdier 2013).

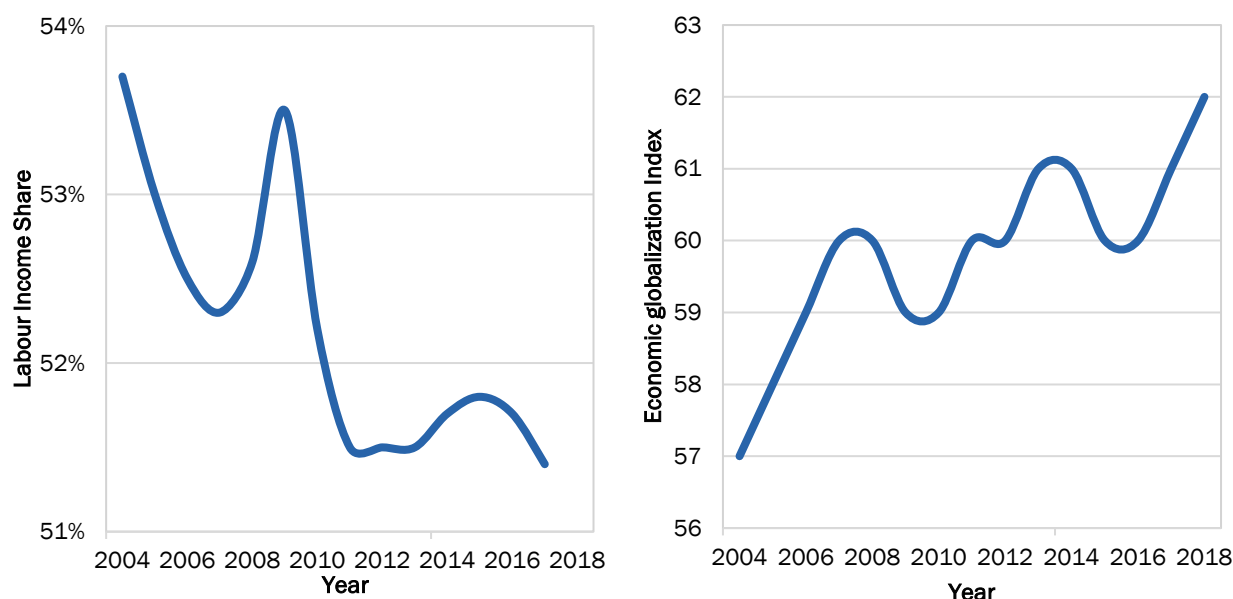
Another feature of the post-industrialist global economy, **financialization**, introduced a new logic into global markets (Epstein 2005; Hujo and Lupo 2022), with huge implications for accumulation and investment, value creation and distribution along GVCs as well as distribution of risks and rewards between business and state actors (Mazzucato 2018). This catalyzed income and wealth concentration and further undermined solidarity relations, ecological sustainability and employment creation. Financialization as a key driver of hyperglobalization (box 1.5), the most recent phase of globalization, describes the growing influence of the financial sector on the real economy (Gowan 2009) and is closely associated with the rise in economic inequality and crises with which this report is concerned (chapter 2 and 3). Defined as a process where financial motives, markets, actors and institutions are increasingly important in the functioning of modern-day economies, financialization can increase inequalities through the shareholder value orientation of companies and a rising demand for financial professionals, while strong labour institutions that strengthen labour rights at company and national levels can effectively mitigate these effects, as research on post-industrial democracies has shown (Huber et al. 2020).

#### Box 1.5. Hyperglobalization

Hyperglobalization is characterized by the dominance of private finance and large corporations engaging in rent-seeking activities, and an ideology motivated by neoliberalism, leading to rising inequalities, extreme levels of debt, heightened insecurity and stalling levels of investment and structural change (UNCTAD 2020). The origins of this process go back to two events in particular: the OECD's decision in 1989 to remove all restrictions on cross-border financial flows, and the establishment in 1995, after almost a decade of negotiations, of the World Trade Organization (WTO), with wide-ranging implications for domestic health and safety rules, subsidies and industrial policies (Rodrik 2016). A key feature of the hyperglobalization period taking off in the mid-1980s has been a significant expansion and acceleration of global trade, driven largely by East Asia and Southeast Asia, in particular China, and an associated expansion of global value chains (GVCs). This process has negatively affected national income distribution in various countries, not least because large transnational corporations capture the highest share of value produced within GVCs (UNCTAD 2018a).

Problems associated with globalization, which regularly provoke protests by antiglobalization and alterglobalization movements in different places in the world (see chapter 2), have intensified in recent years for a couple of reasons. For one, global financial and economic crises such as the 2008 crisis and the recent Covid-19 pandemic, both closely associated with globalization and its main characteristics, have shaken the world economy, undermining economic and social progress while exposing governance and policy failures at global and national levels. Second, and partly as a result of these crises and the unequal distribution of the costs of neoliberal globalization, social tensions are rising and a marked shift toward greater protectionism and nationalist policies, including more restrictive migration policies, is taking place promoted by large, industrialized countries, which could further undermine development opportunities for the global South. Third, the Covid-19 pandemic itself, with its significant impacts on international mobility (tourism and so forth), migration and GVCs, could mark the start of a potential period of deglobalization or “slowgalization,” as efforts of national governments to reshore production of essential goods into national economies or to decrease dependencies on politically less aligned countries seem to indicate. In this context, the most recent geopolitical tensions around the Russia–Ukraine war are likely to have severe implications for the future of globalization (Wong and Swanson 2022), while the consequences for individual countries and economic sectors remain uncertain.

Figure 1.1: Economic globalization and labour income share



Source: Gygli et al. 2019. ILO modelled estimates and projections (ILOEST), Labour incomes share as a percent of GDP – ILO modelled estimates, July 2019 (%) Annual. Accessed 13 October 2021.

Notes: **Globalization index**– the KOF Globalization index is a composite index measuring globalization for every country in the world. In particular this figure uses Economic Globalization, de facto (index KOFECGldf) which combines variables of trade (trade in goods, trade in services, trade partner diversification) and financial globalization (foreign direct investment, portfolio investment, international debt, international reserves, international income payments).; **Labour income share**–Labour income is the amount employed people earn by working and includes the wages of workers and part of the income of the self-employed.

## 2.2 Technological change

Technological change, the invention, innovation and diffusion of technologies or processes, is a key driver of economic development, and the belief in steady technological progress and associated welfare gains is at the heart of current growth models (Stewart 2020). Technological innovation and diffusion are also key elements of green economy approaches, policy proposals aiming to reduce the

environmental and climate impact of contemporary market economies (chapter 5). Technologies are seen as key means of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (SDG 17), with positive contributions across all goals (Earth Institute and Ericsson 2016), for example for realizing goals related to hunger through agricultural improvements, health service innovations, digitalization of education services or decentralized renewable energy (Earth Institute and Ericsson 2016; Herweijer 2019). Access to technologies, determined by intellectual property rights and the ability to purchase and operate them, has direct benefits for consumers, producers, and administrators and service providers, for example, through better connectivity, which can have positive impacts on opportunities and social capital; through health and pharmaceutical innovations improving well-being; and through increasing productivity of businesses and efficiency in administrative processes.

Technological change, with its social, political, cultural and economic implications, has impacts on current social contracts. The rise of the gig economy has prompted business actors to demand more flexibility and a new division of labour between states and markets (see chapter 4), while governments and private service providers are increasingly promoting digital services in their quest for greater efficiency and cost reduction. Indeed, the development of information and communication technology (ICT) is a key feature of the shift toward globalized post-industrial societies, also called the network society (Castells 1996), and has been associated with the accelerated pace in global trade and financial markets (Rodrik 2011; UNCTAD 2018a). The current era, characterized by a fourth industrial revolution defined as rapid advancements in new technologies and global connectivity, has not only changed the world of work and production but is also having an immense impact on how people relate to each other, communicate, and consume and process information. UNRISD (2016) has argued that technological innovation has the potential to provide synergies with social innovation, for example, through facilitating the delivery of social benefits or the communication among social network actors. However, we also argued that combinations of social and technological innovations were necessary to address some of the limitations of development strategies that centre on technological fixes and often disregard the social and political contexts where diffusion occurs.

