

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

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: 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.

# 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 Sustainable Development Goals

There is perhaps no more telling example of the way in which our current world order is bent toward injustice than the Covid-19 pandemic, simultaneously so universal and experienced so differently from person to person and place to place. The period since the virus was first detected in early 2020 has been marked by extensive loss of life, severe economic downturn, the rolling back of many human development indicators and an overall increase in poverty. Yet, at the same time, it also brought significant gains for a very small group of people, as wealth concentration at the top has intensified since the pandemic began. Such an extreme increase in human suffering matched by an equally extreme increase in profit and privilege has been the unfortunate refrain running through the history of recent crises, growing louder with each passing year. 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<sup>1</sup> while sending more than 120 million people into extreme poverty<sup>2</sup> signals a broken social contract, leaving behind far too many people and failing to protect our planet.

Only seven years ago the world seemed to be set on a more hopeful path. 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.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the era of the Millennium Development Goals, the new agenda included an explicit commitment to reduce inequalities within and between countries, as stipulated in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10. With only eight years remaining to make this ambition reality, the context for achieving the vision of Agenda 2030 has never been more daunting because of a number of urgent challenges. These include disparate progress in reducing poverty; high and rising levels of wealth and income inequality; the persistence of other multidimensional inequalities,

including gendered forms; the climate crisis and environmental destruction; insecurity and conflict; migration and forced displacement; precarious work; and 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 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.<sup>4</sup> The reasons for the sense of crisis and insecurity are threefold: for one, development has been skewed, benefiting people unequally and even pushing some further behind. Second, the world has become more volatile and unpredictable for many (as will be explored in chapter 2), presenting 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,<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> Public wealth has been depleted while private wealth has grown unceasingly, in particular in countries like France, Germany, Spain and Italy.<sup>8</sup> More than two thirds of the world population live in a country where inequality has grown.<sup>9</sup> 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,<sup>10</sup> while multinational companies

are further concentrating wealth and power, often aided by rapidly evolving technology that creates new divides both within and between countries.<sup>11</sup> 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 in a number of countries as a result of unemployment, informalization, privatization, sectoral shifts, international labour migration and the rise of non-standard forms of work.<sup>12</sup>

As inequality continues to increase within and among countries (despite some convergence at the global level largely driven by China) as a result of neoliberal policies and recent crises, vulnerable groups are being especially hard hit (see chapter 3).<sup>13</sup> 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. Rural areas are home to 85 percent of people without access to electricity, which impacts outcomes related to education, health and prosperity.<sup>14</sup>

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 (see chapter 2).<sup>15</sup> 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 economic 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.<sup>16</sup>



## The impact of increasing inequalities tends to negatively affect those who are already marginalized or discriminated against.

The climate crisis and biodiversity loss are destroying ecosystems, changing the face of our planet,<sup>17</sup> 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<sup>18</sup> and displacing millions, with 2020 seeing 30.7 million new displacements due to disasters.<sup>19</sup> According to the Emission Gap Report,<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> Research shows that deforestation and threats to biodiversity associated with the dominance of supply chain production increase the likelihood of future epidemics.<sup>23</sup> 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,

**The damage wrought by Covid-19, HIV and other pandemics is not the result of the viruses alone, but of how they make space in, and expand, the fissures of our unequal society.**

–Winnie Byanyima  
Executive Director, UNAIDS

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.<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup>

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.<sup>28</sup> There is also a third way in which inequality operates, and that is at the intersection of vertical and horizontal inequality, the combination of income and group-based discrimination: poverty undermines people's participation, well-being and enjoyment of rights and exacerbates other forms of disadvantage related to marginalized groups.<sup>29</sup>

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.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> 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 normative 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 and see chapter 4).

### **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 Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant, 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, with the former moving beyond concerns of creating social order toward actively promoting social justice.<sup>a</sup> Real-world social contracts rarely lived up to theoretical or normative standards, 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.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Hickey 2011; <sup>b</sup> UNRISD 2021.

## **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 in every part of the world, undermining economic development, well-being and health, democracy and participation, as well as social, environmental and economic sustainability.<sup>32</sup> The Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated that the combination of inequality and a pandemic has deadly consequences beyond those of the virus itself (see Spotlight by Winnie Byanyima).<sup>33</sup> 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 inequalities or whether the distribution of opportunities is seen as fair, allowing for social mobility.<sup>34</sup> It is often claimed that ensuring equality in opportunity is more feasible and legitimate than equality of outcome.<sup>35</sup> 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 inequalities 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 in line with human rights conventions, the state must 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.<sup>36</sup> At least three factors indicate when inequalities become an issue of economic and social justice and fairness<sup>37</sup> (see box 1.2 and chapter 4): first, when inequality is the result of discrimination and systematic 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 legacies of 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,”<sup>38</sup> which erodes social cohesion, solidarity and democracy, the foundations of a progressive social contract.



### 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 older people or persons living with disabilities 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.<sup>a</sup> 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 or reparative 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. Among different theoretical approaches, four justice concepts have received particular attention.<sup>b</sup> *Liberal egalitarianism* is grounded in a notion of justice as fairness<sup>c</sup> 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.<sup>d</sup> Mechanisms to advance global justice are global institutions and policies for redistribution such as international taxation.<sup>e</sup> The *capabilities approach*<sup>f</sup> 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*<sup>g</sup> 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* (for example Marxist/neo-Marxist, feminist or post-modern approaches) 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 (also called the triple-R framework, now expanded to the 5-R framework with the addition of reducing unpaid work and rewarding care workers)<sup>h</sup> to address injustices and promote the political agency of subaltern groups.<sup>i</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Biermann and Kalfagianni 2020; <sup>b</sup> Biermann and Kalfagianni 2020; <sup>c</sup> Rawls 1971; <sup>d</sup> Beitz 2005; <sup>e</sup> Pogge 1989; <sup>f</sup> Sen 1992, 2009;

<sup>g</sup> Nozick 1974; <sup>h</sup> ILO 2018; <sup>i</sup> Fraser 1998, 2008.



**Inequality is not destiny  
but is largely the result of  
political and policy choices.**

### 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 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. 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. Horizontal inequality refers to social groups as a measure of differentiation,<sup>a</sup> for example, along lines of age, gender, sex, ethnicity, race, religion, disability or geographical location, establishing patterns of exclusion and segmentation.<sup>b</sup> 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.<sup>c</sup>

Income inequality and inequality related to group identity, when intersecting, reinforce each other.<sup>d</sup> 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,<sup>e</sup> and a life course approach showing that inequalities tend to increase over a person's life if no action is taken to reverse them.<sup>f</sup> 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.<sup>g</sup>

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.<sup>h</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Stewart 2013; <sup>b</sup> Therborn 2010; <sup>c</sup> Bourdieu 1979; Foucault 1976; Spicker 2020; Weber 1922; <sup>d</sup> Crenshaw 1991; Kabeer 2014; Stewart 2013; UNRISD 2010; <sup>e</sup> Malhotra and Kabeer 2002; Stewart 2020; UN 2002, 2003, 2013; <sup>f</sup> Cecchini et al. 2015; ISSA 2019; UN 2003; <sup>g</sup> see, for example, Amable et al. (2019) and Folbre (2020); <sup>h</sup> UNRISD 2016.

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 (box 1.4).

By providing in-depth analysis of inequality in its various forms, policy recommendations supported by data and 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 links to asymmetric power structures and political inequalities (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);

- presenting 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 based on 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, putting social and environmental goals of equity and sustainability above economic objectives of profit maximization and efficiency.

Source: UNRISD 2016: ch. 1.



## Report key messages

ONE

**Our world is in a state of fracture, confronted with severe crises, increasing inequalities and unraveling 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.

●○○○○

TWO

**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.

○●○○○

THREE

**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, on the other hand, can largely shield themselves from adverse impacts of crises and often even exploit crises for their own gain.

○○●○○

FOUR

**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 solidarities.

○○○●○

FIVE

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.

○○○○●



**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.**

## 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.<sup>39</sup>

We therefore understand these problems as inevitable outcomes of a system in which profit is exploited and extracted from every possible source until resources are 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.<sup>40</sup> For example, the changing world of work is driven by several trends such as globalization, technological progress—in particular digitization and automation (including artificial intelligence)—and demographic change. 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 in positive or negative ways or lead to mitigation of certain effects. Identifying key development trends is important as they indicate processes of long-term change relevant for citizens, workers and business actors. Policy makers must respond to these trends in order to steer them toward desired outcomes, minimizing potentially negative effects.

**In today's era of rentier capitalism, there has been a plunder of the commons. ... In the process, social inequalities have worsened by more than can be measured by monetary incomes.**

– Guy Standing  
Professorial Research Associate,  
SOAS University of London



## 2.1 Globalization

Globalization in the age of neoliberalism, starting in the late 1970s/early 1980s, was a process of accelerated global integration fueled by technological innovation, enabled by free-market policies and dominated by profit-maximizing private corporations. Reductions in restrictions on trade and finance that had characterized the preceding phase of globalization in the post-war era led to growing trade integration and global financial flows as well as foreign direct investment (FDI) and production relocation.<sup>41</sup> 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.

Neoliberal globalization is often praised for its positive development impacts in terms of greater efficiency, productivity, growth and poverty reduction.<sup>42</sup> 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;<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup> 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 and the entry of China and the countries of the Former Soviet Union (FSU) into the global economy have led to an ever more interconnected world and increases in cross-national flows of information, goods, capital and people.<sup>45</sup>

On the other hand, outcomes of the most recent period of neoliberal globalization have been highly unequal in the distribution of profits, costs and

risks. This is both a reflection of market outcomes and the policies and institutions chosen to govern global integration. 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 (see chapter 3).<sup>46</sup> As market distribution becomes more unequal, policies are less effective in producing egalitarian outcomes. 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, a period of slower and more regulated global integration, that preceded the neoliberal era. This period was characterized by higher market regulation and 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 chapters 2 and 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. It also needs to be viewed in a broader historical context of previous phases of globalization or de-globalization, as well as historical drivers of inequalities such as colonialism and imperialism. 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>47</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.<sup>48</sup> 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



## Social contracts did not simply fall victim to an agentless globalization process but were actively dismantled by neoliberal reforms.

slower than profits during a recession. As explored in greater detail in chapter 2, these negative results of increasing economic inequality can be associated with the neoliberal turn in economic and social policies and the concentration of elite power (see chapter 3),<sup>49</sup> 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<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup>

Growth of national income or GDP during globalization has been uneven among countries and over time,<sup>52</sup> with a few large developing countries such as China sustaining high growth over several

decades contributing to overall North–South convergence (see chapter 3).<sup>53</sup> 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;<sup>54</sup> sub-Saharan Africa in particular, but also much of Latin America as well as Eastern Europe and the 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<sup>55</sup> and the FSU in the 1990s after the transition to a market economy.

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 estimates<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup>

Another feature of the post-industrialist global economy, financialization, introduced a new logic into global markets,<sup>58</sup> 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.<sup>59</sup> 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<sup>60</sup> and is closely associated with the rise in economic inequality and crises with which this report is concerned (see chapters 2 and 3).<sup>61</sup> 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. On the other hand, 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.<sup>62</sup>

Problems associated with neoliberal globalization, which regularly provoke protests accompanied by alternative visions of “globalization from below” by antiglobalization and alterglobalization movements in different places in the world (see chapter 2),<sup>63</sup> have intensified in recent years for several reasons. For one, global financial and economic crises such as the 2008 crisis and the recent Covid-19 pandemic, both closely associated with neoliberal globalization, 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.<sup>64</sup> In this context, the most recent geopolitical tensions around Russia’s war on Ukraine are likely to have severe implications for the future of globalization,<sup>65</sup> while the consequences for individual countries and economic sectors remain uncertain.

### Box 1.5 Hyperglobalization

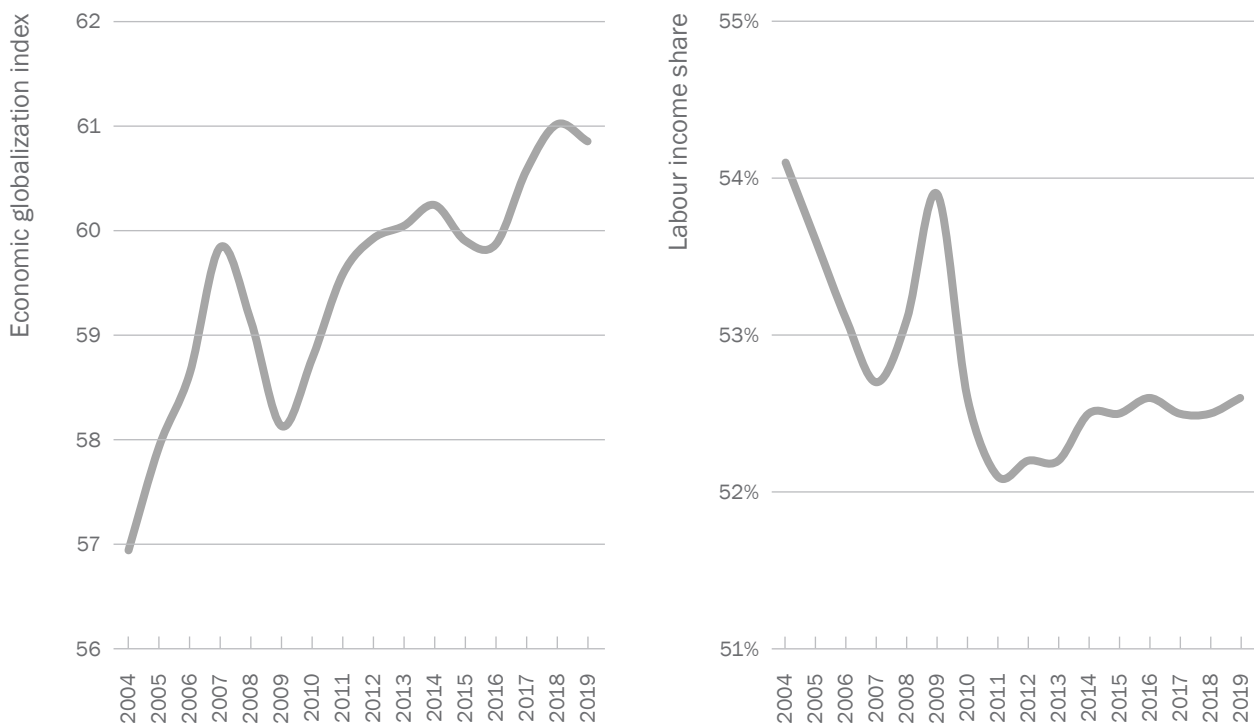
Hyperglobalization is characterized by the dominance of private finance and large corporations engaging in rent-seeking activities, and an ideology motivated by neoliberalism. Hyperglobalization is associated with rising inequalities, extreme levels of debt, heightened insecurity and stalling levels of investment and structural change.<sup>a</sup> 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 of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, with wide-ranging implications for domestic health and safety rules, subsidies and industrial policies.<sup>b</sup> 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 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.<sup>c</sup> Global trade openness decreased after the Great Recession in 2008 but reached pre-crisis levels in 2018. GVC activity has also declined since 2008, leading some scholars to limit the definition of hyperglobalization to the period from 1986 to 2008.<sup>d</sup> This report, however, applies the term beyond the 2008 crisis, as global and national governance mechanisms and incentives for hyperglobalization remain in place, despite periodic disruptions due to economic, health and geopolitical crises.

