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The Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth

Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights*,**

Summary

The Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth (Addendum to report A/HRC/62/42) provides advice to States on the eradication of extreme poverty in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Roadmap aims to assist States in implementing the Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, adopted by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 21/11 and which the General Assembly welcomed in its resolution 67/164 of 20 December 2012. The Roadmap identifies a set of policy measures at domestic and multilateral levels that could reduce the dependency of the fight against poverty and inequalities on economic growth.

* The present document is being issued without formal editing. It is circulated in the language of submission only.

** This report was finalized by the previous mandate holder, Olivier De Schutter, and presented by the current mandate holder, Elena Díaz Galán.

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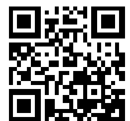

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The Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth

I. Introduction

1. In an earlier report, the Special Rapporteur showed that economic growth often fails to translate into commensurate improvements in economic, social and cultural rights.[1] Indeed, the quest for growth at all costs can in fact exacerbate violations of rights, as governments seek to attract investment by lowering taxes on corporate profits, weakening labour protections and reshaping regulatory frameworks in favour of capital, thereby subordinating social justice, decent work and care to profit maximisation and investor confidence. A narrow focus on gross domestic product (GDP) — understood as a measure of total economic output — can thus distort decision-making in favour of forms of development that can weaken workers' rights,[2] deepen inequalities, intensify insecurity and undermine mental health due to the pressures of increased competition.[3] It is in that sense that growth can become "counter-productive".

2. Moreover, the pursuit of economic growth has resulted in higher levels of resource use, accelerating biodiversity loss, waste generation and pollution. An economic model dependent on endless expansion thus undermines the very material conditions necessary for the realisation of human rights. As the Special Rapporteur underlined in earlier reports, the crisis of poverty and the ecological crisis are interlinked: the growth of inequalities and the concentration of wealth not only are destabilizing the economy and have become a threat to democracy[4], they also are major obstacles to fight against further environmental degradation; and environmental degradation in turn has a disproportionate impact both on people in poverty and on low-income countries.[5]

3. Once the limits of growth-dependence are acknowledged, new questions emerge. How can we make economies more inclusive and sustainable by design? Where growth is still needed — in low-income countries in particular, as well as in some middle-income countries —, how can we ensure that it is less extractive and exploitative than it is in its current form? Which governance mechanisms should be put in place to escape path dependencies, and to inject long-term thinking in policy-making, to ensure intergenerational fairness?

4. The Roadmap on Eradicating Poverty beyond Growth proposes to address this complex equation. It is not a blueprint to reform the economy, developed by a handful of experts working behind closed doors. It is the very opposite: it was developed through contributions from a wide range of actors, including unions, civil society groups, academic experts, States and UN agencies, over a period of 18 months[6]. More than 400 persons in total

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[1] See A/HRC/56/61.

[2] See A/78/175.

[3] See A/79/162.

[4] Inequality is considered as the most interconnected global risk in the World Economic Forum's *Global Risks Report 2026*.

[5] See A/75/181 and A/HRC/59/51.

[6] In addition to the large number of individual experts who contributed to this effort, the Special Rapporteur is grateful to the institutional partners whose work significantly informed the analysis and recommendations of the Roadmap, including Earth4All, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR), the REAL – A Post-Growth Deal Project, the Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll), MERGE, the SPES project (Sustainability Performances, Evidence and Scenarios), ToBe, Oxfam, Greenpeace, the New Economics Foundation (NEF), Positive Money UK, the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), the Tax Justice Network (TJN), the World Inequality Lab (WIL), the Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR), International Development Economics Associates (IDEAs), Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO), the Sustainability & Organizations Institute (HEC Paris), the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN), Equal Right, UBI Bath, the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), Ecohesion, the Finance Innovation Lab, WhatAboutDem, the Law and Political Economy Project, the 4 Day Week Foundation, Territoires Zéro Chômeurs Longue Durée (TZCLD).