ICT has experienced the fastest global diffusion of any technology in history: the time taken for people to adopt ICT-based applications such as mobile phones, computers, the Internet and social media has overtaken that for any previous technology (Earth Institute and Ericsson 2016), although fewer people have access to these technologies in developing and least-developed countries compared with developed countries (figure 1.2). While diffusion of new technologies can accelerate catch-up development and allow leapfrogging, for example, through adoption of technologies for renewable energy or technologies that are more resource efficient and less polluting, it also creates new disparities between capital and labour and between countries: access to technological knowledge and associated rents (for example, rents associated with intellectual property rights) shapes global profit distribution at firm, national and global levels, mainly benefiting large MNCs and a few countries operating at the frontier of technological innovation (Bourguignon 2017; chapter 3).

Digitalization and automation are expected to create positive dividends for growth, jobs and service delivery (World Bank 2016). Countries in the global South have outpaced global North regions in terms of growth rates of trade in exports of digitally deliverable services (UNCTAD 2021), in particular between 2005 and 2010. However, job losses and rising inequalities associated with digitalization and automation in the shorter term are acknowledged as well as risks such as market concentration and increased state control over citizens (World Bank 2016). This concern is echoed by UNCTAD:

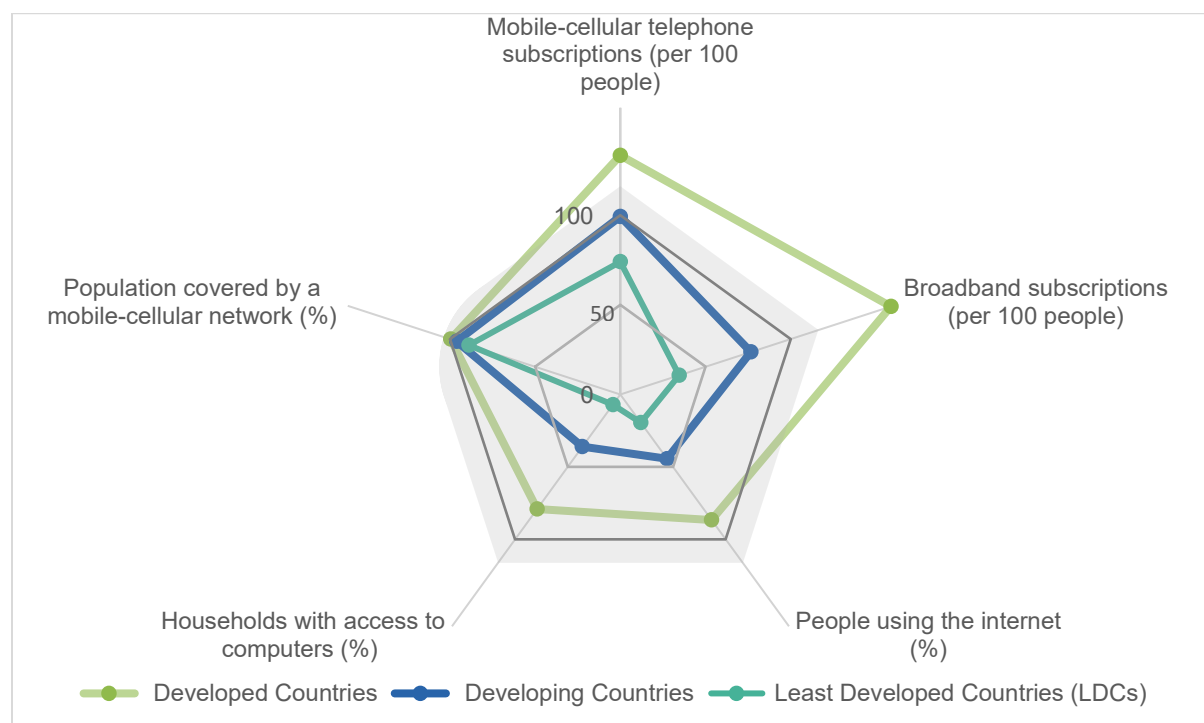
Recent developments in frontier technologies, including artificial intelligence, robotics and biotechnology, have shown tremendous potential for sustainable development. Yet, they also risk increasing inequalities by exacerbating and creating new digital divides between the

technology haves and have-nots. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed this dichotomy. Technology has been a critical tool for addressing the spread of the disease, but not everyone has equal access to the benefits. (UNCTAD 2021).

In addition, digitalization and automation facilitate reshoring entire productions back to OECD countries, which in the past were dependent on low labour costs in Asia or elsewhere. Demand for manufacturing and processing by a human workforce may thus drop even further in the future (Maihack and Oehm 2020).

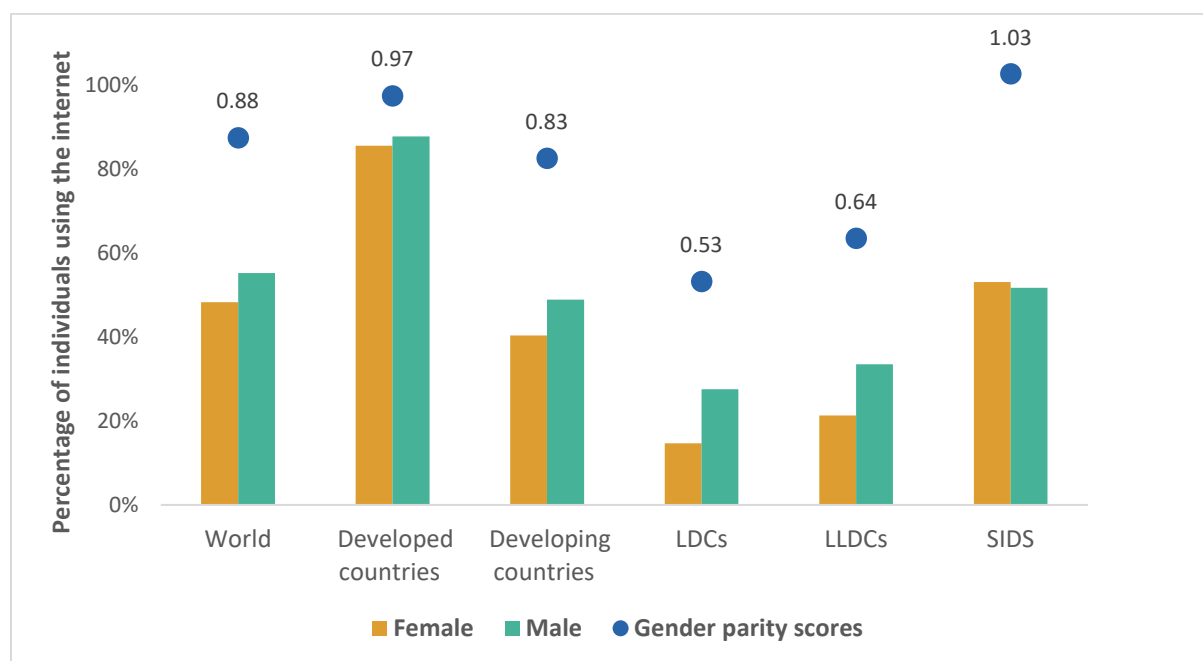
Covid-19 and related social distancing measures and lockdowns have accelerated the digital transformation worldwide, catalyzing teleworking, distance learning, e-commerce, and the digitalization of public administration and other services such as finance and banking. This process is seen as providing both opportunities and challenges, as disadvantaged groups have relatively less access to the Internet, electronic and mobile devices, and teleworking opportunities. Women face specific barriers to participating in the digital economy (ECLAC 2021; figure 1.3), while many children do not have access to devices, and older persons often lack digital literacy. Finally, concerns are growing that governments might use digital technologies and surveillance mechanisms introduced in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic to control access to information, undermine political opposition or restrict civic space (chapter 2).