<sup>a</sup> UNCTAD 2020; <sup>b</sup> Rodrik 2016; <sup>c</sup> UNCTAD 2018a; <sup>d</sup> Antràs 2020.

**Current discourse with respect to SDG 10 largely focuses on those who are excluded, marginalized and living below the poverty line. ... In contrast, little attention is given to the top of the distribution: the rich and powerful.**

– *Sakiko Fukuda-Parr*  
Professor, The New School



**Figure 1.1 Economic globalization and labour income share, 2004–2019**

Sources: Economic Globalization Index based on Gygli et al. 2019. Labour income share based on ILO 2022b.

Notes: Economic globalization uses the KOF Economic Globalization index (index KOFEGldf) 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 in GDP is the ratio, in percentage, between total labour income and gross domestic product. The time range does not represent the entire period of globalization and was chosen with regard to data availability.



## 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.<sup>66</sup> 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 SDGs (SDG 17), with positive contributions across all goals, for example, for realizing goals related to hunger through agricultural improvements, health service innovations, digitalization of education services or decentralized renewable energy.<sup>67</sup> 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 led to gaps in workers' rights and social protection coverage of platform workers<sup>68</sup> and prompted business actors to demand a new division of labour between states and markets, where the state would assume responsibilities for social protection of an increasingly flexible and short-term workforce having multiple employers or self-employed status (see chapter 4). While

business is pushing for further flexibilization and deregulation of labour markets to increase their profits, governments and private service providers are 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,<sup>69</sup> and has been associated with the accelerated pace in global trade and financial markets.<sup>70</sup> 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 immensely impacting 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 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,<sup>71</sup> 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 (see chapter 3).<sup>72</sup> Technological change has been identified as one of the key drivers of rising income inequality within both developed and developing countries

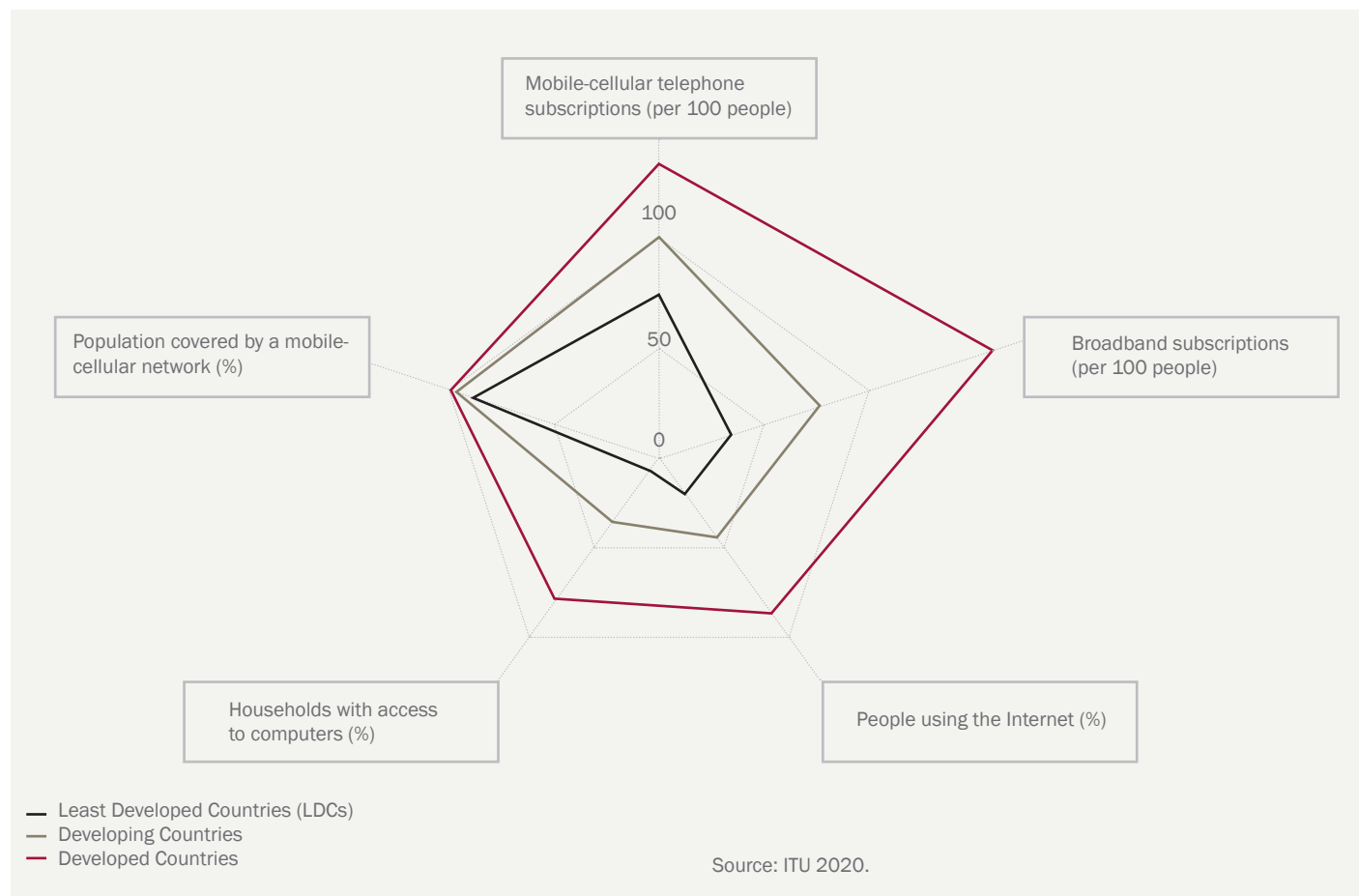
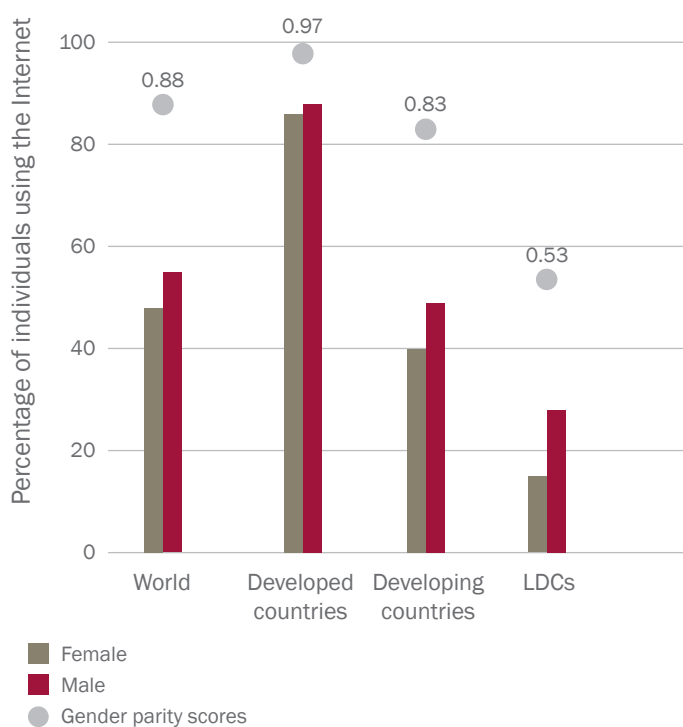
through channels such as skills premium and capital intensity of production, both favouring the upper part of the income distribution.<sup>73</sup>

Digitalization and automation are expected to create positive dividends for growth, jobs and service delivery.<sup>74</sup> Countries in the global South have outpaced global North regions in terms of growth rates of trade in exports of digitally deliverable services,<sup>75</sup> 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.<sup>76</sup> This concern is echoed by UN Secretary-General Guterres in his preface to a recent UNCTAD (2021:IV) report:

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.

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.<sup>77</sup>

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, in particular in least-developed countries (figure 1.3),<sup>78</sup> while many children do not have access to devices, and older persons often lack digital literacy. Finally, concerns are growing that governments might use

**Figure 1.2 ICT indicators by level of development, 2020 or most recent available year****Figure 1.3 Gender gap in Internet use by level of development, 2019**

digital technologies and surveillance mechanisms introduced in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic or before to control access to information, undermine political opposition or restrict civic space (chapter 2). Private ICT companies have furthermore been accused of digital colonialism because of their aggressive data extraction methods in the global South, for example in Africa, as well as their neglect of data privacy and user protection regulations.<sup>79</sup> This illustrates that technological progress without appropriate legal and policy frameworks is likely to produce undesired outcomes and deepen inequalities.

Source (figure 1.3): ITU 2020. Gender parity scores calculated by report team. 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.<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup> 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<sup>82</sup> 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.<sup>83</sup> 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 (see Spotlight by James Heintz; figure 1.4).<sup>84</sup>

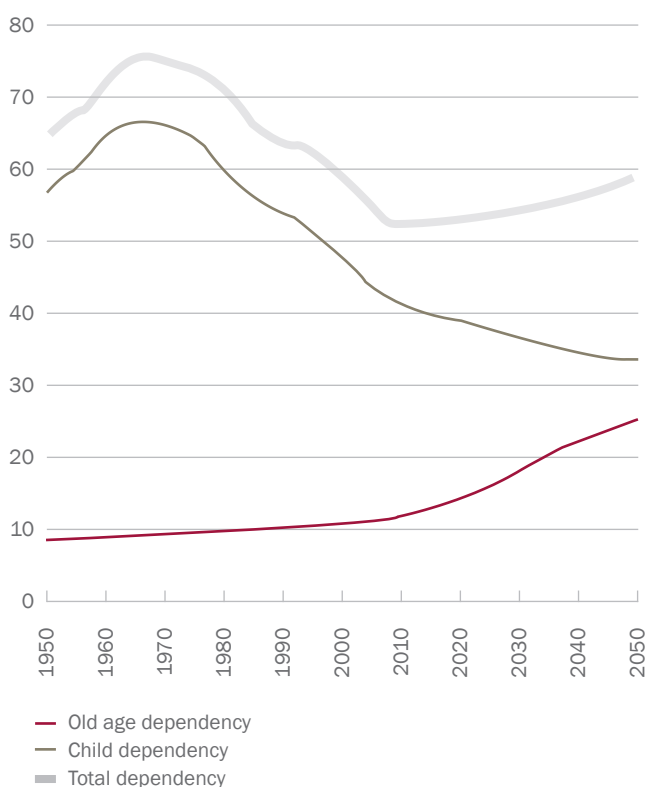
While demographic change such as ageing is a predictable process, it can be affected by unexpected and unpredictable events such as pandemics, natural disasters, wars or large migration or refugee movements.<sup>85</sup> The pace of and advancement in the process of population ageing and the stage of an individual country in the demographic transition,<sup>86</sup> 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,<sup>87</sup> and labour market reforms targeted at either increasing retention rates and life-long learning for the older workforce, facilitating labour migration, or improving labour market conditions and education for both older and younger persons.<sup>88</sup>

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, with many Least Developed Countries (LDCs) estimated to double their population between 2022 and 2050.<sup>89</sup> 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 and 10.4 billion in 2100.<sup>90</sup> Global population growth is expected to create challenges for SDG achievement, though it also offers a potential demographic dividend, understood as opportunities arising from improving dependency ratios due to increasing working-age populations and declining fertility rates.<sup>91</sup>

Ageing impacts inequalities and the social contract: more national resources are needed to avoid old-age poverty and protect the human rights of older adults, 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 and providing job opportunities for young people).

Inequalities accumulate over the life course, leading to increased gaps and reduced life chances 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, while women and girls are delivering the bulk of unpaid care work globally (three times as much as men), age can be an additional discriminating factor, with older women taking on a disproportionate amount of unpaid care work in households compared to older men,<sup>92</sup> often the result of an accumulation of “a lifetime of gender inequalities” undermining older women’s choices and well-being.<sup>93</sup> In the same vein, undocumented migrant women workers often lack social protection and income as they have not accumulated entitlements for pensions or health care due to their (irregular or undocumented) migration status, their lack of a formal employment relation and periods spent on family care work (see chapter 3).

**Figure 1.4 Global dependency ratios, 1950–2050**



Source: UN DESA 2019b.

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). Figures from 2019 onwards are projections.



## 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 (figure 1.6).<sup>94</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.<sup>95</sup> Human mobility continues to be predominantly regional, in particular regarding forced displacement. In sub-Saharan Africa, intra-regional 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).<sup>96</sup>

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.<sup>97</sup> 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>98</sup> 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 (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.<sup>99</sup>

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.<sup>100</sup> Migration has important influences on development, with positive and negative impacts on its economic, social and environmental dimensions.<sup>101</sup> Remittance flows have far exceeded official development assistance and are approaching the level of FDI flows,<sup>102</sup> 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, also exposing them to greater risks, as seen during the Covid-19 pandemic (see Spotlight by Naila Kabeer). Diaspora communities have evolved into important transnational development actors.<sup>103</sup> And migration is one way of adapting to the adverse impacts of climate change,<sup>104</sup> 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).<sup>105</sup> Scholarship that highlights the positive development effects of migration associates migration with economic 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.<sup>106</sup>



**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.**

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<sup>107</sup> and research finds positive impacts of remittances on inequality in Mexico.<sup>108</sup> 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,<sup>109</sup> it can both create new inequalities and exacerbate existing ones, in particular horizontal inequalities between groups,<sup>110</sup> but also vertical inequalities between individuals or income classes such as income concentration at the top.<sup>111</sup> 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, for example, when networks have developed.<sup>112</sup>

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.<sup>113</sup> The dramatic resurgence of displacement over the last few years, particularly as a result of (internationalized) civil wars, has caused immense human suffering.<sup>114</sup> Forced displacement—combining IDPs and refugees—reached 80 million people in 2020,<sup>115</sup> with low- and middle-income countries hosting over 80 percent of the world's refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>116</sup> 2020 saw the highest absolute number of refugees, 24.5 million, on record,<sup>117</sup> and IDPs also increased significantly, reaching 55 million.<sup>118</sup> The recent Russia–Ukraine war has already resulted in over 6.8 million Ukrainian citizens and other residents fleeing the country.<sup>119</sup> Violent conflicts continue to be complex and protracted, involving non-state groups and regional and international actors.<sup>120</sup>

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.<sup>121</sup> 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 some affected communities who do not want to be seen as climate refugees.<sup>122</sup>