Figure 1.2: Information and technology communication (ICT) indicators by level of development (2020 or most recent year)



Source: ITU (International Telecommunication Union). N.d. "Key ICT indicators for developed and developing countries, the world and special regions (totals and penetration rates)." *ICT Indicators database*. Accessed 1 November 2021.

Figure 1.3: Gender gap in Internet use by level of development, 2019



Source: ITU (International Telecommunication Union). N.d. ICT Indicators Database. <https://www.itu.int/pub/D-IND-WTID.OL-2021> Accessed 12 November 2021. Gender parity scores are authors calculations.

Notes: The gender parity score is calculated as the proportion of women who use the Internet divided by the proportion of men. A score below one indicates that more men use the internet than women.

## 2.3 Ageing

Thanks to increasing life expectancy and decreasing fertility rates, populations are getting older, a process that has been shaped by other long-term trends such as advancements in health technologies and pharmaceuticals and changing gender norms. Older persons make significant contributions to national economies and societies through paid and unpaid work (for example, childcare), as entrepreneurs, supporting their families with pension income, and through political participation and social capital (UNDP et al. 2017). Older persons are included in the SDG principle of leaving no one behind while also featuring in Goal 3 (“Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”), Goal 5 (“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”) and in the commitment to data disaggregation by age and other social group characteristics.

Population ageing, while a positive trend, is also considered one of the key long-term structural challenges with which twenty-first-century societies are grappling. Over the next decades, the number of older persons is projected to more than double, reaching over 1.5 billion and increasing the share of the population aged 65 years or over to 16 percent in 2050, up from 9.3 percent in 2020 (UN DESA 2020b). The increasing share of individuals in the age group associated with retirement (starting at age 60/65) is affecting virtually all countries in the world (Woodall 2021) and has implications for social protection schemes, labour markets and social services (benefit structure and financing), and also for society at large. Ageing is a gendered process, as women tend to have a longer life expectancy, while they acquire lower pension entitlements due to interrupted employment histories because of unpaid care work and lower wages (Koehler 2022; Arza 2015). Ageing also has implications for the generational contract. The generational contract refers to expectations and social norms governing intergenerational relations (for example, living arrangements, care responsibilities, decision making and so forth) as well as concrete institutional and policy design

determining the distribution of resources between generations (for example, how much national income is distributed between economically active members of working age and economically dependent members such as children and older persons) and guaranteeing all generations, including future ones, a decent living standard within planetary boundaries (Stewart 2020; see Spotlight James Heintz; see figure 1.4).

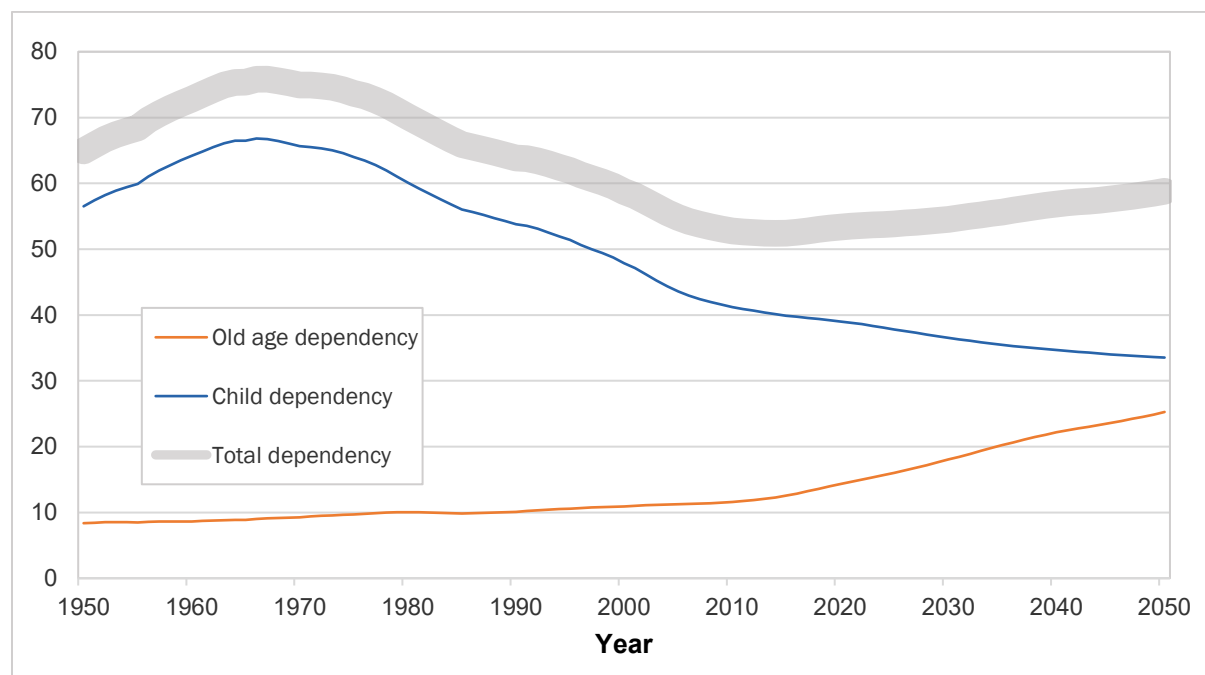
While demographic change such as ageing is a predictable process, it can be affected by unexpected and unpredictable events such as pandemics, natural disasters, wars or large migration or refugee movements (Woodall 2021). The pace of and advancement in the process of population ageing and the stage of an individual country in the demographic transition (Grover 2014; UN DESA 2019a), as well as the broader economic and social context, determine its policy implications, for example, adjustments in public pension schemes (increasing contribution rates, higher retirement ages), investments in health systems and long-term care policies, healthy ageing policies combined with individual approaches (Gratton and Scott 2016), and labour market reforms targeted at either increasing retention rates and life-long learning for the elderly workforce, facilitating labour migration, or improving labour market conditions and education for both older and younger persons (ISSA 2019; UN DESA 2019a).

Overall, ageing processes have so far not resulted in global declines in global population numbers, as the world population continues to grow, driven by high population growth rates in some of the poorest countries in the world, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa. It has increased from 2.5 billion in 1950, to 4.8 billion in 1985, to 7.7 billion in 2019, and it is estimated to reach 8.5 billion in 2030. Global population growth is expected to create challenges for SDG achievement, though it also offers a potential demographic dividend (opportunities arising from improving dependency ratios due to increasing working-age populations and declining fertility rates) (UN 1987; UN DESA 2019a).

Ageing impacts inequalities and the social contract: more national resources are needed to avoid old-age poverty and protect the human rights of older persons, invest in long-term care, reduce unpaid care work by women and support older women negatively affected by low lifetime earnings. Addressing ageing successfully is therefore closely related to several other global trends, such as migration (care workers are often migrants), technological progress (service provision through digital means, health innovations and so forth) and the changing world of work (retaining older workers in the workforce).

Inequalities accumulate over the life course, leading to increased gaps during old age (with a divide between those covered by contributory social insurance and those depending on assistance); intersectionality is also key, as difficult-to-cover groups are often those where inequalities intersect, for example, undocumented migrant women workers who have not accumulated entitlements for pensions or health care due to their migration status, their lack of a formal employment relation and periods spent on family care work.

Figure 1.4: Global dependency ratios, 1950–2050



Source: UNCTADstat; UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). 2019. *World Population Prospects: Revision 2019*. Accessed October 6, 2021.

Notes: The **total dependency ratio** is defined as the number of children (0–14 years old) and older persons (65 years and over) per 100 persons in working age (15–64 years old). The **old-age dependency ratio** is defined as the number of older persons (65 years or over) per 100 persons in working age (15–64 years old). The **child dependency ratio** is defined as the number of children (0–14 years old) per 100 persons in working age (15–64 years old).

## 2.4 Migration

People migrate for a variety of reasons, from economic, social and political to environmental, typically seeking better livelihoods and opportunities but also escaping life-threatening circumstances such as persecution, violent conflict, war or natural disasters (figure 1.5). Over the last two decades, the stock of all types of migration has increased, encompassing people moving to seek better employment, to join family members or to study abroad, internally displaced people (IDPs) and international refugees (figures 1.5 and 1.6). Between 2000 and 2010, the number of international migrants increased by 48 million globally, and by 60 million between 2010 and 2020, reaching a total stock of 281 million in 2020.<sup>3</sup> Humanitarian crises contributed to this number with an increase of 17 million in the number of refugees and asylum seekers between 2000 and 2020 (UN DESA 2020c). Human mobility continues to be predominantly regional, in particular regarding forced displacement. In sub-Saharan Africa, intraregional migration amounted to more than half of all migration (53 percent of all African migrants, or 19.4 million, lived in other African countries in 2017; see UNCTAD 2018b).

The Covid-19 pandemic reduced mobility, leading to a reduction in the growth of international migration of an estimated 27 percent compared with projections based on its evolution between July 2019 and June 2020, as well as a slight decrease in remittances, which dropped by an estimated 1.7 percent (UN 2021; UN DESA 2020c). In 2021, remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries were projected to reach USD 589 billion, a 7.3 percent increase compared with 2020

<sup>3</sup> International migrant stock is the number of people born in a country other than that in which they live, including refugees (see figure 1.6).

(Ratha et al. 2021). Nonetheless, regardless of the pandemic, the proportion of international migrants remains very small and incommensurate with the pace and scope of globalization in trade and finance: international migrants constitute only 3.6 percent of the world population (see figure 1.8), indicating that many potential migrants lack the resources and opportunities to migrate and remain “involuntarily immobile,” partly due to restrictive immigration policies and associated barriers to migration (Carling 2002).

Whether migration is seen as a relatively stable long-term demographic trend or as a coping mechanism in times of crisis, conflicts or disasters, migration and development are closely intertwined and interdependent (De Haas 2010). Migration has important influences on development, with positive and negative impacts on its economic, social and environmental dimensions (Bastia and Skeldon 2020). Remittance flows have far exceeded official development assistance (ODA) and are approaching the level of foreign direct investment (FDI) flows (Ratha et al. 2021), constituting important supplements to migrants’ household income and often used to invest in better nutrition, education and health. Migrant workers constitute an important share of the essential workforce in many destination countries, in particular in care and domestic work. Diaspora communities have evolved into important transnational development actors (Faist 2008). And migration is one way of adapting to the adverse impacts of climate change (Black et al. 2011), a type of migration that is likely to grow greatly in coming decades.

The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development identifies migration as a key development issue, recognizing its potential to make positive contributions as well as some of the challenges it raises (in particular regarding forced displacement and human trafficking). It includes several explicit targets on migration, for example, target 10.7 to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility and to implement planned and well-managed migration policies. Other targets aim to improve migration outcomes in six of the SDGs, for example, protecting the rights of migrant workers, especially women (target 8.8), and reducing remittance transfer costs (target 10.c) (Hujo 2019; OECD 2017). Scholarship that highlights the positive development effects of migration associates migration with growth and productivity improvements, increasing household incomes and access to foreign exchange for origin countries through remittances. It also points to positive effects when migrants return to or invest in their home country, for example, by changing social norms and contributing new skills or new entrepreneurial networks. In practice, however, empirical evidence demonstrates that the experience and development impacts of migration are shaped by policies and context: rights-based legal frameworks and migration-friendly policies as well as an enabling development context are crucial factors for harnessing development benefits from migration for countries and communities and for allowing migrants to access decent work, social protection and social services in sending and receiving countries (De Haas 2010, 2020; Hujo and Piper 2010).

While evidence points to the broadly positive impact of migration on poverty reduction, the impact on inequality is less clear and may differ at local, regional and national scales. Some scholars regard migration as an individual or household response to inequalities in wages, labour market opportunities or lifestyles (Black et al. 2005) and research finds positive impacts of remittances on inequality in Mexico, for example (Kóczán and Loyola 2018). However, the relationship between migration and inequality goes two ways: while migration bears significant development potential in terms of employment opportunities or disrupting inequalities associated with unequal social structures (Crawley 2018), it can both create new inequalities and exacerbate existing ones, in particular horizontal inequalities between groups (Crawley 2018; Stewart 2016), but also vertical inequalities between individuals such as income concentration at the top (Advani et al. 2020). Effects may differ according to type of migration: internal migration may reduce inequalities, while more costly international migration may increase it. Timescales also matter: migration may

initially be very difficult and costly, available only to the relatively wealthy, but become easier and less costly over time, when networks have developed, for example (Mckenzie and Rapoport 2007).

While inequalities and lack of economic opportunities drive labour migration, they can also act as a constraint for those people who cannot afford to migrate due to a lack of resources. Much of forced displacement (figure 1.5), in particular stocks of IDPs, is the result of violent conflict (Plagerson 2021). The dramatic resurgence of displacement over the last few years, particularly as a result of (internationalized) civil wars, has caused immense human suffering (Palik et al. 2020; UN and World Bank 2018). Forced displacement—combining IDPs and refugees—reached 80 million people in 2020 (UNHCR 2020), with low- and middle-income countries hosting over 80 percent of the world’s refugees and asylum seekers (UN DESA 2020c). 2020 saw the highest absolute number of refugees, 24.5 million, on record (UN 2021), and IDPs also increased significantly, reaching 55 million (IOM 2021). The recent Russia–Ukraine war has already resulted in over five million Ukrainian citizens and other residents fleeing the country (UNHCR n.d.a). Violent conflicts continue to be complex and protracted, involving non-state groups and regional and international actors (Degila 2020).

Environmental change can also result in forced displacement, both through sudden-onset events such as floods and hurricanes, as well as slow-onset processes such as desertification and sea level rise. Black et al. (2011) argue that migration as a climate change adaptation strategy should be recognized and supported and debates are ongoing on how best to approach climate change-induced displacement and internal migration (Kumari Rigaud et al. 2018). Where cross-border movements are warranted, there is debate as to whether a new category of climate refugees could be established, a proposal that is, however, contested or not endorsed, not only by organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), but also by affected communities who do not want to be seen as climate refugees (El-Hinnawi 1985; Farbotko and Lazrus 2012; Santos and Mourato 2021; UNHCR n.d.b).