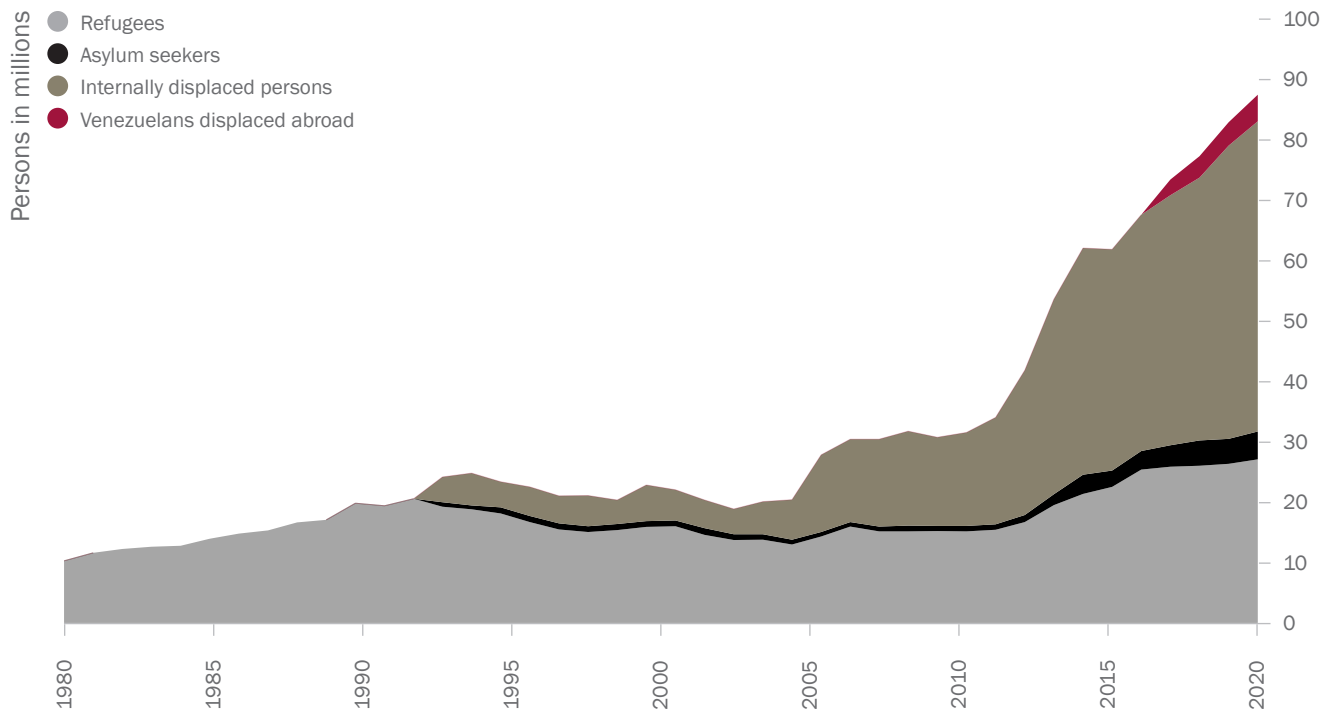
International migrants and refugees, as well as internal migrants in some countries such as India and China (where social and political rights are tied to the usual place of residence or community of origin), are rarely fully integrated into national social contracts. As such they have limited access 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.<sup>123</sup> 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 though 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.<sup>124</sup> 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,<sup>125</sup> 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.<sup>126</sup> However, this approach is at odds with empirical evidence that shows increasing incomes are associated with more mobility.<sup>127</sup> 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.<sup>128</sup>

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. Racialized borders and bordering practices through restrictive migration policies and welfare institutions creating boundaries of inclusion and exclusion from social rights have dehumanizing effects.<sup>129</sup> But even more moderate political forces are increasingly expressing concerns

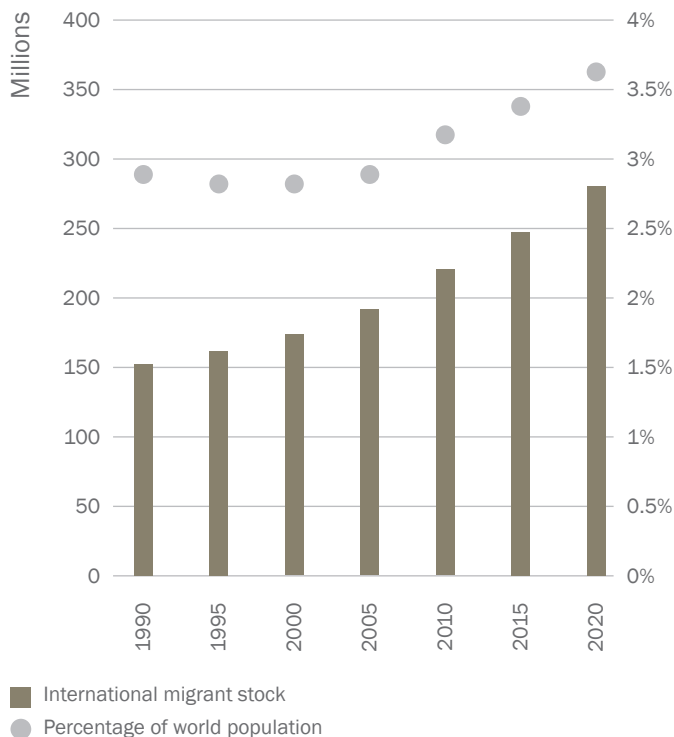
**Figure 1.5. Forcibly displaced people worldwide, 1980–2021**



Source: UNHCR 2022b.

Notes: Data on IDPs has only been recorded since 1989. Refugees includes Palestine refugees under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The category of Venezuelans displaced abroad was established by UNHCR as they are likely to need international protection but have not applied for asylum yet in the country of destination.

**Figure 1.6 International migrant stock and its percentage of world population, 1990–2020**



Sources: UN DESA 2020e; World Bank 2022.

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.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, increased security concerns in the wake of international conflicts and terrorism have reinforced the securitization approach to migration governance,<sup>131</sup> 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.

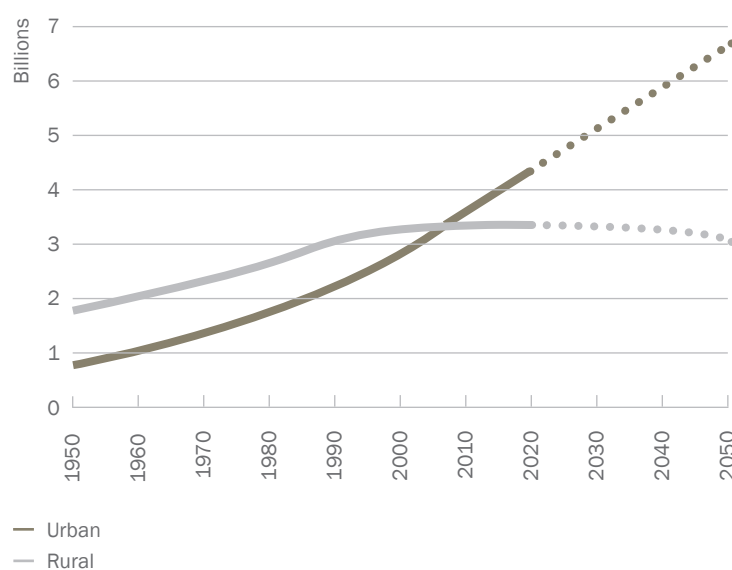


## 2.5 Urbanization

The concentration of human populations in 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 development. 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.<sup>132</sup> Since the middle of the twentieth century, this process has been accelerating, in many ways faster than our cities can keep up with, while in many countries the national economy has not been able to absorb surplus labour into formal wage labour, resulting in increasing informal urban economies. 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, reflecting broader challenges associated with rural livelihoods such as land inequality (see chapter 3)<sup>133</sup> and lack of infrastructure and services. Between 1950 and 2020, the proportion of the global population living in cities went from 29 percent to over 56 percent (see figure 1.7).<sup>134</sup> That share is projected to increase to over 60 percent by 2030<sup>135</sup> and to 68 percent by 2050.<sup>136</sup> 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.<sup>137</sup> However, close to 90 percent of the urbanization projected to occur over the next 30 years is expected take place in Asia and Africa.<sup>138</sup> The extreme growth rate in the developing world (in Africa the rate of urban growth is 11 times greater than in Europe)<sup>139</sup> indicates a shifting centre of gravity of urbanization, and with it urban economic weight, which will have significant human development and global economic impacts.<sup>140</sup>

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.<sup>141</sup> Indeed, more than 80 percent of global GDP is generated in urban centres.<sup>142</sup> Cities are also hugely important for national economies, increasing national GDP while facilitating stronger institutions and resilience to global economic shocks.<sup>143</sup> 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.<sup>144</sup> 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

**Figure 1.7 Growth of urban population, 1950–2050**



Source: UN DESA 2019c.

tend to lead to greater economic independence for women.<sup>145</sup> 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).<sup>146</sup> 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).<sup>147</sup>

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.<sup>148</sup> 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.<sup>149</sup>

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.<sup>150</sup> 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 or essential public services 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).<sup>151</sup> It is the most vulnerable citizens who face a disproportionate level of climate-related risk (see box 2.1).<sup>152</sup> Currently, 80 percent of the population living in LECZs are in developing countries,<sup>153</sup> and four out of every 10 non-permanent households in the developing world are at risk of environmental disasters such as landslides and floods.<sup>154</sup>

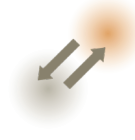
The pressure urbanization puts on our environment is considerable. Cities generate 70 percent of global carbon emissions and consume two-thirds of the world's energy.<sup>155</sup> While concentration of populations can lead to more efficient use of resources, if unplanned it can lead to greater use 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.<sup>156</sup> 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.<sup>157</sup>

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.<sup>158</sup> 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.<sup>159</sup> 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 Spotlight by Jailson de Souza e Silva).<sup>160</sup> 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.<sup>161</sup>

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.<sup>162</sup> Ultimately, urbanization has many potential human and environmental benefits; however, the current model is unsustainable and compounds injustice and inequality.



## 2.6 Shifting global powers

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, 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.<sup>163</sup> 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."<sup>164</sup>

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 FSU. This reinforced the geopolitical power of the West, "removed the East-West bargaining chip, and appeared to justify anti-statist and anti-Keynesian policy positions."<sup>165</sup> US hegemony entered a new phase with the declaration of a US-led global War on Terror after the 9/11 Al-Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001. This ushered in two decades of (increasingly technologically-driven) securitization and militarization approaches dominating international (and domestic) affairs, with "politics of borders" manifesting in a proliferation

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

	GDP		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 2022.

Note: GDP measured in current USD.

of walls and fences worldwide in a context of increasing xenophobia and anti-immigration.<sup>166</sup> These developments, in combination with US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as numerous counterterrorism military operations, led to major destruction of lives, livelihoods and infrastructure and at times intensification of local conflicts.<sup>167</sup>

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,<sup>168</sup> 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 (table 1.1), but also in ideational and epistemological shifts captured by terms such as decolonizing and decentring knowledge and politics or shifting the geopolitics of knowledge.<sup>169</sup> 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 are decolonial reflections on the Covid-19 crisis.<sup>170</sup> Increasing South–South

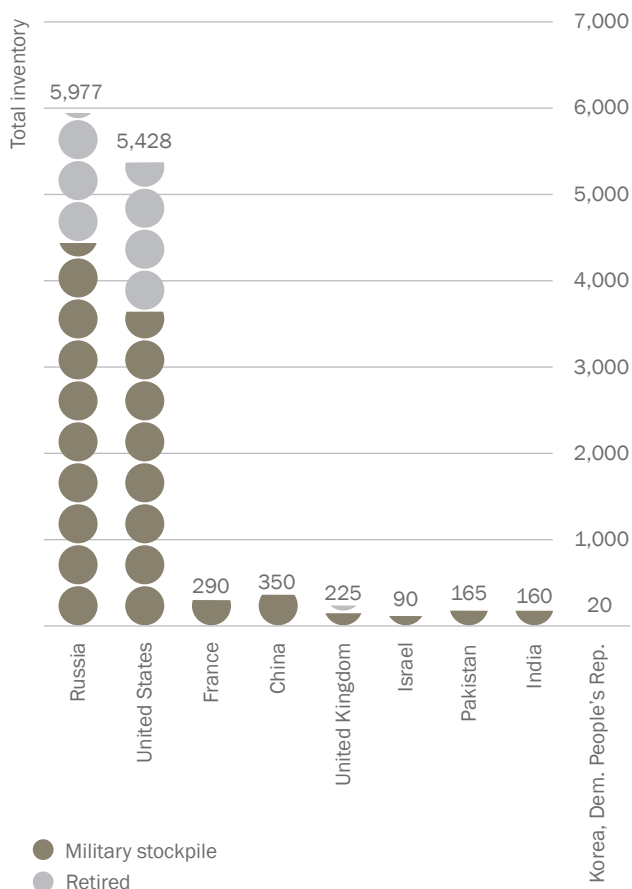
cooperation is also highly relevant, supported in the United Nations through the UN Office for South–South Cooperation (UNOSSC).<sup>171</sup>

Aiming to measure countries' international weight, Derviş (2018) identifies three criteria: the size of the population; the size of the economy, measured by GDP; and military power, measured by defence expenditure. If all three metrics are considered to be 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).<sup>172</sup> When focusing on economic activity from a geographical perspective, it becomes clear that the global economy's centre of gravity<sup>173</sup>—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.

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 high relevance since tensions emerged between the United States, the European Union, Germany, Ukraine and Russia over the Nordstream 2 gas pipeline<sup>174</sup> and recently 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.<sup>175</sup> Interestingly, all five permanent members of the security council are also the world's largest nuclear powers, with Russia and the United States possessing around 20 times more nuclear warheads than the others combined (figure 1.8).

**Figure 1.8 World nuclear forces in 2022  
(inventory of nuclear weapons)**



Source: Kristensen and Korda 2022.

Notes: Last updated February 2022. Total inventory includes warheads in the military stockpile as well as retired but still intact warheads in the queue for dismantlement.

Power is about interactions and relationships, and leaders' ability to use resources and skills to achieve intended results through interaction with others.<sup>176</sup> 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.<sup>177</sup>

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,<sup>178</sup> analysts tend to agree that no other power will be able to take up the role anytime soon.<sup>179</sup> The United States is still considered ahead of China,<sup>180</sup> despite China's efforts in vaccine diplomacy during the Covid-19 pandemic and infrastructure development in the global South in the context of its Road and Belt Initiative.<sup>181</sup> 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<sup>182</sup> 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. A range of factors is already undermining multilateralism, for example, postcolonial backlash against Western dominance, populism emerging in several countries and eroding liberal values multilateral institutions are founded upon, nationalist leaders contesting and withdrawing from multilateral institutions and international treaties (including Western leaders), stalling trade negotiations of the WTO Doha round, the dismantling of the Iran nuclear deal, chronic lack of financial resources, inefficient decision-making processes and power asymmetries (see chapter 5).<sup>183</sup> The question then emerges whether the hypothesis on the adaptability and durability of multilateral arrangements still holds,<sup>184</sup> and which measures need to be adopted to increase the problem-solving capacity of multilateralism in a time when international collaboration to address global challenges is needed more than ever before (see chapter 5).<sup>185</sup>

Regarding the potential implications of power shifts for the global South, perspectives from the global South are revealing. Some 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.<sup>186</sup> 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.<sup>187</sup> 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 and fertilizer price hikes; and worsen the widening post-pandemic debt crisis that affects an increasing number of developing countries (chapter 2). It could also result in aggressive competition between Russia and Western countries to gain political and economic allies in the global South,<sup>188</sup> prompting some scholars to call for a new non-aligned movement of developing countries.<sup>189</sup>

Global long-term trends such as globalization, technological progress, demographic change and shifts in geopolitical power dynamics have profound impacts on development. Whether positive opportunities associated with trends can be harnessed to realize the SDGs and benefit more people depends on the policies chosen to govern them. The following chapters analyse how crises and inequalities are interlinked with global trends and the dominant policy approaches that have shaped them, which has resulted in unraveling social contracts and growing divides and fractures. The report will also provide positive policy examples and proposals on how to govern global trends in the interest of sustainable development, peace and human rights.