International migrants and refugees, as well as internal migrants in some countries such as India and China (where social and political rights are tied to the usual place of residence or community of origin), are rarely fully integrated into national social contracts. As such they have limited access to labour markets, social services and social protection, and to equal political and cultural rights, thus restricting their political voice and their scope to take action to improve their situation (Stewart 2016). These exclusions are more frequent for undocumented and irregular migrants—or those in transit—and are further exacerbated by constraints in the availability and accessibility of public services and protection schemes in many receiving countries. This holds true for destination countries in the global North and South and conditions may change over time: while pathways for regularizing migration status or acquiring citizenship exist in some countries, they are less available in other countries

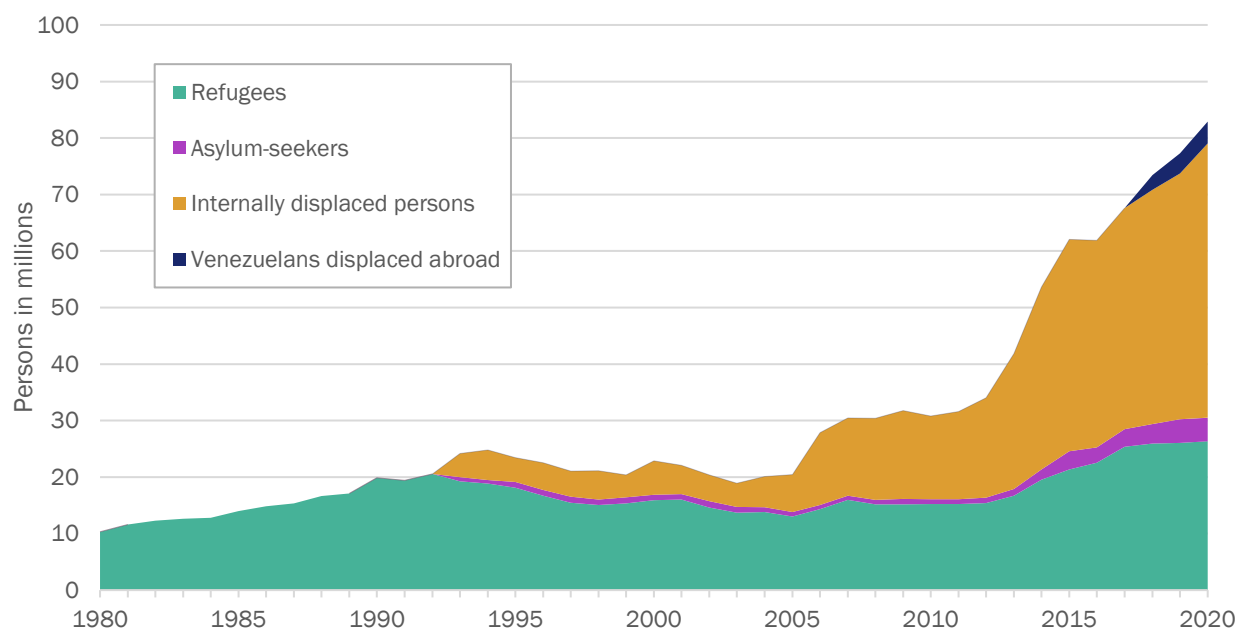
While international human rights and labour protection standards have been set up to overcome the limitations of national social contracts in protecting migrants and granting them equal rights with citizens, constituting the foundation of a human rights-based approach to migration, implementation and ratification are lagging (Hujo 2019). Instead, approaches focusing on the management of migration in line with development and security interests of sending and receiving countries are shaping migration policies to a large extent (see chapter 5). The most recent efforts to improve the situation of migrants and refugees globally have been the agreement on a Global Compact on Migration and a Global Compact on Refugees. Regional bodies such as the African Union have created a regional migration policy framework and plan of action (AU 2018), while some donor countries or regions have policies and programmes that aim to address root causes of irregular migration and displacement in countries of origin, such as helping to create economic opportunities to curb potential immigration flows (European Commission 2018; Kihato 2018; Landau 2018).

However, this approach is at odds with empirical evidence that shows increasing incomes are associated with more mobility (De Haas 2020). Finally, the securitization approach that is applied at EU borders and implemented by its specialized agency FRONTEX frequently works to the detriment of migrants’ rights and can actually put their lives in danger (Amnesty International 2014; Kmak and Phillips 2022).

Often, migrants and refugees are instrumentalized and scapegoated in political discourses and public debates, for example, during the so-called European “refugee crisis” in 2015. Some politicians, mostly from far-right parties, promote an outright anti-migrant stance, grounded in xenophobic, racist and culturalist attitudes. More moderate political forces are increasingly expressing concerns about potential downward pressure on wages through job competition or additional pressures on housing and social services caused by migration, despite the fact that there is little empirical evidence to support them (Hagen-Zanker et al. 2017). Furthermore, increased security concerns in the wake of international conflicts and terrorism have reinforced the securitization approach to migration governance (Bello 2020), which can be detrimental for safeguarding the human rights of migrants.

It becomes clear that migration is not only a cross-cutting issue in the SDGs but is also a global trend that is closely connected with inequality and multiple crises. How to integrate migrants and refugees into national social contracts and how to shift global migration governance toward a human rights-based approach remain key challenges to address.

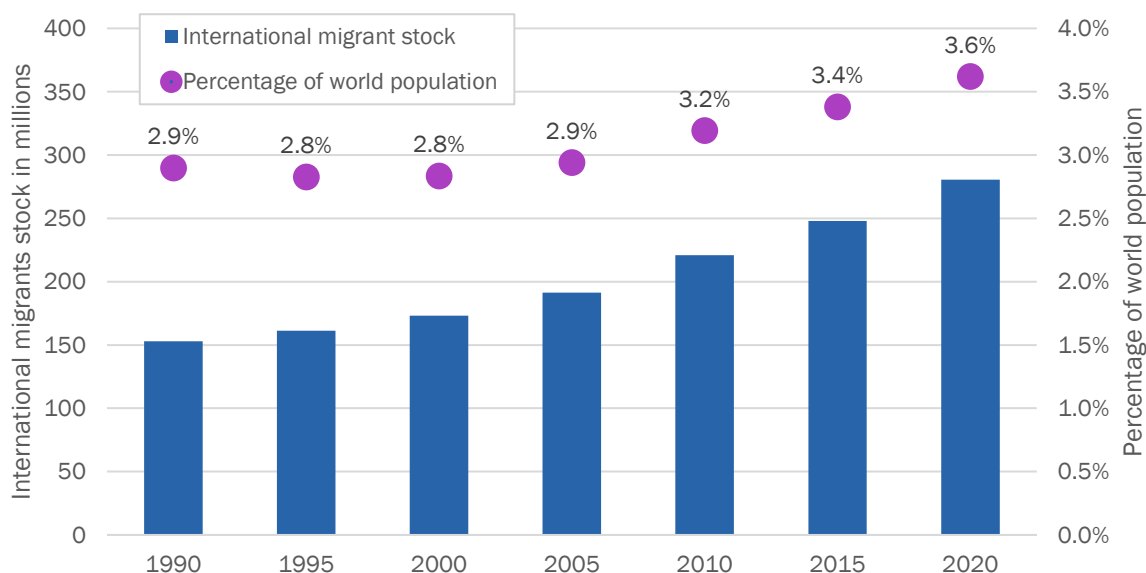
Figure 1.5: Forcibly displaced people worldwide, 1980 to the end of 2020



Source: UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre). n.d. Refugee Data Finder. <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>. Accessed 7 October 2021.

Notes: Data on IDPs has only been recorded since 1989. Refugees includes Palestine refugees under the mandate of UNRWA.