### 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

**Against a global backdrop of growing inequality, increased polarization and rising right-wing populism, understanding how governments and elites maintain their hold on the public is crucial to address the power gap in society.**

– Anya Schiffrin  
Professor, Senior Lecturer,  
Columbia University

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 – Toward 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 for 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? Ignis audit



# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Oxfam 2022.
- <sup>2</sup> UN 2021a.
- <sup>3</sup> UN 2015.
- <sup>4</sup> UN DESA 2017; UNDP 2019.
- <sup>5</sup> Credit Suisse 2021; Oxfam 2018.
- <sup>6</sup> Oxfam 2022.
- <sup>7</sup> ILO 2019.
- <sup>8</sup> WIL 2022: ch. 3.
- <sup>9</sup> UN DESA 2020a.
- <sup>10</sup> Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012; Lupu and Warner 2022.
- <sup>11</sup> UNCTAD 2020.
- <sup>12</sup> Decreasing union membership density concerns mainly wage and salary earners, whereas union membership of own-account workers has increased since 2009 (ILO 2022a); Gernignon et al. 2000.
- <sup>13</sup> Hujo and Carter 2019; Oxfam 2021.
- <sup>14</sup> UN 2021a.
- <sup>15</sup> Radačić and Facio 2020; Roggeband and Krizsán 2020.
- <sup>16</sup> Hujo 2020; Ortiz et al. 2020.
- <sup>17</sup> Dasgupta 2021; IPCC 2018, 2021; UNDP 2020.
- <sup>18</sup> UN DESA 2020b.
- <sup>19</sup> IDMC 2021.
- <sup>20</sup> UNEP 2020.
- <sup>21</sup> Oxfam 2022.
- <sup>22</sup> UN 2021a.
- <sup>23</sup> Sachs et al. 2020.
- <sup>24</sup> Dasgupta 2021.
- <sup>25</sup> Oxfam 2021, 2022.
- <sup>26</sup> UN 2021a.
- <sup>27</sup> FAO et al. 2020.
- <sup>28</sup> Steward 2013, 2016.
- <sup>29</sup> UNRISD 2010.
- <sup>30</sup> Fraser 2016; Mazzucato 2017; Razavi 2007.
- <sup>31</sup> Roman-Alcalá 2022.
- <sup>32</sup> See, for example, Berg and Ostry (2011), Chancel (2017), Dorling (2019), ISSC et al. (2016), Mounk (2018), Stiglitz (2012), Therborn (2013), UNDP (2019), UNRISD (2010) and Wilkinson and Pickett (2009).
- <sup>33</sup> Oxfam 2022.
- <sup>34</sup> Kwame Sundaram and Popov 2022.
- <sup>35</sup> World Bank 2006.
- <sup>36</sup> Commission on Social Justice 1993; Kwame Sundaram and Popov 2022.
- <sup>37</sup> Hujo and Carter 2022.
- <sup>38</sup> See, for example, Ortiz et al. (2022), Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies (2021) and Roman-Alcalá (2022).
- <sup>39</sup> Standing 2019.
- <sup>40</sup> UN 2020.
- <sup>41</sup> OECD 2011.
- <sup>42</sup> Dollar and Kraay 2002; Ortiz-Ospina 2017.
- <sup>43</sup> Subramanian and Kessler 2013.

- UN DESA 2017.
- Despite an increasingly interconnected world, asymmetries in the treatment of flows of goods and capital and movement of people are staggering: migration flows have not increased to the same extent as trade and finance in the contemporary globalization period, and restrictions are particularly strong for low-skilled workers from low-income countries (see section 2.4; Quiggin 2005); Independent Group 2019.
- UNRISD 1995.
- See, for example, the contested interpretation of the Asian miracle as being the result of market-liberal approaches and low investment in social policies; Kwame Sundaram and Popov 2022; Yi and Mkandawire 2014.
- UNRISD 1995.
- Rising inequality during this period does not necessarily indicate a correlation with globalization or trade liberalization. Jaumotte et al. (2013) identify a positive link between financial globalization, technological change and FDI, and rising inequalities, but not regarding trade liberalization.
- Williamson 1990.
- Meagher 2022.
- Kwame Sundaram and Popov 2022.
- Horner and Hulme 2019; Milanovic 2016; Nayyar 2013; Sumner 2019.
- Popov and Kwame Sundaram 2017.
- Ocampo et al. 2007.
- OECD 2018a.
- Huwart and Verdier 2013.
- Epstein 2005; Hujo and Lupo 2022.
- Mazzucato 2018.
- Gowan 2009.
- See, for example, Jaumotte et al. (2013).
- Huber et al. 2020.
- See, for example, Inda et al. (2002) and de Sousa Santos and Rodríguez-Garavito (2005).
- Antràs 2020.
- Wong and Swanson 2022.
- Stewart 2020.
- Earth Institute and Ericsson 2016; Herweijer 2019.
- Mexi 2020.
- Castells 1996.
- Rodrik 2011; UNCTAD 2018a.
- Earth Institute and Ericsson 2016.
- Bourguignon 2017.
- Jaumotte et al. 2013; OECD 2011.
- World Bank 2016.
- UNCTAD 2021.
- World Bank 2016.
- Maihack and Oehm 2020.
- ECLAC 2021.
- Coleman 2019.
- UNDP et al. 2017.
- UN DESA 2020c.
- Woodall 2021.
- Koehler 2022; Arza 2015.
- Stewart 2020.
- Woodall 2021.
- Grover 2014; UN DESA 2019a.
- Gratton and Scott 2016.
- ISSA 2019; UN DESA 2019a.
- UN DESA 2022.
- UN DESA 2022.
- UN 1987; UN DESA 2019a.
- Samuels et al. 2018.
- Age International 2021:11.
- 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).
- UN DESA 2020d.
- UNCTAD 2018b.
- UN 2021a; UN DESA 2020d.
- Ratha et al. 2021.
- Carling 2002.
- De Haas 2010.
- Bastia and Skeldon 2020.
- Ratha et al. 2021.
- Faist 2008.
- Black et al. 2011.
- Hujo 2019; OECD 2017.
- De Haas 2010, 2020; Hujo and Piper 2010.
- Black et al. 2005.
- Kóczán and Loyola 2018.
- Crawley 2018; Crawley et al. 2022.
- Crawley 2018; Stewart 2016.
- Advani et al. 2020.
- Mckenzie and Rapoport 2007.
- Plagerson 2021.
- Palik et al. 2020; UN and World Bank 2018.
- UNHCR 2020.
- UN DESA 2020d.
- UN 2021a.
- IOM 2021.
- UNHCR 2022a.
- Degila 2020.
- Kumari Rigaud et al. 2018.
- El-Hinnawi 1985; Farbotko and Lazrus 2012; Santos and Mourato 2021; UNHCR n.d.
- Stewart 2016.
- Hujo 2019.
- AU 2018.
- European Commission 2018; Kihato 2018; Landau 2018.
- De Haas 2020.

128 Amnesty International 2014; Kmak and Phillips 2022.  
 129 Yuval-Davis et al. 2019; Williams 2021.  
 130 Hagen-Zanker et al. 2017.  
 131 Bello 2020.  
 132 Lewis 1954.  
 133 Anseeuw and Baldinelli 2020.  
 134 UN-Habitat 2016a, 2020; UN DESA 2019c.  
 135 UN-Habitat 2020.  
 136 UN DESA 2019b.  
 137 UN DESA 2019c.  
 138 UN DESA 2019c.  
 139 UN-Habitat 2016a.  
 140 McKinsey Global Institute 2011.  
 141 UN-Habitat 2020.  
 142 UN-Habitat 2020.  
 143 UN-Habitat 2020.  
 144 UNEP 2019.  
 145 UN-Habitat 2016a.  
 146 UN-Habitat 2020.  
 147 UN 2017; UNTFSS 2014; Utting 2018; Yi et al. 2018.  
 148 Atkinson 2020; Forrest et al. 2017; Sassen 2014,  
 2015.  
 149 UN-Habitat 2022.  
 150 UN DESA 2018.  
 151 Merkens et al. 2016.  
 152 Krause 2019; Trans and Krause 2020.  
 153 Neumann et al. 2015.  
 154 UN-Habitat 2006.  
 155 UN-Habitat 2020.  
 156 UN-Habitat 2016b.  
 157 UNEP 2007.  
 158 MacLeavy and Manley 2022.  
 159 Atkinson 2020; Stein 2019.  
 160 See, for example, Rothstein (2017).  
 161 Marcuse and Madden 2016; OECD 2018b.  
 162 See, for example, Bagaeen and Uduku (2015), Blakely  
 and Snyder (1997), Blandy (2007), Borsdorf and  
 Hidalgo (2008), Caldeira (2000) and UN-Habitat  
 (2009).  
 163 Kennedy 1987; McCoy et al. 2012.  
 164 Bangura 2022:3.  
 165 Koehler 2015:740.  
 166 Longo 2018.  
 167 UNHCHR states that counter-terrorism interventions  
 have often violated human rights, for example through  
 the use of torture and violation of the principle of  
 non-refoulement. They have also undermined the  
 independence of the judiciary, stifled civil society  
 voices and diverted fiscal resources that are urgently  
 needed for implementing social rights through public  
 investments towards security and military spending  
 (UNHCHR 2008), a policy choice that has once more  
 gained currency in response to the recent geopolitical  
 tensions with Russia; Savell 2021.

168 Foot and Walter 2011.  
 169 Reiter 2018; see also de Sousa Santos and Meneses  
 (2020) and Hormeku-Ajei et al. (2022).  
 170 Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020; Ghannam et al. 2020.  
 171 UN 2022.  
 172 Derviş 2018.  
 173 Quah 2011.  
 174 Harper 2021.  
 175 World Population Review 2022.  
 176 Smith 2012.  
 177 See Layne (2012) on the benefits associated with the  
 liberal orders of Pax Britannica and Pax Americana.  
 178 Bello 2022.  
 179 Derviş 2018.  
 180 Silver et al. 2020.  
 181 Nye 2022.  
 182 Kennedy 1987; McCoy et al. 2012.  
 183 Eggel and Galvin 2020.  
 184 Ruggie 1992.  
 185 UN 2021b.  
 186 Bello 2022.  
 187 Bello 2022.  
 188 Bangura 2022.  
 189 Chowdhury and Kwame Sundaram 2022.

# References

- Advani, Arun, Felix Koenig, Lorenzo Pessina and Andy Summers. 2020. *Importing Inequality: Migration, Mobility, and the Top 1 Percent*. CAGE Working Paper no. 508. Coventry: University of Warwick.
- Age International. 2021. *Older Women: The Hidden Workforce*. London: Age International.
- Amable, Bruno, Aidan Regan, Sabina Avdagic, Lucio Baccaro, Jonas Pontusson and Natascha Van der Zwan. 2019. "Discussion Forum: New Approaches to Political Economy." *Socio-Economic Review*, 17(2):433–459.
- Amnesty International. 2014. *The Human Cost of Fortress Europe: Human Rights Violations Against Migrants and Refugees at Europe's Borders*. London: Amnesty International.
- Anseeuw, Ward and Giulia Maria Baldinelli. 2020. *Uneven ground: Land inequality at the heart of unequal societies*. Synthesis Report. Rome: International Land Coalition and Oxfam.
- Antràs, Pol. 2020. *De-Globalisation? Global Value Chains in The Post-Covid-19 Age*. NBER Working Paper no. 28115. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Arza, Camila. 2015. *The Gender Dimensions of Pension Systems: Policies and Constraints for the Protection of Older Women*. UN Women Discussion Paper. New York: UN Women.
- Atkinson, Rowland. 2020. *Alpha City: How London Was Captured by the Super-Rich*. London: Verso.
- AU (African Union). 2018. *Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action (2018–2030)*. Addis Ababa: African Union Commission.
- Bagaeen, Samer and Ola Uduku (eds.). 2015. *Beyond Gated Communities*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Bangura, Yusuf. 2022. "Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: What Does It Mean for Africa?" *CODESRIA Bulletin*, no. 2. Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa.
- Bartels, Larry M. 2008. *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Bastia, Tanja and Ronald Skeldon (eds.). 2020. *Routledge Handbook of Migration and Development*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Beitz, Charles R. 2005. "Cosmopolitanism and Global Justice." *The Journal of Ethics*, 9(1/2):11–27.
- Bello, Valeria. 2020. "The Spiralling of the Securitisation of Migration in the EU: From the Management of a 'Crisis' to a Governance of Human Mobility?" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48(6):1327–1344.
- Bello, Walden. 2022. "Bin Laden, Trump, and the American Empire." *Common Dreams*, 13 January. <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2022/01/13/bin-laden-trump-and-american-empire>.
- Berg, Andrew G. and Jonathan D. Ostry. 2011. *Inequality and Unsustainable Growth: Two Sides of the Same Coin?* IMF Staff Discussion Note no. 8. Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund.
- Biermann, Frank and Agni Kalfagianni. 2020. "Planetary Justice: A Research Framework." *Earth System Governance*, 6:100049.
- Black, Richard, Stephen R. G. Bennett, Sandy M. Thomas and John R. Beddington. 2011. "Migration as Adaptation." *Nature*, 478(7370):447–449.
- Black, Richard, Claudia Natali and Jessica Skinner. 2005. *Migration and Inequality*. Background paper prepared for the World Development Report 2006 on Equity and Development. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Blakely, Edward J. and Mary Gail Snyder. 1997. *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Blandy, Sarah. 2007. "Gated Communities in England as a Response to Crime and Disorder: Context, Effectiveness and Implications." *People, Place & Policy Online*, 1(2):47–54.
- Borsdorf, Axel and Rodrigo Hidalgo. 2008. "New Dimensions of Social Exclusion in Latin America: From Gated Communities to Gated Cities, the Case of Santiago de Chile." *Land Use Policy*, 25(2):153–160.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1979. *La distinction: Critique sociale du jugement*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.
- Bourguignon, François. 2017. "World Changes in Inequality: An Overview of Facts, Causes, Consequences and Policies". BIS Working Papers no. 654. Basel: Bank for International Settlement.
- Caldeira, Teresa Pires do Rio. 2000. *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Canterbury, Dennis C. 2021. *Transformative Social Policy in the New Multipolar World Order: Fresh Vistas for Africa's Development*. Paper prepared for the 2021 Social Policy in Africa Conference, November 2021. Pretoria: University of South Africa; Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa; Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
- Carling, Jørgen. 2002. "Migration in the Age of Involuntary Immobility: Theoretical Reflections and Cape Verdean Experiences." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28(1):5–42.
- Castells, Manuel. 1996. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Cecchini, Simone, Fernando Filgueira, Rodrigo Martínez, Cecilia Rossel Odriozola and Cecilia Rossel (eds.). 2015. *Towards Universal Social Protection: Latin American Pathways and Policy Tools*. ECLAC Books 136. Santiago: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Chancel, Lucas. 2017. *Insoutenables inégalités: pour une justice sociale et environnementale*. Paris: Les Petits Matins.
- Chowdhury, Anis and Jomo Kwame Sundaram. 2022. "China Debt Traps in the New Cold War." *IPS News Agency*, 12 April. <https://www.ipsnews.net/2022/04/china-debt-traps-new-cold-war/>.
- Coleman, Danielle. 2019. "Digital Colonialism: The 21st Century Scramble for Africa through the Extraction and Control of User Data and the Limitations of Data Protection Laws." *Michigan Journal of Race and Law*, 24(2):417–439.

- Commission on Social Justice. 1993. *The Justice Gap*. London: Institute for Public Policy Research.
- Crawley, Heaven. 2018. "Why Understanding the Relationship between Migration and Inequality May Be the Key to Africa's Development." *Development Matters*, 30 October. <https://oecd-development-matters.org/2018/10/30/why-understanding-the-relationship-between-migration-and-inequality-may-be-the-key-to-africas-development/>.
- Crawley, Heaven, Faisal Garba and Francis Nyamnjoh. "Migration and (In)Equality in the Global South: Intersections, Contestations and Possibilities: Editorial Introduction." *Zanj: The Journal of Critical Global South Studies*, 5(1/2):1–13.
- Credit Suisse. 2021. *Global Wealth Report 2021*. Zurich: Credit Suisse AG, Research Institute.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*, 43:1241–1299.
- Dasgupta, Partha. 2021. *The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review*. London: HM Treasury.
- Degila, Dêlidi Eric. 2020. "The Hybridization of Security Challenges in Contemporary Africa." In *Global Terrorism Index 2020: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*, 80–83. Sydney: Institute for Economics and Peace.
- De Haas, Hein. 2020. "Paradoxes of Migration and Development." In *Routledge Handbook of Migration and Development*, edited by Tanja Bastia and Ronald Skeldon, 17–31. Abingdon: Routledge.
- De Haas, Hein. 2010. "Migration and Development: A Theoretical Perspective." *The International Migration Review*, 44(1):227–264.
- Derviş, Kemal. 2018. *Global Power Is Shifting. Is It the End of Multilateralism?* Geneva: World Economic Forum.
- de Sousa Santos, Boaventura and Maria Paula Meneses (eds.). 2020. *Knowledges Born in the Struggle: Constructing the Epistemologies of the Global South*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- de Sousa Santos, Boaventura and César A. Rodríguez-Garavito. 2005. "Law, politics, and the subaltern in counter-hegemonic globalization." In *Law and Globalization from Below: Towards a Cosmopolitan Legality*, 1–26. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dollar, David and Aart Kraay. 2002. "Growth Is Good for the Poor." *Journal of Economic Growth*, 7(3):195–225.
- Dorling, Danny. 2019. *Inequality and the 1%*. 2nd edition. London: Verso Books.
- Earth Institute and Ericsson. 2016. *ICT and SDGs: How Information and Communications Technology Can Accelerate Action on the Sustainable Development Goals*. New York: Colombia University.
- ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean). 2021. *The Economic Autonomy of Women in a Sustainable Recovery with Equality*. Special Report Covid-19 no. 9. Santiago: ECLAC.
- Eggel, Dominic and Marc Galvin. 2020. "Multilateralism Is in Crisis – Or Is It?" *Global Governance in Peril – Introduction*. *Global Challenges*, 7:1–5. Geneva: The Graduate Institute.
- El-Hinnawi, Essam. 1985. *Environmental Refugees*. Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme.
- Epstein, Gerald A. 2005. "Introduction: Financialization and the World Economy." In *Financialization and the World Economy*, edited by Gerald A. Epstein, 3–16. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- European Commission. 2018. *Many More to Come? Migration from and within Africa*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Faist, Thomas. 2008. "Migrants as Transnational Development Agents: An Inquiry into the Newest Round of the Migration–Development Nexus." *Population, Place and Space*, 14(1):21–42.
- FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization), IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development), UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), WFP (World Food Programme) and WHO (World Health Organization). 2020. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020: Transforming Food Systems for Affordable Healthy Diets*. Rome: FAO.
- Farbotko, Carol and Heather Lazrus. 2012. "The First Climate Refugees? Contesting Global Narratives of Climate Change in Tuvalu." *Global Environmental Change*, 22(2):382–390.
- Folbre, Nancy. 2020. *The Rise and Decline of Patriarchal Systems: An Intersectional Political Economy*. London: Verso Books.
- Foot, Rosemary and Andrew Walter. 2011. *China, the United States, and Global Order*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Forrest, Ray, Sin Yee Koh and Bart Wissink. 2017. *Cities and the Super-Rich: Real Estate, Elite Practices and Urban Political Economies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Foucault, Michel. 1976. *Histoire de la sexualité: la volonté de savoir*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Fraser, Nancy. 2016. "Contradictions of Capital and Care." *New Left Review*, 100:99–117.
- Fraser, Nancy. 2008. "Abnormal Justice." *Critical Inquiry*, 34(3):393–422.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1998. *Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, Participation*. WZB Discussion Paper, no. FS I 98–108. Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung.
- Ghannam, Omar, Kareem Megahed and Tetteh Hormeku-Ajei. 2020. "Lessons from Africa's past to cope with COVID-19." *Reclaiming Africa's Early Post-Independence History Series - Post-Colonialism Today Project*. *Africa is a Country*, 19 October. <https://africasacountry.com/2020/10/lessons-from-africas-past-to-cope-with-covid-19>.
- Gernigon, Bernard, Alberto Otero and Horacio Guido. 2000. "ILO Principles Concerning Collective Bargaining." *International Labour Review*, 139(1):33–55.
- Gilens, Martin. 2012. *Affluence and Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America*. New York: Russel Sage Foundation and Princeton University Press.
- Gowan, Peter. 2009. "Crisis in the Heartland: Consequences of the New Wall Street System." *New Left Review*, 55:5–29.
- Gratton, Linda and Andrew J Scott. 2016. *The 100-Year Life: Living and Working in an Age of Longevity*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Grover, Drew. 2014. *What Is the Demographic Transition Model?* Demographic Transition Model blog series, 13 October. Washington, DC: Population Education.
- Gygli, Savina, Florian Haelg, Niklas Potrafke and Jan-Egbert Sturm. 2019. "The KOF Globalisation Index–Revisited." *Review of International Organizations*, 14(3):543–574.



- Hagen-Zanker, J., Elisa Mosler Vidal and Georgina Sturge. 2017. *Social Protection, Migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. ODI Briefing paper. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Harper, Jo. 2021. "Nord Stream 2: Who Wins, Who Loses?" *DW*, 23 December. <https://www.dw.com/en/nord-stream-2-who-wins-who-loses/a-60223801>.
- Herweijer, Celine. 2019. *How Technology Can Fast-Track the Global Goals*. Geneva: World Economic Forum.
- Hickey, Sam. 2011. "The Politics of Social Protection: What Do We Get from a 'Social Contract' Approach?" *Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue canadienne d'études du développement*, 32(4):426–438.
- Horner, Rory and David Hulme. 2019. "From International to Global Development: New Geographies of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Development." *Development and Change*, 50(2):347–378.
- Hormeku-Ajei, Tette, Aishu Balaji, Adebayo Olukoshi and Anita Nayar. 2022. "Introduction: Early Post-Independence Progressive Policies – Insights for our Times." Special Issue from the Post-Colonialisms Today Project, Lessons to Africa from Africa: Reclaiming Early Post-Independence Progressive Policies. *Africa Development*, 47(1):1–30.
- Huber, Evelyn, Bilyana Petrova and John D. Stephens. 2020. "Financialization, Labor Market Institutions and Inequality." *Review of International Political Economy*, 29(2):425–452.
- Hujo, Katja (ed.). 2020. *The Politics of Domestic Resource Mobilization for Social Development*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan and United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
- Hujo, Katja. 2019. "A Global Social Contract: New Steps Towards a Rights-Based Approach to Migration Governance?" *Global Social Policy*, 19(1/2):25–28.
- Hujo, Katja and Maggie Carter (eds.). 2022. *Between Fault Lines and Front Lines: Shifting Power in an Unequal World*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Hujo, Katja and Maggie Carter. 2019. *Overcoming Inequalities in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Issue Brief no. 10. Geneva: UNRISD.
- Hujo, Katja and Luisa Lupo. 2022. *Financialization, Commodity Markets and Global Value Chains: Implications for Social Development*. UNRISD Research Paper 2022–1. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
- Hujo, Katja and Nicola Piper. 2010. "Linking Migration, Social Development and Policy in the South: An Introduction." In *South–South Migration: Implications for Social Policy and Development*, edited by Katja Hujo and Nicola Piper, 1–45. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan and United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
- Huwart, Jean-Yves and Loïc Verdier. 2013. *Economic Globalisation: Origins and Consequences*. OECD Insights. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Publishing.
- IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre). 2021. *Global Report on Internal Displacement: Internal Displacement in a Changing Climate*. Geneva: IDMC; Oslo: Norwegian Refugee Council.
- ILO (International Labour Organization). 2022a. *Social Dialogue Report 2022: Collective bargaining for an inclusive, sustainable and resilient recovery*. Geneva: ILO.
- ILO (International Labour Organization). 2022b. *ILOSTAT*. Geneva: ILO. Accessed 21 October 2021. [https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorer10/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=SDG\\_1041\\_NOC\\_RT\\_A](https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorer10/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=SDG_1041_NOC_RT_A).
- ILO (International Labour Office). 2019. *The Global Labour Income Share and Distribution*. Geneva: ILO.
- ILO (International Labour Organization). 2018. *Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work*. Geneva: ILO.
- Inda, Jonathan Xavier and Renato Rosaldo. 2002. "Introduction: A world in motion." In *The anthropology of globalization: A reader*, edited by Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo, 1–34. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Independent Group (of Scientists appointed by the UN Secretary-General). 2019. *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019: The Future is Now – Science for Achieving Sustainable Development*. New York: United Nations.
- IOM (International Organization for Migration). 2021. *World Migration Report 2022*. Geneva: IOM.
- IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). 2021. *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis*. Working Group I contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Geneva: IPCC.
- IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). 2018. *Global Warming of 1.5°C: An IPCC Special Report*. Geneva: IPCC.
- ISSA (International Social Security Association). 2019. *Ten Global Challenges for Social Security*. Geneva: ISSA.
- ISSC (International Social Science Council), IDS (Institute of Development Studies) and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). 2016. *World Social Science Report 2016 – Challenging Inequalities: Pathways to a Just World*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.
- ITU (International Telecommunication Union). 2020. *ITU World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators database*. Geneva: ITU. Accessed 12 November 2021. <https://www.itu.int/pub/D-IND-WTID.OL-2021>.
- Jaumotte, Florence, Subir Lall and Chris Papageorgiou. 2013. "Rising Income Inequality: Technology, or Trade and Financial Globalization?" *IMF Economic Review*, 61(2):271–309.
- Kabeer, Naila. 2014. "Social Justice and the Millennium Development Goals: The Challenge of Intersecting Inequalities." *Equal Rights Review*, 13:91–116.
- Kennedy, Paul. 1987. *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. New York: Random House.
- Kihato, Caroline. 2018. *The "Containment Compact": The EU Migration "Crisis" and African Complicity in Migration Management*. Occasional Paper no. 288. Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs.

- Kmak, Magdalena and Stephen Phillips. 2022. "Our European Way of Life? Challenges to Human Rights and Justice in the EU's Migration Policy." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 10 February. <https://gjiia.georgetown.edu/2022/02/10/our-european-way-of-life-challenges-to-human-rights-and-justice-in-the-eus-migration-policy/>.
- Kóczán, Zsóka and Franz Loyola. 2018. *How Do Migration and Remittances Affect Inequality? A Case Study of Mexico*. IMF Working Paper WP/18/136. Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund.
- Koehler, Gabriele. 2022. "The Trajectory of Universal Social Pensions in Nepal." In *Handbook of Aging, Health and Public Policy*, edited by S. Irudaya Rajan, 1–13. Singapore: Springer.
- Krause, Dunja. 2019. *Transforming Coastal City Adaptation: From Idea to Practice*. Research and Policy Brief no. 27. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
- Kristensen, Hans M. and Matt Korda. 2022. "Estimated Global Nuclear Warhead Inventories, 2022." In *Status of World Nuclear Forces*. Washington, DC: Federation of American Scientists.
- Kumari Rigaud, Kanta, Alex de Sherbinin, Bryan Jones, Jonas Bergmann, Viviane Clement, Kayly Ober, Jacob Schewe, Susana Adamo, Brent McCusker, Silke Heuser and Amelia Midgley. 2018. *Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Kwame Sundaram, Jomo and Vladimir Popov. 2022. "Global Economic Inequalities: Trends and Drivers." In *Between Fault Lines and Frontlines: Shifting Power in an Unequal World*, edited by Katja Hujo and Maggie Carter, 25–41. London: Bloomsbury.
- Landau, Loren B. 2018. "A Chronotope of Containment Development: Europe's Migrant Crisis and Africa's Reterritorialisation." *Antipode*, 51:169–186.
- Layne, Christopher. 2012. "The Global Power Shift from West to East." *The National Interest*, 119:21–31.
- Lewis, W. Arthur. 1954. *Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labor. The Manchester School*, 22(2):139–91.
- Longo, Matthew. 2018. *The politics of borders: Sovereignty, security, and the citizen after 9/11*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lupu, Noam and Zach Warner. 2022. "Affluence and Congruence: Unequal Representation around the World." *The Journal of Politics*, 84(1):276–290.
- MacLeavy, Julie and David Manley. 2022. "Socio-Spatial Inequalities and Intergenerational Dependencies." In *Between Fault Lines and Frontlines: Shifting Power in an Unequal World*, edited by Katja Hujo and Maggie Carter, 45–61. London: Bloomsbury.
- Maihack, Henrik and Manfred Oehm. 2020. *Time for a Post-Coronavirus Social Contract!* Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
- Malhotra, Rahul and Naila Kabeer. 2002. *Demographic Transition, Inter-Generational Contracts and Old Age Security: An Emerging Challenge for Social Policy in Developing Countries*. Working paper series, no. 157. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
- Marcuse, Peter and David Madden. 2016. *In Defense of Housing: The Politics of Crisis*. London: Verso Books.
- Mazzucato, Mariana. 2018. *The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Public vs Private Sector Myths*. London: Penguin Books.
- Mazzucato, Mariana. 2017. *The Value of Everything: Making and Taking in the Global Economy*. London: Penguin Books.
- McCoy, Alfred W., Josep M. Fradera and Stephen Jacobson (eds.). 2012. *Endless Empire: Spain's Retreat, Europe's Eclipse and America's Decline*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Mckenzie, David and Hillel Rapoport. 2007. "Network Effects and the Dynamics of Migration and Inequality: Theory and Evidence from Mexico." *Journal of Development Economics*, 84:1–24.
- McKinsey Global Institute. 2011. *Urban World: Mapping the Economic Power of Cities*. New York: McKinsey Global Institute.
- Meagher, Kate. 2022. "Rewiring the Social Contract: Digital Taxis and Economic Inclusion in Nigeria." In *Between Fault Lines and Front Lines: Shifting Power in an Unequal World*, edited by Katja Hujo and Maggie Carter, 80–97. London: Bloomsbury.
- Merkens, Jan-Ludolf, Lena Reimann, Jochen Hinkel and Athanasios T. Vafeidis. 2016. "Gridded Population Projections for the Coastal Zone under the Shared Socioeconomic Pathways." *Global and Planetary Change*, 145:57–66.
- Mexi, Maria. 2020. "The platform economy—time for decent 'digiwork'." *Social Europe*, 26 November. <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/el/data/platform-economy/records/the-platform-economy-time-for-decent-digiwork>
- Milanovic, Branko. 2016. *Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mounk, Yascha. 2018. *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Nayyar, Deepak (ed.). 2013. *Catch Up: Developing Countries in the World Economy*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. 2020. "Geopolitics of Power and Knowledge in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Decolonial Reflections on a Global Crisis." *Journal of Developing Societies*, 36(4):366–389.
- Neumann, Barbara, Athanasios T. Vafeidis, Juliane Zimmermann and Robert J. Nicholls. 2015. "Future Coastal Population Growth and Exposure to Sea-Level Rise and Coastal Flooding: A Global Assessment." *PLOS ONE*, 10(3):e0118571.
- Nozick, Robert. 1974. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books.
- Nye, Joseph S. 2022. "Whatever Happened to Soft Power?" *Project Syndicate*, 11 January. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/whatever-happened-to-soft-power-by-joseph-s-nye-2022-01>.
- Nye, Joseph S. 1990. "Soft Power." *Foreign Policy*, 80(3):153–171.
- Ocampo, José Antonio, Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Rob Vos. 2007. "Explaining Growth Divergences." In *Growth Divergences: Explaining Differences in Economic Performance*, edited by José Antonio Ocampo, Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Robert Vos, 1–24. London: Zed Books.

- OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). 2018a. *Multinational Enterprises in the Global Economy: Heavily Debated but Hardly Measured*. Policy Notes. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). 2018b. *Divided Cities: Understanding Intra-Urban Inequalities*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). 2017. *Interrelations between Public Policies, Migration and Development*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). 2011. *Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Ortiz, Isabel, Sara Burke, Mohamed Berrada and Hernán Saenz Cortés. 2022. *World Protests: A Study of Key Protest Issues in the 21st Century*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ortiz, Isabel, Matthew Cummins, Jeronim Capaldo and Kalaivani Karunanethy. 2020. *The Decade of Adjustment: A Review of Austerity Trends 2010–2020 in 187 Countries*. ILO Extension of Social Security Series no. 53. Geneva: International Labour Organization.
- Ortiz-Ospina, Esteban. 2017. *Is Globalization an Engine of Economic Development? Our World in Data*. Oxford: Oxford University/Global Change Data Lab.
- Oxfam. 2022. *Inequality Kills: The Unparalleled Action Needed to Combat Unprecedented Inequality in the Wake of COVID-19*. Oxford: Oxfam International.
- Oxfam. 2021. *The Inequality Virus: Bringing Together a World Torn Apart by Coronavirus through a Fair, Just and Sustainable Economy*. Oxford: Oxfam International.
- Oxfam. 2018. *Reward Work, Not Wealth*. Oxfam Briefing Paper. Oxford: Oxfam International.
- Palik, Júlia, Siri Aas Rustad and Fredrik Methi. 2020. *Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2019*. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo.
- Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies. 2021. *From Rhetoric to Action: Delivering Equality & Inclusion*. New York: NYU Center on International Cooperation.
- Plagerson, Sophie. 2021. *Human Well-Being and Capabilities*. UNRISD Report. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
- Pogge, Thomas. 1989. *Realizing Rawls*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Popov, Vladimir and Jomo Kwame Sundaram. 2017. “Convergence? More Developing Countries Are Catching Up.” In *The Rest Beyond the West*, edited by Piotr Dutkiewicz and Vladimir Popov, 7–23. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Quah, Danny. 2011. “The Global Economy’s Shifting Centre of Gravity.” *Global Policy*, 2(1):3–9.
- Quiggin, John. 2005. *Interpreting Globalization Neoliberal and Internationalist Views of Changing Patterns of the Global Trade and Financial System*. Overarching Concerns Programme Paper no. 7. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
- Radačić, Ivana and Alda Facio. 2020. *Gender Equality and Gender Backlash*. Position Paper of the OHCHR working group on discrimination against women and girls. Geneva: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- Ratha, Dilip, Eung Ju Kim, Sonia Plaza, Ganesh Seshan, Elliott J. Riordan and Vandana Chandra. 2021. *Recovery: COVID-19 Crisis through a Migration Lens*. Migration and Development Brief no. 35, KNOMAD-World Bank. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Rawls, John. 1971. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge MA: Belknap Press.
- Razavi, Shahra. 2007. *The Political and Social Economy of Care in a Development Context: Conceptual Issues, Research Questions and Policy Options*. Gender and Development Programme Paper no. 3. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
- Reiter, Bernd (ed.). 2018. *Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Rodrik, Dani. 2016. “Put Globalization to Work for Democracies.” *New York Times*, 17 September. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/18/opinion/sunday/put-globalization-to-work-for-democracies.html>.
- Rodrik, Dani. 2011. *The Globalization Paradox: Democracy and the Future of the World Economy*. London: W. W. Norton.
- Roggeband, Conny and Andrea Krizsán. 2020. *Democratic Backsliding and the Backlash against Women’s Rights: Understanding the Current Challenges for Feminist Politics*. UN Women Discussion Paper Series no. 35. New York: UN Women.
- Roman-Alcalá, Antonio. 2022. “Othering and Solidarity in Twentieth Century Agrarian California: Lessons from Cross-Sector Alliances for Progressive Political Change.” In *Between Fault Lines and Frontlines: Shifting Power in an Unequal World*, edited by Katja Hujo and Maggie Carter, 193–208. London: Bloomsbury.
- Rothstein, Richard. 2017. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. New York: Liveright.
- Ruggie, John Gerard. 1992. “Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution.” *International Organization*, 46(3):561–598.
- Sachs, Jeffrey, Guido Schmidt-Traub, Christian Kroll, Guillaume Lafortune, Grayson Fuller and Finn Woelm. 2020. *Sustainable Development Report 2020 – The Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Samuels, Fiona, Emma Samman, Abigail Hunt, Lucia Rost and Georgia Plank. 2018. *Between work and care: Older women’s economic empowerment*. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Santos, Cláudia and João Morais Mourato. 2022. “Voices of Contention: The Value of Development Narratives in the Age of Climate (Change) Migration Misconceptions.” *Climate and Development*, 14(1):13–24.
- Sassen, Saskia. 2015. “Who owns our cities – and why this urban takeover should concern us all.” *The Guardian*, 24 November. <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/nov/24/who-owns-our-cities-and-why-this-urban-takeover-should-concern-us-all>.
- Sassen, Saskia. 2014. *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press.
- Savell, Stephanie. 2021. *The Costs of United States’ Post-9/11 “Security Assistance”: How Counterterrorism Intensified Conflict in Burkina Faso and Around the World*. Paper prepared for the project Costs of War. Providence: Brown University.
- Sen, Amartya. 2009. *The Idea of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Sen, Amartya. 1992. *Inequality Reexamined*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Silver, Laura, Kat Devlin and Christine Huang. 2020. *Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries*. Global Attitudes Project. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.
- Smith, Martin A. 2012. *Power in the Changing Global Order: The US, Russia and China*. London: Polity Press.
- Spicker, Paul. 2020. *The Poverty of Nations: A Relational Perspective*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Standing, Guy. 2019. *Plunder of the Commons: A Manifesto for Sharing Public Wealth*. London: Pelican Books.
- Stein, Samuel. 2019. *Capital City: Gentrification and the Real Estate State*. London: Verso Books.
- Stewart, Frances. 2020. "Overcoming Short-Termism: Incorporating Future Generations into Current Decision-Making." *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 31(2020):1–17.
- Stewart, Frances. 2016. *The Dynamics of Horizontal Inequalities*. 2016 UNDP Human Development Report Think Piece. New York: United Nations Development Programme.
- Stewart, Frances. 2013. *Approaches Towards Inequality and Inequity: Concepts, Measures and Policies*. Discussion Paper: Perspectives on Equity. Florence: United Nations Children's Fund Office of Research.
- Stiglitz, Joseph E. 2012. *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Subramanian, Arvind and Martin Kessler. 2013. *The Hyperglobalization of Trade and Its Future*. Working Paper no. 13–6. Washington, DC: Peterson Institute of International Economics.
- Sumner, Andy. 2019. "Global Poverty and Inequality: Change and Continuity in Late Development." *Development and Change*, 50(2):410–425.
- Therborn, Göran. 2013. *The Killing Fields of Inequality*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Therborn, Göran. 2010. "Globalisierung und Ungleichheit. Mögliche Erklärungen und Fragen der Konzeptualisierung." In *Große Armut, großer Reichtum. Zur Transnationalisierung sozialer Ungleichheit*, edited by U. Beck and A. Pöferl, 53–109. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Tran, Minh and Dunja Krause 2020. *Transformative Adaptation to Climate Change and Informal Settlements in Coastal Cities: Entry Points for Jakarta and Ho Chi Minh City*. Research Paper 2020-4. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
- UN (United Nations). 2022. *Draft Strategic Framework of the United Nations Office for South–South Cooperation. 2022–2025*. DP/CF/SSC/7. New York: UN Office for South–South Cooperation.
- UN (United Nations). 2021a. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report*. New York: UN.
- UN (United Nations). 2021b. *Our Common Agenda – Report of the Secretary-General*. New York: UN.
- UN (United Nations). 2020. *Report of the UN Economist Network for the UN 75th Anniversary: Shaping the Trends of Our Time*. New York: UN.
- UN (United Nations). 2017. *The New Urban Agenda*. Quito: UN.
- UN (United Nations). 2015. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. New York: UN.
- UN (United Nations). 2013. *Intergenerational Solidarity and the Needs of Future Generations*. Report of the Secretary-General A/68/322. New York: UN.
- UN (United Nations). 2003. "Intergenerational Relations." In *Young People in a Globalizing World: World Youth Report 2003*. Report of the Secretary-General A/58/79 & E/CN.5/2003/4. New York: UN.
- UN (United Nations). 2002. *Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002*. Adopted at the 10th plenary meeting of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid, 12 April [A/CONF.197/9]. New York: UN.
- UN (United Nations). 1987. *Our Common Future*. Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. New York: UN.
- UN (United Nations) and World Bank. 2018. *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). 2021. *Technology and Innovation Report 2021 – Catching Technological Waves: Innovations with Equity*. Geneva: UNCTAD.
- UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). 2020. *Trade and Development Report – From Global Pandemic to Prosperity for All: Avoiding Another Lost Decade*. Geneva: UNCTAD.
- UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). 2018a. *Trade and Development Report – Power, Platforms and the Free Trade Delusion*. Geneva: UNCTAD.
- UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). 2018b. *Economic Development in Africa Report 2018: Migration for Structural Transformation*. Geneva: UNCTAD.
- UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). 2022. *World Population Prospects 2022: Summary of Results*. UN DESA/POP/2022/TR/NO. 3. New York: United Nations.
- UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). 2020a. *World Social Report 2020: The Challenge of Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World*. New York: United Nations.
- UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). 2020b. *Impact of COVID-19 on SDG Progress: A Statistical Perspective*. Policy Brief no. 81. New York: United Nations.
- UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). 2020c. *World Population Ageing 2020 Highlights: Living Arrangements of Older Persons* (ST/ESA/SER.A/451). New York: United Nations.
- UN DESA (United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs). 2020d. *International Migration 2020 Highlights*. New York: United Nations.
- UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). 2020e. *International Migration Stock 2020*. New York: United Nations.
- UN DESA (United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs). 2019a. *World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights* (ST/ESA/SER.A/423). New York: United Nations.
- UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). 2019b. *World Population Prospects: 2019 Revision*. New York: United Nations.
- UN DESA (United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs). 2019c. *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision* (ST/ESA/SER.A/420). New York: United Nations.



- UN DESA (United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs). 2018. "11: Sustainable Futures and Communities." *SDGs Report*. New York: United Nations.
- UN DESA (United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs). 2017. *World Economic and Social Survey – Reflecting on seventy years of development policy analysis*. New York: United Nations.
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2020. *Human Development Report 2020 – The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene*. New York: UNDP.
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2019. *Human Development Report 2019 – Beyond Income, Beyond Averages, Beyond Today: Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century*. New York: UNDP.
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) and HelpAge. 2017. *Ageing, Older Persons and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. New York: UNDP.
- UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme). 2020. *Emissions Gap Report 2020*. Nairobi: UNEP.
- UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme). 2019. *Global Environment Outlook – GEO-6: Healthy Planet, Healthy People*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme). 2007. *Global Environmental Outlook – GEO-4: Environment for Development*. Nairobi: UNEP.
- UN-Habitat. 2022. *World Cities Report 2022 – Envisaging the Future of Cities*. Nairobi: UN-Habitat.
- UN-Habitat. 2020. *World Cities Report 2020 – The Value of Sustainable Urbanization*. Nairobi: UN-Habitat.
- UN-Habitat. 2016a. *World Cities Report 2016 – Urbanization and Development: Emerging Futures*. Nairobi: UN-Habitat.
- UN-Habitat. 2016b. *The Fundamentals of Urbanization: Evidence Base for Policy Making*. Nairobi: UN-Habitat.
- UN-Habitat. 2009. *Global Report on Human Settlements 2009: Planning Sustainable Cities*. London: Earthscan.
- UN-Habitat. 2006. *The State of the World's Cities Report 2006/2007*. Nairobi: UN-Habitat.
- UNHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights). 2008. *Human Rights, Terrorism and Counter-terrorism*. Fact Sheet no. 32. Geneva: UNHCHR.
- UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). 2022a. *Operational Data Portal: Ukrainian Refugee Situation*. Accessed 8 March 2022. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>.
- UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). 2022b. *Refugee Population Statistics Database*. Geneva: UNHCR. Accessed September 2022. <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>.
- UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). 2020. *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019*. Geneva: UNHCR.
- UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). n.d. *Climate Change and Disaster Displacement*. Geneva: UNHCR. Accessed 23 August 2022. <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/climate-change-and-disasters.html>.
- UNRISD (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development). 2021. *A New Eco-Social Contract: Vital to Deliver the SDGs*. Issue Brief no. 11. Geneva: UNRISD.
- UNRISD (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development). 2016. *Policy Innovations for Transformative Change: Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Geneva: UNRISD.
- UNRISD (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development). 2010. *Combating Poverty and Inequality: Structural Change, Social Policy and Politics*. Geneva: UNRISD.
- UNRISD (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development). 1995. *States of Disarray: The Social Effects of Globalization*. Geneva: UNRISD.
- UNTFSSSE (UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy). 2014. *Social and Solidarity Economy and the Sustainable Development Goals*. Position Paper. Geneva: UNTFSSSE.
- Utting, Peter. 2018. *Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through Social and Solidarity Economy: Incremental versus Transformative Change*. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
- Weber, Max. 1922. *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (Economy and Society)*. Tübingen: Mohr & Siebeck.
- WIL (World Inequality Lab). 2022. *World Inequality Database*. Paris: WIL. Accessed 19 July 2022. <https://wid.world/>.
- Wilkinson, Richard and Kate Pickett. 2009. *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*. London: Allen Lane.
- Williams, Fiona. 2021. *Social Policy: A Critical and Intersectional Analysis*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Williamson, John. 1990. "What Washington Means by Policy Reform." In *Latin American Readjustment: How Much Has Happened*, edited by John Williamson, 7–20. Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics.
- Wong, Edward and Ana Swanson. 2022. "Ukraine War and Pandemic Force Nations to Retreat from Globalization." *New York Times*, 22 March.
- Woodall, John. 2021. "Demographic Change." In *Handbook on Social Protection Systems*, edited by Esther Schüring and Markus Löwe, 651–662. London: Edward Elgar.
- World Bank. 2022. *World Development Indicators*. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>.
- World Bank. 2016. *World Development Report 2016: Digital Dividends*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- World Bank. 2006. *World Development Report 2006: Equity and Development*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- World Population Review. 2022. *Nuclear Weapons by Country, 2022*. Walnut, CA: World Population Review. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/nuclear-weapons-by-country>.
- Yi, Ilcheong, Heejin Ahn, Jongick Jang, Michelle Jaramillo, Eun Sun Lee, Suyeon Lee, Ye Jin Lee, Peter Utting and Joon Young Yi. 2018. *Social and Solidarity Economy for the Sustainable Development Goals: Spotlight on the Social Economy in Seoul*. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
- Yi, Ilcheong and Thandika Mkandawire. 2014. *Learning from the South Korean Developmental Success: Effective Developmental Cooperation and Synergistic Institutions and Policies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan and United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira, Georgie Wemyss and Kathryn Cassidy. 2019. *Bordering*. Cambridge: Polity Press.