Figure 1.6: International migrant stock and its percentage of total population

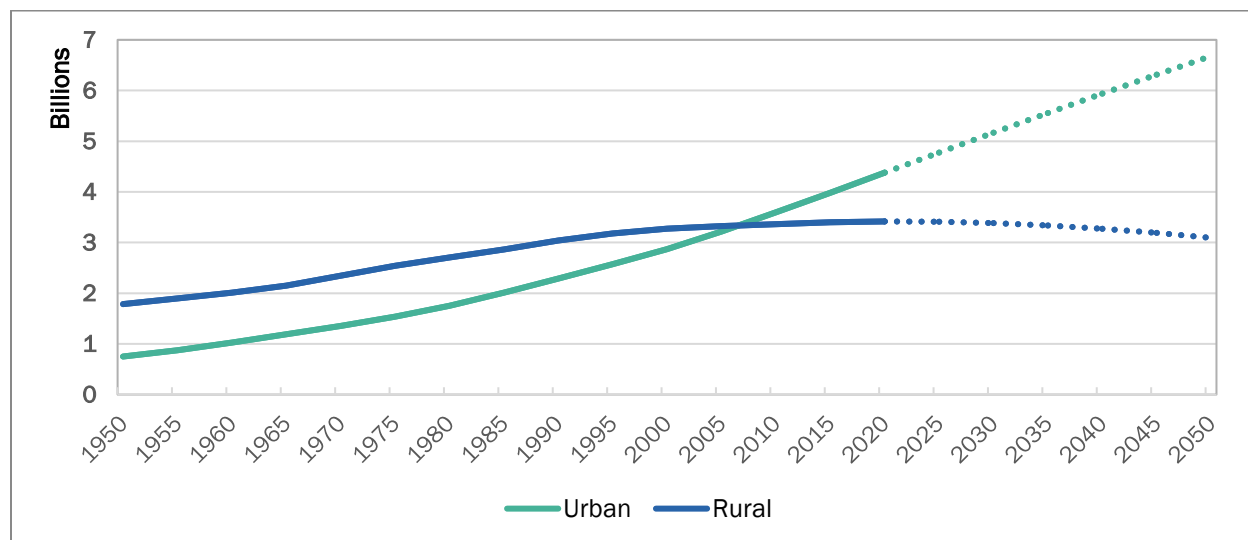


Source: UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). 2020. *International Migration Stock 2020*. New York: UN DESA Population Division. Accessed 1 November 2021.; World Bank. n.d. *World Development Indicators*. <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>. Accessed 30 March 2022.

## 2.5 Urbanization

The concentration of human populations into urban centres is not a new story. It has long been a driving factor of social and economic development, as cities are essential sites of exchange, innovation and economic growth. Development economists have associated urbanization with a process of structural change from agrarian societies to industrialized economies, where shares of manufacturing and services contributing to GDP are growing. In this process, lower-productivity surplus labour from rural areas is assumed to be absorbed into higher-productivity urban wage labour, which leads to growth and higher incomes (Lewis 1954). Since the middle of the twentieth century, this process has been accelerating, in many ways faster than our cities can keep up with. While overall population growth partly explains this increase, the steep proportional rise is largely a result of migration from rural areas to cities in search of better life opportunities. Between 1950 and 2020, the proportion of the global population living in cities went from 29 percent to over 56 percent (UN-Habitat 2016a, 2020; UN DESA 2019b) (see figure 1.7). That share is projected to increase to over 60 percent by 2030 (UN-Habitat 2020) and to 68 percent by 2050 (UN DESA 2019b). Importantly, this development has not been even across the globe. Until recently, the majority of urban development had occurred in developed countries: with the exception of Latin America and the Caribbean, the developed world is much more urbanized than the developing world (UN DESA 2019b). However, close to 90 percent of the urbanization projected to occur over the next 30 years is expected take place in Asia and Africa (UN DESA 2019b). The extreme growth rate in the developing world (In Africa the rate of urban growth is 11 times greater than in Europe (UN-Habitat 2016a)) indicates a shifting centre of gravity of urbanization, and with it urban economic weight, which will have significant human development and global economic impacts (McKinsey Global Institute 2011).

Figure 1.7: Growth of urban population, 1950–2050



Source: UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). 2018. *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision*. New York: UN DESA Population Division.

Urbanization presents both challenges and opportunities for human development, social and economic justice, and environmental sustainability. On the positive side, urbanization has undeniable economic benefits, in particular through economies of scale. The concentration of people and economic activity in one place can lead to job creation, increased productivity and higher standards of living (UN-Habitat 2020). Indeed, more than 80 percent of global GDP is generated in urban centres (UN-Habitat 2020). Cities are also hugely important for national economies, increasing national GDP while facilitating stronger institutions and resilience to global economic shocks (UN-Habitat 2020). Cities can also bring greater economic prosperity to surrounding rural regions, by providing a market for goods, and through spillover effects of innovation, educational opportunities and prosperity from urban into surrounding rural regions. The concentration of people into cities also presents potential environmental benefits through the efficient use of energy and resources, for example, through smart transportation and housing (UNEP 2019). There are also many social development impacts associated with urbanization, for example, improvements in gender equality: life in cities presents greater educational and employment opportunities for women. Urbanization is often correlated with reduced fertility rates, with women engaging in labour outside the home at higher rates. These opportunities also tend to lead to greater economic independence for women (UN-Habitat 2016a). Realizing this potential, however, requires sufficient planning, management and governance that is rights-based, inclusive and sustainable. UN-Habitat puts forward a number of criteria which are important for achieving this, including involving local governments in national and international decision making, fostering innovation and making use of new technologies, turning to nature-based solutions that are inclusive and equitable to unlock the environmental potential of urbanization for all, integrating migrants into cities as key to their socioeconomic development, employing feminist and youth-centred approaches to urban planning, and recognizing the value of the urban commons (shared resources, spaces and knowledge) (2020). To be sure, alternative economic models which centre local actors, their needs and the environment, such as social and solidarity economy (SSE), have a key role to play in this as well (see chapter 5; UN 2017; UNFSS 2014; Utting 2018; Yi et al. 2018).

Despite the positive potential of urbanization for human development, in many places these have not been realized, and in fact urbanization has produced the opposite effect. Urban centres have become the nodes of the globalized neoliberal system, in which heavily pro-market policy regimes

create an environment bent toward ever greater accumulation, and predatory finance repurposes the city for its own gain. Economic growth associated with urbanization does not necessarily translate into increased prosperity, as low-income and minority groups are often left out of these benefits. Growing cities often lead to increased poverty as well as inequality, both within and between cities. Increasing costs of land, housing and goods, in combination with low wages, force residents into situations such as housing insecurity (living in inadequate and/or unsafe housing, or prolonged or periodic houselessness) and hunger. Migrants are particularly at risk as their citizenship status often relegates them to informal employment and housing opportunities. The life of low-income urban dwellers can be highly precarious.

In many places, this precarity takes the form of the expansion of slums and informal settlements, with more and more residents relegated to highly underserved areas as cities grow. While the proportion of the urban population living in slums declined between 2000 and 2014, since then the proportion has been increasing, with 23.5 percent of urban dwellers living in slums in 2018 (UN DESA 2018). These communities are often partially or entirely cut off from essential municipal services such as transport networks (which has significant implications for accessing economic opportunities and creates time poverty), water and sanitation, and electricity, and access to health and education services is very limited. Further, life in these communities presents many health and safety concerns. With limited state presence and high rates of poverty, crime and violence are widespread. Living in close quarters, often with poor sanitation facilities or in proximity to polluted water supplies or industrial sites, presents high risks of disease and adverse impacts on long-term health. Finally, these settlements are often built in disaster-prone areas. Many of the world's largest cities are located in low-lying and coastal areas, and it is estimated that by 2050 over one billion people will live in low-elevation coastal zones (LECZs) (Merkens et al. 2016). It is the most vulnerable citizens who face a disproportionate level of climate-related risk (Krause 2019; Trans and Krause 2020; see box 2.1). Currently, 80 percent of the population living in LECZs are in developing countries (Neumann et al. 2015), and four out of every 10 non-permanent households in the developing world are at risk of environmental disasters such as landslides and floods (UN-Habitat 2006).