## What the Sustainable Development Goals get wrong about inequality



**Sakiko Fukuda-Parr**

Professor of International Affairs,  
The New School

🐦 @sfparr

Inequality can take many forms that raise different political and social concerns: highly skewed income and wealth distribution raises questions about fairness in the way individuals experience life; how the prevalence of absolute or relative poverty, discrimination and marginalization is morally unacceptable; and the ways in which extreme inequality marked by the concentration of wealth is troubling as it can give rise to elite capture of policy-making processes and threaten social stability. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10 targets reducing inequalities within and between countries. However, current discourse with respect to SDG 10 largely focuses on those who are excluded, marginalized and living below the poverty line. For example, the 2022 *Sustainable Development Goals Report* calls attention to the rise in refugees, migrants and relative poverty, that is, the proportion of a population living on less than half the national income, and workers' share of income. In contrast, little attention is given to the top of the distribution: the rich and powerful.<sup>1</sup>

This narrative within the SDG discourse that represents inequality as poverty and exclusion is not an accident. It accurately reflects the inequality agenda in the SDG framework that is dominated by targets and indicators focusing on the bottom of the distribution rather than the top. As many who followed the negotiations between 2012 and 2015 will recall, inequality was one of the most contentious issues. SDG 10 was in and out of multiple drafts and it was uncertain until the last moment if it would survive. But the negotiations around the goal were not simply about whether or not it would be included, but about how inequality would be defined.

Inequality is a politically sensitive issue that has been avoided in development debates for decades. But in the context of the time, it could not be

excluded from the SDGs. The glaring failure to include inequality in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) framework in 2000 has been heavily criticized, and inequality has since emerged as a major political and social issue. For example, social movements across the world—such as Occupy Wall Street in New York City—have protested the capture of the economy by the top 1 percent. At venues such as the World Economic Forum, global leaders in politics, business and academia have ranked extreme inequality as the number one threat to social peace and economic stability. While the importance of inequality could not be denied, there was much contestation around how and by what definition it should be included in the SDG framework: should it be a free-standing goal or mainstreamed? Inequality of what among whom? During the formulation process, two competing perspectives emerged: “extreme inequality” and concern over the concentration of power and wealth at the top of the distribution; and “exclusion” and concern over vulnerable and marginalized populations' lack of access to opportunities. It is important to note that these two perspectives also imply different types of policy response. Extreme inequality poses a radical challenge to reconsider the economic model and to redistribute wealth, while social exclusion invites a social protection approach to inequalities.

Proponents of a strong inequality agenda—from academia, civil society, many developing country delegations and several UN organizations such as OHCHR, UNICEF and UNRISD—argued for a stand-alone goal. They voiced concerns with extreme inequality, including marginalization, discrimination and the concentration of power and wealth at the top of the distribution. Those opposed to a free-standing goal conceptualized inequality narrowly as poverty and exclusion. Many high-income country

“

**Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10 targets reducing inequalities within and between countries. However, current discourse with respect to SDG 10 largely focuses on those who are excluded, marginalized and living below the poverty line. ... In contrast, little attention is given to the top of the distribution: the rich and powerful.”**

delegations and prominent academics vigorously argued that an inequality goal would be redundant. As the delegate for the United Kingdom put it during the negotiations, inequality could be addressed “through goals and targets related to poverty eradication; equal access to productive and other assets; social protection floors; gender equality; elimination of discriminatory practices, policies and laws; and job-rich and inclusive growth.”<sup>2</sup>

Ultimately, a stand-alone goal was included in the agreed SDG framework adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2015. However, the targets focus primarily on poverty and exclusion, and they do not take into account the distribution of wealth within and between countries or make reference to extreme inequality.

In the early stages of the negotiations, the World Bank and several donors advocated for defining the target for income inequality (SDG 10.1) as “shared prosperity,” that is, the incomes of the poor growing faster than the national average. The corresponding indicator, growth rate of income per capita of the bottom 40 percent of the population compared with the national average, was included in the indicator

framework proposed by the technical committee, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDG), despite considerable pushback from many delegations, civil society organizations, UN agencies and other stakeholders. These groups proposed alternatives such as including targets on vertical distribution, and the use of measures such as the widely used Gini coefficient and the Palma ratio—that is, the ratio of the top 10 percent of the population’s share of national income divided by the share of the bottom 40 percent. However, these alternatives failed to gain traction.

The choice of these measurement tools is supposedly technical, but behind a seemingly technical choice lies a political agenda.<sup>3</sup> The Gini best captures shifts in the middle of the distribution, the Palma ratio at the top, and the shared prosperity measure at the bottom. The choice of the shared prosperity measure excludes from the narrative the problems of extreme inequality and the power of the wealthy.

There is no consensus among philosophers and economists on how much inequality should be desirable for any society. For a long time, the standard economic argument held that inequality was constructive and part of a necessary incentive for hard work and talent. But more recently, new literature and theories have emerged about the destructive effects of inequality.<sup>4</sup> High inequality is increasingly associated with rent seeking and monopoly power, as well as the elite capture of policy-making processes and the erosion of social cohesion and democracy. Indeed, economist and public policy analyst Joseph Stiglitz (2012) argues that inequality has a dampening effect on demand and economic growth and is associated with economic instability.

The focus on inequality as poverty and exclusion is unfortunate in today’s political economy, where vested interests obstruct policies to combat key challenges to sustainability and social equity such as climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 and its socioeconomic consequences have disproportionately affected the poorest and most marginalized populations. But the pandemic has helped to expose the underlying power structures that perpetuate inequality. For example, the international community failed to address accessibility obstacles when gross inequalities regarding access to Covid-19 vaccines emerged.

Similarly, the contestation over enacting a TRIPS waiver—the proposal to waive certain provisions of the WTO Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Agreement (TRIPS) for Covid-19 vaccines, medicines and diagnostics for the duration of the pandemic—is illustrative of the power corporations and high-income governments wield to defend their interests. Tabled by India and South Africa in October 2020 to respond to the critical vaccine supply shortages and lack of access for low- and middle-income countries, the proposal was supported by over 100 countries but vigorously opposed by pharmaceutical lobbies and most high-income countries. According to the South Centre (2022), after 18 months of negotiations, the agreement reached in 2022 was so diluted that its impact is likely to be limited. In response, the co-chair of the People's Vaccine Alliance, Max Lawson, stated: “This is absolutely not the broad intellectual property waiver the world desperately needs to ensure access to vaccines and treatments for everyone, everywhere. The EU, UK, US, and Switzerland blocked that text.”<sup>5</sup>

Leading pharmaceutical companies and high-income countries have also rejected participating in other important multilateral initiatives to overcome barriers to equitable access such as the World Health Organization (WHO) Covid-19 Technology Access Pool and the Vaccine Technology Transfer Hub. Even in the face of a devastating global pandemic, these powerful corporations and governments resist efforts to address systemic obstacles to equitable access to medical technologies, to prioritize health care as a human right and to institutionalize essential vaccines and medicines as a global public good.

In his foreword to the 2022 *Sustainable Development Goals Report*, UN Secretary-General António Guterres (UN 2022:2) called for “bold action” in an “urgent rescue effort for the SDGs.” Tackling extreme inequality should be a top priority.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> UN 2022.
- <sup>2</sup> UK 2014.
- <sup>3</sup> Fukuda-Parr 2019.
- <sup>4</sup> Birdsall 2001; ISSC et al. 2016; Stiglitz 2012; Wilkinson and Pickett 2009.
- <sup>5</sup> People's Vaccine Alliance 2022.

## References

- Birdsall, Nancy. 2001. “Why Inequality Matters.” *Ethics in International Affairs*, 15(2):3–28.
- Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko. 2019. “Keeping Out Extreme Inequality from the SDG Agenda—Politics of Indicators.” *Global Policy*, 10(1):61–69.
- ISSC (International Social Science Council), IDS (Institute of Development Studies) and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). 2016. *World Social Science Report 2016 – Challenging Inequalities: Pathways to a Just World*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.
- People's Vaccine Alliance. 2022. *WTO Vaccine Deal: “A Technocratic Fudge Aimed at Saving Reputations, Not Lives,” Campaigners Say*. 17 June. <https://peoplesvaccine.org/resources/media-releases/wto-reaction-2022/>.
- The South Centre. 2022. *Statement – TRIPS Waiver: An Insufficient Multilateral Response*. Geneva: The South Centre. <https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/SC-Statement-TRIPS-waiver-FINAL-1.pdf>.
- Stiglitz, Joseph. 2012. *Price of Inequality*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- UK (United Kingdom). 2014. *Statement by the UK Delegation*. 10th session of the United Nations General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, New York, 31 March–4 April.
- UN (United Nations). 2022. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report*. New York: UN.
- Wilkinson, Richard and Kate Pickett. 2009. *The Spirit Level: Why Equality Makes Societies Stronger*. New York: Bloomsbury Press.

## Vaccine inequality: A deadly discrimination



**Jayati Ghosh**

Professor of Economics,  
University of Massachusetts Amherst  
@Jayati1609

One feature of the world today that most strikingly captures global inequality is the production and distribution of Covid-19 vaccines.

The rapid development of these vaccines shows how much can be achieved when significant public investment and support are matched with human inventiveness and private sector involvement. At the same time, however, global vaccine production has been limited and its distribution very unequal, pointing to momentous failures in how we organize our economies and govern innovation. Unequal vaccine access has dramatic consequences: in addition to unnecessarily prolonging the pandemic in less vaccinated regions, it has enabled the emergence of new variants of the coronavirus that are more infectious, which in turn affects even those countries where vaccines are widely available.

Since vaccines are the first and most effective line of defence against Covid-19, there are huge public health and economic benefits to vaccinating as much of humanity as possible, as quickly as possible. Yet, two years after the first vaccines were approved, the gaps in vaccination rates remain startling. By mid-2021, 75 percent of all Covid-19 vaccinations had been administered in only 10 (mostly rich) countries.<sup>1</sup> By September 2022, in North America and Europe, around two-thirds of the population was fully vaccinated, and many had been provided with additional booster doses, with remaining gaps due to vaccine hesitancy rather than shortage. By contrast, in Africa less than 30 percent of the population had received even one dose. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, only 3.2 percent of the population had been fully vaccinated.<sup>2</sup>

A pandemic can be overcome only when it is conquered everywhere. Letting the virus spread unchecked in any part of the world accelerates the emergence of new viral variants, against which the current vaccines could be less effective.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the

emergence of new variants led to the perceived need for third and fourth “booster” doses in some rich countries, even as first doses remain in short supply in many developing countries. Equitable vaccination distribution is not just ethically desirable, it is also a public health and economic imperative. In addition to prolonging the pandemic and preventing a return to “normal” life, vaccine inequality inhibits and delays global economic recovery. These risks are so great that if the governments of rich countries had simply decided to pay for the entire cost of vaccinating all of the world’s population, their economies would have benefited materially.<sup>4</sup>

So why did this not happen? Despite a global facility (Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility, or COVAX, led by the World Health Organization [WHO] and others) set up specifically to distribute vaccines equitably to the world, an “every-country-for-itself” approach dominated national responses. COVAX was significantly underfunded and was not able to purchase the vaccines required for free distribution to poor countries as planned, so its actual distribution fell well short of its own plans. Out of around five billion vaccine doses administered globally by the end of August 2021, less than 5 percent were distributed by COVAX.<sup>5</sup>

Rich countries took the lion’s share of early doses of the approved Covid-19 vaccines, by signing (often opaque) bilateral deals with pharmaceutical companies. These vaccine grabs sometimes amounted to several times what could be administered to their own populations, leading to large stockpiles of doses—some of which had to be destroyed because the vaccines reached expiry dates without being administered.

The vaccine shortage was unnecessary because supply of vaccines need not have been so constrained. The production of Covid-19 vaccines has been limited by a lack of technology transfer.

There are two impediments: the legal constraints, cemented by the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement of the World Trade Organization (WTO); and the (related) ability of major pharma companies to monopolize knowledge created mostly by publicly funded research.

Consider the patents issues first. Patents and other intellectual property rules are supposed to ensure rewards for invention and innovation, without which it is believed that technological change would either not occur or be limited. The pharma industry has successfully argued that because of the high costs and risks of developing new drugs, which may not succeed even after years of research and development (R&D) effort, it needs the incentive of property rights over this knowledge, thereby conferring a monopoly over supply and pricing.

But in reality, pharma companies typically do only the “last mile” research for most drugs, vaccines and therapeutics: the bulk of the research, not just the basic science but also more advanced discoveries that enable breakthroughs, is publicly funded. Increasingly, big companies acquire promising compounds and other knowledge from labs and smaller companies that have benefited from public investment and subsidies. Indeed, big pharma companies typically spend relatively little on R&D—much less than what they spend on advertising and marketing, and a small fraction of what they pay out in dividends to shareholders or share buybacks designed to increase stock prices.<sup>6</sup>

In the specific case of Covid-19 vaccines, big pharma companies not only benefited from prior publicly funded research and reduced costs of clinical testing due to large numbers of unpaid volunteers for trials, but also received massive subsidies from governments—public financing that mostly covered their R&D costs.<sup>7</sup> In the United States alone, the six major vaccine companies received over USD 12 billion in public subsidies; other rich-country governments also provided subsidies to these companies for developing these vaccines.<sup>8</sup> Even Pfizer, which claimed to have received no government support, benefited from USD 445 million provided by the German government to BionNTech, which developed the vaccine and also received significant logistical support from the US government.<sup>9</sup> Yet even though these companies could succeed in developing the vaccines largely

“

**Equitable vaccination distribution is not just ethically desirable, it is also a public health and economic imperative. In addition to prolonging the pandemic and preventing a return to ‘normal’ life, vaccine inequality inhibits and delays global economic recovery.”**

because of support funded by taxpayers, they were granted exclusive rights over this knowledge. They have used this to limit supply and keep prices high even as the global pandemic rages on in the developing world. The major pharma companies producing Covid-19 vaccines enjoyed massively profit increases in 2021 (Pfizer, for example, nearly doubled its revenues to more than USD 81 billion, while profits more than doubled to USD 22 billion.<sup>10</sup> Pfizer and Moderna both raised their prices for subsequent orders of their Covid-19 vaccines.