The pressure urbanization puts on our environment is considerable. Cities generate 70 percent of global carbon emissions and consume two-thirds of the world's energy (UN-Habitat 2020). While concentration of populations can lead to more efficient use of resources, if unplanned it can lead to greater use of land and resources, soil sealing and pollution. Currently, the increase in urban land area is growing at a faster rate than urban populations, on average. Between 1990 and 2015, urban land area increased by 1.5 times in relation to population growth in developed countries. In developing countries, urban land growth increased 3.5 times in relation to population (UN-Habitat 2016b). The expansion of urban land area has significant implications for carbon emissions, energy consumption, environmental degradation and ecosystem loss. Urbanization has led to significant ecosystem alteration over the past several decades, with implications for food and water supply, air quality, species loss, environmental disasters such as floods and landslides, zoonotic diseases and more (UNEP 2007). Urbanization also entails greater exposure to other risks such as crime, terrorism, pollution, traffic accidents and disease for all residents.

While cities have the potential to bring people together across race, class, ethnicity, religion and culture, they also have the potential to cement divides along these lines. The segregation of cities along neighbourhood lines has significant implications for quality of life, health and education, access to services, political rights and, importantly, intergenerational mobility (MacLeavy and Manley 2022). Urban policies and infrastructure, for example, relating to transportation, housing, policing and public space, as well as processes of privatization, often serve to further these divides and exclude certain groups from the life of cities (Atkinson 2020; Stein 2019). Legacies of structural racism or ethnic discrimination have manifested in urban policies, excluding communities of colour from the benefits of development and locking them into cycles of poverty and deprivation that are

inscribed in space (see, for example, Rothstein 2017). Practices such as divestment by the state in favour of developing other areas (a practice which is also politically driven); redlining, the withholding of services to a community, most consequentially credit and insurance, because they are doomed too risky; and discriminatory housing policies which aim to keep people of certain groups out of certain neighbourhoods have created cities that are highly segregated along racial/ethnic as well as economic lines (Marcuse and Madden 2016; OECD 2018b).

It is important to note that spatial segregation goes beyond the question of address and entails processes of enclosure such that communities become inaccessible and their resources unavailable to all but those who live there. This can be seen in the privatization of public space, restricted access to public schooling by neighbourhood, and transportation reform that renders certain neighbourhoods less accessible from other neighbourhoods, creating highly spatially distinct existences between residents who may live only one zip code apart. An extreme example of this divide is the rise of gated communities in large cities as those with means retreat into fully serviced private spaces. These processes have severe economic, political and social costs for marginalized groups and entail highly disproportionate consumption of urban space (see, for example, Bagaeen and Uduku 2015; Blakely and Snyder 1997; Blandy 2007; Borsdorf and Hidalgo 2008; Caldeira 2000; UN-Habitat 2009).

Ultimately, urbanization has many potential human and environmental benefits; however, the current model is unsustainable and compounds injustice and inequality. This is why SDG 11 aims to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

## 2.6 Shifting global powers

The most recent Russian invasion of Ukraine resulting in a brutal war, is a stark and tragic reminder of the continuous impact of global power struggles and geopolitical interests on peace, security and sustainable development.

Global politics and dominant powers have shaped international relations and development from ancient empires to colonialism and imperialism, to the cold war period and the new multilateral world order emerging in the late twentieth century under US leadership. Imperial transitions and global power shifts are critical junctures which redefine the rules of the game of international policy making. They can result in a repositioning of the different players and bring new opportunities and constraints, as well as potential periods of increased instability and risk (Kennedy 1987; McCoy et al. 2012). Emerging powers are changing the global power balance and the political economy, while bringing new interests and ideas into the international arena, with important implications for global governance and multilateralism, seen most concretely in the elevation of the G20 to a leaders' level forum in 2008. Declining powers, meanwhile, can present important security risks: "Playing rogue is the weapon of great powers in decline" (Bangura 2022:3).

Since the end of the Second World War and the creation of the United Nations, the global world order has shifted from a bipolar structure prevalent during the cold war period, with the United States and the Soviet Union as major rivals, to a unipolar world under US hegemony that emerged after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the concomitant demise of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union (FSU). The current world order is described as multicentric or multipolar, with increasing geopolitical influence of countries such as China (and, to a lesser degree, other BRICS countries such as India, Brazil and South Africa, as well as other emerging markets such as Indonesia, Mexico, South Korea or Turkey) alongside the traditional powers—the United States, Europe and Western allies. In this group, the current hegemon, the United States, and the rising power, China, are singled out as the two most important countries in the international system, engaging in both cooperative and rivalrous webs of relations (Foot and Walter 2011), while the most

recent developments signal that Russia is reclaiming terrain in this US-dominated multipolar order, with highly disruptive impacts.

The shift in global power from a bipolar structure to a stronger role for a number of global South countries is reflected not only in terms of economic, demographic or military power, but also in ideational and epistemological shifts captured by terms such as decolonizing and decentering knowledge and politics. In this context, recent efforts to redress cultural injustices related to colonialism, for example, the transfer of cultural and artistic artefacts, as well as debates around climate justice (see chapter 2), are of importance, as is increasing South–South cooperation, supported in the United Nations through the UN Office for South–South Cooperation (UNOSSC) (UN 2022).

Aiming to measure countries’ international weight, Derviş (2018) identifies three criteria: the size of the population; the size of the economy, measured by GDP at market prices; and military power, measured imperfectly by defence expenditure. If all three metrics are considered as equally important, the United States, China, the European Union (considered one actor), Japan, India, Russia and Brazil emerge as the key international powers. Comparing the evolution of these indicators over time, the picture that emerges situates the United States and China at the top, with the European Union following and India as a potential future candidate in the top ranking (see table 1.1; Derviş 2018). When focusing on economic activity from a geographical perspective, it becomes clear that the global economy’s centre of gravity (Quah 2011)—the average of economic activity across geographies—has shifted east and is projected to move further eastward from the previous mid-Atlantic centre of gravity between North America and Western Europe.

Table 1.1: Metrics of global power: GDP, population, military expenditure (% of world total)

	GDP, current USD		Population		Military expenditure	
	1990	2020	1990	2020	1990	2020
<b>United States</b>	26.3	24.7	4.7	4.2	45.6	40.3
<b>China</b>	1.6	17.4	21.5	18.2	1.4	13.1
<b>European Union</b>	28.6	18.0	8.0	5.8	20.2	12.1
<b>Japan</b>	13.8	6.0	2.3	1.6	4.0	2.5
<b>India</b>	1.4	3.1	16.5	17.8	1.5	3.8
<b>Russian Federation</b>	2.3	1.8	2.8	1.9	1.1	3.2
<b>Brazil</b>	1.7	1.7	2.8	2.7	1.3	1.0

Source: World Bank. 2020. *World Development Indicators*. Washington, DC: World Bank.  
<http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators>. Accessed 9 April 2022.

Additional power sources can be added to this metric. McCoy et al. (2012) include technological innovation as a basis for applied science and military systems as well as energy sources such as natural gas reserves (of which an estimated 60 percent is held by Russia and Iran), an issue that has gained visibility in the initial phase of tensions between the United States, the European Union, Germany, Ukraine and Russia over the Nordstream 2 gas pipeline (Harper 2021) and the role of gas and oil supplies to Europe in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Russia’s threat to use nuclear weapons against any country entering the war further highlights that Russia, despite its weak position in terms of economic power, population and military expenditure,

ranks first in one important power resource: it holds the largest number of nuclear warheads in the world (World Population Review 2022).

Power is about interactions and relationships, and leaders' ability to use resources and skills to achieve intended results through interaction with others (Smith 2012). The concept of soft power, popularized by Joseph S. Nye (1990), has increasingly entered the field of international relations and can be understood as the power of attraction (as opposed to coercion). Nye identifies three sources of soft power: culture, political values such as democracy and human rights, and policies that are legitimate because they are framed with an awareness of others' interests (see also Layne (2012) on the benefits associated with the liberal orders of Pax Britannica and Pax Americana).