This is why the majority of WTO members have proposed that intellectual property rights (IPRs) be suspended for Covid-19 drugs, vaccines, diagnostics and other technologies for the duration of the pandemic, until global herd immunity is achieved. Such an arrangement was overseen by the US government, for example, for the production of penicillin during World War II.<sup>11</sup> This is important because even when a single producer declares that it will not enforce its patent, the multiplicity of patents involved in the production of the new vaccines makes it difficult for new producers and complicates the possibility of compulsory licensing, under which a government can award individual companies a



licence to produce a particular product. A TRIPS waiver would eliminate the possibility of other patent-holders suing any producer using that technology and thereby enable scaling up of production. The United States and Australia, which had previously opposed the waiver, moved to support it in mid-2021. But pressure from other countries (mostly in Europe) prevented this waiver from being approved and led to a much-watered-down compromise in the WTO, with likely limited effect.

However, waiving IPRs, while essential during this pandemic, is merely a first step, addressing only the legal side of the problem. The next step is to ensure the actual transfer of technology to manufacture the vaccines. There are many potential producers of such vaccines across the world in countries, from Canada to Bangladesh, with the required facilities.<sup>12</sup> They have requested that the major vaccine producers provide the licences and technical know-how to enable them to proceed but have thus far been denied. Not a single company has joined the voluntary facility for the sharing of technology set up by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Covid-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP). The WHO has been involved in setting up an mRNA tech transfer hub in South Africa to enable wider vaccine production in Africa, but not only did the big pharma companies refuse to assist with this, Moderna has filed cases of intellectual property infringement against the hub.<sup>13</sup>

But since these vaccines were developed with large subsidies from governments in the United States, Europe and elsewhere, could these governments not lean on these companies to share the knowledge that was created with public funding? (Cuba has declared that it will do so for its new vaccine candidates—albeit vaccines that have not, at the time of writing, been approved by a regulatory agency or the WHO).<sup>14</sup> In the United States, the Biden administration persuaded Johnson & Johnson to share its technology with Merck to ensure larger domestic production of its single-dose vaccine. It could similarly push the pharma companies it has funded to share knowledge with a larger number of producers across the world.

All these proposals are easily achievable. More funding for COVAX could come from the countries not planning to use their share of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) new issuance of USD 650 billion of Special Drawing Rights, an international

reserve asset meant to ease liquidity constraints in times of crisis.<sup>15</sup> The TRIPS waiver could be passed tomorrow if just a few countries stopped opposing it. Pharma companies, especially those that have benefited from public funding, could be prodded or persuaded to share their know-how with other producers across the world.

The achievement of such proposals is held back by constraints that are mainly political, reflecting the significant lobbying power that large corporations have with states across the world. But such constraints are binding only if citizens do not apply sufficient counterpressure on their governments. This is necessary not only to ensure the vaccine equity that is essential to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, but also to achieve the international solidarity that is a minimum requirement for humanity to address other existential threats such as that posed by climate change.

---

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> RFI 2021.
- <sup>2</sup> Our World in Data n.d.
- <sup>3</sup> WHO 2021.
- <sup>4</sup> UNCTAD 2021.
- <sup>5</sup> Mueller and Slotnik 2021.
- <sup>6</sup> Dickinson 2021.
- <sup>7</sup> Allen 2020.
- <sup>8</sup> MSF 2020.
- <sup>9</sup> Mango 2022.
- <sup>10</sup> Pharmaceutical Technology 2022.
- <sup>11</sup> Medicines Law & Policy 2021.
- <sup>12</sup> Biolyse Pharma 2021; Cheng and Hinnant 2021; Molla 2021.
- <sup>13</sup> Maxmen 2022.
- <sup>14</sup> Reuters 2021.
- <sup>15</sup> IMF 2021.

## References

- Allen, Arthur. 2020. "For Billion-Dollar COVID Vaccines, Basic Government-Funded Science Laid the Groundwork." *Scientific American*, 18 November.
- Biolyse Pharma. 2021. "Canadian-Pharma Solution to Aid Worldwide COVID Vaccine Access." Biolyse Pharma, 11 March.
- Buchholz, Katharina. 2021. "Infographic: How COVID-19 Vaccines Changed Pharma Company Profits." *Statista*, 15 November.
- Cheng, Maria and Lori Hinnant. 2021. "Countries Urge Drug Companies to Share Vaccine Know-How." AP News, 20 April.
- Dickinson, Tim. 2021. "Katie Porter Delivers Another Knockout Punch." *Rolling Stone* (blog), 19 May.
- IMF (International Monetary Fund). 2021. "IMF Governors Approve a Historic US\$650 Billion SDR Allocation of Special Drawing Rights." Washington, DC: IMF.
- Mango, Paul. 2022. *Warp Speed: Inside the Operation That Beat COVID, the Critics, and the Odds*. Washington, DC: Republic Book Publishers.
- Maxmen, Amy. 2022. "South African scientists copy Moderna's COVID vaccine." *Nature*, 3 February. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-00293-2>.
- Medicines Law & Policy. 2021. "Ensuring That Intellectual Property Rights Aren't a Barrier to Scaling-Up: The Remarkable Example of Penicillin Production in the United States during World War II." *Medicines Law & Policy* (blog), 13 April 2021.
- Molla, Mohammad Al-Masum. 2021. "Astrazeneca Vaccine: Bangladesh Wants to Produce It Locally." *The Daily Star*, 3 April.
- MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières). 2020. "Governments Must Demand All Coronavirus COVID-19 Vaccine Deals Are Made Public." Geneva: MSF International.
- Mueller, Benjamin and Daniel E. Slotnik. 2021. "Covax, a Global Program to Distribute Covid Vaccines, Cuts Its 2021 Forecast for Available Doses by a Quarter." *New York Times*, 8 September.
- Our World in Data. N.d. *Coronavirus (Covid-19) Vaccinations*. Oxford: University of Oxford. Accessed 3 October 2022. <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations>.
- Pharmaceutical Technology. 2022. *Pfizer reports 92% operational growth in full-year 2021 revenues*. London: GlobalData. <https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/pfizer-full-year-2021-revenues/>.
- Reuters. 2021. "Vietnam Says Cuba to Supply COVID-19 Vaccine, Transfer Technology." Reuters, 24 August.
- RFI (Radio France Internationale). 2021. "Ten Countries Have Used 75 Percent of Covid Vaccine Doses: WHO." 24 May.
- UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). 2021. *Trade and Development Report 2021. From Recovery to Resilience: The Development Dimension*. Geneva: UNCTAD.
- WHO (World Health Organization). 2021. "The Effects of Virus Variants on COVID-19 Vaccines." Geneva: WHO.

## Reviving the commons would reduce inequality



### Guy Standing

Professorial Research Associate, SOAS University of London; Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts; Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences; co-founder and honorary-co-president of the Basic Income Earth Network

Ever since Justinian Law was codified in Rome in AD 529–534, a form of property has been legitimized as “the commons” (*res communes*). It is what belongs to everybody equally. It includes the land, air, water, the sea and minerals under the ground, as well as institutions inherited as common property or designated as such. The commons also refers to a way of living, enshrined in the neglected idea of “commoning”—shared, cooperative activities that have shaped society throughout history.

In November 1217, common law in England was further legitimized in the Magna Carta and the Carta de Foresta, the Charter of the Forest. These declared that every free person had equal civil rights and the right to subsistence in the commons. The Charters’ principles became the foundation of all democratic constitutions. The commons are also the bedrock of republican freedom, the freedom to act without fear of control by figures of unaccountable power. And they have also provided informal social protection, through access to resources.

Yet across the world in today’s era of rentier capitalism,<sup>1</sup> there has been a plunder of the commons.<sup>2</sup> This is not the “tragedy of the commons” depicted by Garret Hardin (1968) in an influential polemic, but the “tragedy of de-commoning.” Globally, the commons have been depleted through neglect, enclosure, commodification, privatization and, most egregiously, neocolonial acquisition, with foreign private-equity capital often used to acquire ownership of a country’s commons. The plunder is wholly illegitimate, amounting to the private theft of common wealth. In the process, social inequalities have worsened more than can be measured by monetary incomes.

There are five types of commons—natural, social, civil, cultural and knowledge—and they all limit inequalities, partly because they have more use

value for low-income “commoners.” Land, water, air, seashores and the sea are recognized commons under common law, while other types of commons are created, bequeathed or inherited as belonging to, or for the benefit of, everybody equally. These commons are the amenities, areas and institutions that exist to give commoners—all of us within communities—a better standard of living and a more dignified life.

All forms of commons have been weakened, often by administrative neglect during the austerity era following the financial crash of 2008 and by privatization. Austerity concealed the neoliberal strategy of privatizing the natural commons, resulting in the degradation of forests, parks, allotments, village greens, urban trees and public waterways.

The plunder has also hit the social commons, such as social housing, health services, care homes, refuges for women and children suffering from domestic violence, playgrounds, youth centres and public transport. A result has been high death rates in privatized under-resourced care homes, where many residents come from lower-income families and communities.

In many countries, parts of cities and towns have been turned into POPS—privately owned public spaces—resulting in lost access to what had been zones of recreation. This has hit low-income people harder than the rich, who usually have gardens and second homes or live in leafy areas with cleaner air and more open space.

Legal institutions are civil commons if they adhere to legal principles established by the Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest. This means that everybody should have access to an equal set of legal institutions and be able to obtain justice, with due process, affordable access to qualified

representation, an independent judiciary and punishment proportional to the offence. These principles have rarely been respected adequately, but in recent years they have been shredded, as parts of judicial systems, including prisons and probation services, have been privatized and commercialized. This is a powerful form of inequality and injustice, as are cuts to legal aid.

In some countries, homelessness has been criminalized and made more unpleasant or dangerous for health and survival. The main function of the commons historically was to ensure survival and subsistence in tough times. Erode that capacity and you indulge in “social cleansing.” That will not show up in income distribution statistics, but it is a terrible form of inequality.

Then there is the erosion of the cultural commons, shown in the loss of public libraries, the commercialization of museums and art galleries, and the disappearance of local theatres and places of shared artistic activity. The global trend toward reliance on commercial sponsorship is a form of commodification, in which corporate or philanthropic donors can dictate what the public sees and does not see, inducing self-censorship.

Finally, there is an erosion of the knowledge commons—information, education and “intellectual.” Although we appear to have much more of it than in the past, the information commons—that is, access to balanced, objective, fact-based information—has shrunk. We are bombarded incessantly by disinformation and “fake news,” heavily funded by plutocrats and zealots keen to manipulate our minds and imaginations. Prominent tech corporations have colonized the information landscape. The manipulators are hardly likely to allow the media they own to provide information that might make electorates vote for progressive redistribution policies. They favour politicians who will preserve their wealth and power.

The education commons is vital for a good society. Ideally, we rely on education to produce responsible, altruistic citizens. But educational systems have been privatized and commodified, epitomized by MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), packaged by corporations and sold around the world. These are never neutral and tend to marginalize local and vernacular knowledge that has been a hallmark of the commons. That too is a form of inequality

“

**Globally, the commons have been depleted through neglect, enclosure, commodification, privatization and, most egregiously, neocolonial acquisition, with foreign private-equity capital often used to acquire ownership of a country’s commons. The plunder is wholly illegitimate, amounting to the private theft of common wealth. In the process, social inequalities have worsened more than can be measured by monetary incomes.”**

being spread by stealth, which is not picked up in conventional statistics.

Then there is the plunder of the intellectual commons. Since the World Trade Organization’s Agreement on TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) came into force in 1995, more ideas and innovations have become a source of monopoly profits, guaranteeing sole ownership for 20 years in the case of patents, and for the whole of life and much more in the case of copyright.

Understanding that ideas are public goods, Thomas Jefferson declared: “Inventions then cannot, in nature, be a subject of property.” But under rentier capitalism, that is what they have become, to a greater extent than ever. There are 15 million patents in force today, with the number constantly rising. Many result from publicly funded research; many are filed solely to prevent others from producing something, not to boost production.

Contrary to the claims of apologists, there is no correlation between the strengthening of private property rights in ideas and growth or innovation. It is a vehicle for increasing rentier income and inequality. Witness the billions of dollars firms manufacturing Covid-19 vaccines are making, after receiving huge public subsidies to fund research and development.

Less documented is the fact that we are losing the “blue commons,” the sea, seashore, seabed and marine ecosystems that make up over 60 percent of the planet. This was accelerated by the passage in 1982 of the United Nations’ Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which enshrined the biggest enclosure in history. UNCLOS gave national ownership of 200 nautical miles of the sea around each littoral country, multiplying the size of some jurisdictions, while giving nothing to land-locked countries. Once enclosed, governments could privatize and commodify the seas and their contents, which they now owned. Extraordinarily, one multinational, the world’s biggest chemical company, BASF, now owns 47 percent of all the valuable patents in marine genetic resources.<sup>3</sup> The plunder of the blue commons will further worsen global inequality.

What must be done? We need more awareness. Knowledge of what the plunder of the commons represents is still scanty. We need a campaign to revive them and to appreciate their value. Elsewhere, I propose that every country should set up a commons capital fund, built from levies on those who have gained from taking or having been given commons, and from which commons dividends, in the form of basic income payments, should be paid as a way of reducing insecurity and inequality.

For example, we need high carbon taxes if we are to curb the greenhouse gas emissions that are driving the world toward extinction and an era of pandemics. A high carbon tax by itself would be regressive as it would represent a higher share of the income of low-income people than of the rich and so would be electorally unpopular. However, if it guaranteed that the revenue would be recycled as equal common dividends, it would be progressive and popular.

So, reviving the commons and gaining compensation for commoners from those gaining from the plunder of the commons should be part of a strategy to reduce inequalities and to generate a Good Society suited to the twenty-first century.

---

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Standing 2021.
- <sup>2</sup> Standing 2019.
- <sup>3</sup> Blasiak et al. 2018.

## References

- Blasiak, Robert, Jean-Baptiste Jouffray, Colette C. C. Wabnitz, Emma Sundström and Henrik Österblom. 2018. “Corporate Control and Global Governance of Marine Genetic Resources.” *Science Advances*, 4(6):eaar5237.
- Hardin, Garrett. 1968. “The Tragedy of the Commons.” *Science*, New Series, 162(3859):1243–1248.
- Standing, Guy. 2019. *Plunder of the Commons: A Manifesto for Sharing Public Wealth*. London: Pelican.
- Standing, Guy. 2021. *The Corruption of Capitalism: Why Rentiers Thrive and Work Does Not Pay*. London: Biteback Publishing.