While the security role played by the United States, especially when it is deployed outside of any multilateral or international framework, has received much criticism, culminating in the recent withdrawal from Afghanistan after 20 years of military presence and trillions of dollars of investment (Bello 2022), analysts tend to agree that no other power will be able to take up the role any time soon (Derviş 2018). The United States is still considered ahead of China (Silver et al. 2020), despite China's efforts in vaccine diplomacy during the current Covid-19 pandemic and infrastructure development in the global South in the context of its Road and Belt Initiative (Nye 2022). According to Nye (2022), this is also due to the soft power assets embedded in US civil society and culture.

Much has been said about the supposed decline of US power (Kennedy 1987; McCoy et al. 2012) and the impacts of the new multipolar world order on development opportunities in the global South and on North–South relations. One key question is the impact on multilateralism and international institutions, both formal intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations, the WTO and IFIs, as well as informal clubs such as the G7, G20 and BRICS, and global agendas such as the SDGs, the Paris Agreement and the human rights agenda. Questions have arisen about whether the rise of China in a globalizing world has led to increased trade protectionism (and broader nationalism) in the United States (for example, due to a loss of agricultural and rust-belt jobs) and strengthened an anti-cooperation stance (for example, on climate change), and whether it has led to the G7 being less interventionist than it was in the 1990s and 2000s. Global players such as China and Russia defend non-interference but seem less concerned with key pillars of the multilateral order and UN values, such as human rights and liberal democracy or, in the case of Russia, territorial sovereignty of states, which can have further repercussions the more they expand their “spheres of influence” toward the global South (Bangura 2022).

Regarding the potential implications of power shifts for the global South, perspectives from the global South are revealing. Analysts are critical of the neoliberal world order and the globalization project, which have been promoted by successive US governments over the last four decades. They are also sceptical about the hegemon's ability to continue to discipline the rest of the world (in particular after the most recent withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Russian invasion of Ukraine), to remain a or *the* dominant economic power and to overcome its deep internal political polarization (Bello 2022). Scholars such as Canterbury (2021) see new opportunities arising for Africa's development in a multipolar world order, in particular regarding non-traditional sources of finance and less reliance on the IFIs. He argues that a mix of competition and cooperation between the United States and more state-led approaches prevalent in the European Union, Russia and China might open up developmentalist alternatives for the global South.

Finally, the implications of the Russia–Ukraine war are not boding well for the global South as it could lead to a reinvigoration of the spheres of influence doctrine in Africa and elsewhere; affect food and energy importers through oil, wheat and other grain price hikes; and result in aggressive

competition between Russia and Western countries to gain political and economic allies in the global South (Bangura 2022), prompting some scholars to call for a new non-aligned movement of developing countries (Chowdhury and Kwame Sundaram 2022).

### 3 Overview

This final section summarizes the different chapters and the related questions addressed in the report.

#### 3.1 Chapter 2 – Inequalities in times of crisis: How did we get here?

When taking a deeper look at the system that has ushered in an age of crisis, we understand that the inequality, environmental degradation and lack of resilience it has produced is built in by design. Multiple and interdependent crises, inequalities and the demise of social contracts are interlinked, from various economic and financial crises associated with neoliberal globalization; to the crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and unsustainable resource use that has been unfolding over two centuries, reaching alarming tipping points; to the care crisis which manifests itself through a disproportionate amount of unpaid care work placed on women and an undervaluation of care services in the market; to a political crisis that is characterized by increasing power asymmetries, a backlash against human rights, democratic principles and multilateral governance, decreasing citizen trust and eroding state legitimacy, and an unprecedented level of protests and violent conflicts. The Covid-19 pandemic is a “great revealer” of the inherent flaws of this system in terms of both the conditions that led to it, specifically the closing-in of human civilization on natural ecosystems, and the outcomes it has produced. What are the policy choices that have resulted in the current situation of multiple crises and rising inequalities? How can we break the vicious cycle between inequality, crisis and unsustainable development?

#### 3.2 Chapter 3 – The age of inequality: Intersecting inequalities and power

When poverty intersects with inequalities associated with gender, race, ethnicity, caste, age, sexual orientation, migrant or refugee status, location or other markers of group identity, it creates particularly oppressive and protracted forms of disadvantage that impede people from developing their capabilities and contributing fully to society. Addressing these inequalities is not only a question of social justice, but also a key condition for achieving more sustainable development outcomes. Inequality has adverse impacts on growth, macroeconomic stability, poverty reduction, health, nutrition and educational indicators, social protection and employment, gender equality, human rights and democratic governance. At the top of the income and wealth pyramid, economic, social, environmental and political privileges accumulate, building the foundation of elite power that often opposes transformative change toward greater social, climate and economic justice. The Covid-19 pandemic has amplified pre-existing inequalities, but also helped to expose the extreme state of fracture of our world, pushing forward a consensus on the need to change the system that led us into the crisis. What is the current evidence on vertical and horizontal inequalities, how do they affect the implementation of the SDGs and how do they shape the uneven impacts of crises? What are the power dynamics underpinning these intersecting vertical and horizontal inequalities?

#### 3.3 Chapter 4 – Building a new eco-social contract: Actors, alliances and strategies

The twentieth-century social contract—an implicit bargain between economic imperatives of growth and productivity, and social imperatives of redistribution and social protection—has broken down and cannot sustain the transformative vision of the 2030 Agenda. The breakdown of the social contract

manifests itself in multiple global crises, rising inequalities and the deep divisions in our societies. Multiple actors call for a new social contract, but visions differ on what an ideal social contract should look like. Indeed, it is important to recognize the variety of normative and real-world social contracts as well as the power asymmetries and structural inequalities shaping them. Recent history shows that social contracts are not set in stone but renegotiated when contexts change, or when contracts lose legitimacy and support. Countries have created new social contracts at critical junctures, in response to regime changes and citizens' demands, embarking on a variety of institutional and policy reforms. To overcome present challenges and lay the foundations for just and sustainable societies and economies, this report suggests uniting all stakeholders in deliberations on a new eco-social contract based on principles of inclusivity, human rights, social justice, respect for planetary boundaries and our global commons, solidarity and multilateralism. How can diverse understandings of the concept of the social contract help us to make sense of the current situation and to create new visions and alliances for transformative change? What type of real-world social contracts exist, and how have they changed over time? What are key propositions from different actors on how to reform social contracts? When rethinking social contracts, which principles can guide us in creating a new eco-social contract for sustainable futures?

### **3.4 Chapter 5 – A new way forward: Pathways toward social, economic and environmental justice**

Establishing a new eco-social contract to overcome inequalities and address multiple crises and the root causes of unsustainable development requires that we change our mindset, rethink priorities and move away from a dominant focus on growth and profits. A new eco-social contract needs to be grounded in integrated approaches for economic, social, climate and gender justice. Such a contract would rein in hyperglobalization and financialized capitalism; connect the spheres of production and reproduction through establishing a caring economy in ways that impede the exploitation of people and the planet; and reinvigorate a transformative social turn based on universal social policies, decent work and a rights-based approach. Pathways toward a new eco-social contract can be built on a new development model consisting of three key pillars: alternative economic approaches that centre environmental and social justice and rebalance state–market–society–nature relations, transformative social policies based on a fair fiscal contract, and reformed and strengthened multilateralism and solidarities. What is needed to move this agenda forward and secure our common future is a combination of progressive leadership that goes beyond elite preferences and is inspired by the common good and public interest, together with grassroots pressure from below by progressive social movements and civil society, supported by multilateral organizations and frameworks. What are the policies that address inequalities and enhance social and climate justice? How can we build the alliances and coalitions to support a new eco-social paradigm for sustainable development?



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