took part in consultations, or submitted inputs, to address this question: how can we address the poverty and inequality emergencies without seeing economic growth as the precondition for progress? The Roadmap thus builds on the wide range of proposals received to enrich the policy toolbox against poverty, with a view to moving beyond the "grow-tax-transfer" sequence on which the fight against poverty has traditionally relied: while post-market compensation is still needed to support redistribution, in-market reforms and pre-market social investment should now be equally ranked as priorities. The Roadmap therefore identifies a wide range of policy measures that could be adopted to move in this direction: it thereby gives concrete content to the vision of a "human rights economy" put forward within the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and it serves to stimulate political action, policy exchange and collective learning across countries, thus contributing to the objectives of the Global Coalition for Social Justice led by the International Labour Organisation.[7]

5. Four characteristics of this effort deserve to be highlighted. First, the Roadmap is adaptable to national circumstances. While it presents an integrated framework to combat poverty and inequalities without relying on growth, not all measures proposed will be equally relevant to all contexts. Countries at different levels of development have different needs, and they face different challenges. For low-income countries (in the World Bank classification), or least-developed countries (according to the listing of the UNCTAD), it may still be necessary to increase total economic output in order to satisfy the needs of the population and thus contribute to the realization of human rights. For these poor countries, and even for some middle-income countries, the challenge is not to dispense with growth: it is, rather, to ensure growth is truly employment-rich, inclusive, oriented towards local needs and sustainable, and thus to escape forms of growth that are export-dependent, extractive, based on low-wage competition and geared towards satisfying the demand of the high-value markets of rich countries. Implementation will thus necessarily vary according to national circumstances—countries at different development levels face different constraints and will prioritize different entry points. But the systemic nature of poverty requires systemic responses: selective adoption of individual measures without attention to their interdependencies risks undermining transformative potential.

6. Secondly, while the policy measures proposed may concern different levels of governance —from municipalities and local governments to national and regional governance to multilateral institutions at the global level— escaping growth dependencies may require a coordination of reforms at these different levels, which should be mutually supportive. For instance, investing in social protection at the domestic level requires that the debt crisis facing lower- and middle-income countries be addressed, not only by adopting and enforcing principles on responsible sovereign borrowing and lending (as already anticipated in the UNCTAD Principles on Promoting Responsible Sovereign Lending and Borrowing and in the G20 Operational Guidelines for Sustainable Financing), taking into account the requirements of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights[8], but also by strengthening the G20 Common Framework for Debt Treatments beyond the Debt Service Suspension Initiative,[9] setting up a comprehensive debt cancellation framework, building on the principles endorsed in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 69/319 on Basic Principles on Sovereign Debt Restructuring Processes to improve the stability and fairness of the international financial system, and by

[7] The Global Coalition for Social Justice serves as a platform to implement political commitments, mobilize investments, and promote concrete actions that support social justice, in alignment with national priorities. It aims to foster multilateral cooperation and partnerships that accelerate progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Its priorities are: addressing inequalities, discrimination and exclusion; realizing human rights and related labour rights, ensuring human dignity and meeting basic need; expanding access to, and capabilities for, productive and freely chosen employment and sustainable enterprises; providing protection and building resilience; strengthening just transition and the social dimension of sustainable development, trade and investment, and reinforcing institutions of social dialogue. The Human Rights Economy is also one of the Coalition's key multistakeholder interventions, aimed at advancing transformative, rights-based approaches.

[8] See E/C.12/2016/1.

[9] See A/CONF.227/2025/L.1, paras. 48 and 50.

institutionalising Global South debtor coordination through formal Debtors' Coalitions, learning from the UNCTAD Borrower's Platform, to strengthen negotiating power of indebted countries.[10] Or, to take another example, increasing taxes on corporate profits would be greatly facilitated by the adoption of a UN Framework Convention on Tax Cooperation imposing binding standards for country-by-country reporting, encouraging the establishment of public beneficial ownership registries, setting a global minimum corporate tax rate applied jurisdiction by jurisdiction, and providing for unitary taxation with formulary apportionment of multinational profits based on real economic activity. And, more fundamentally: the shift at domestic level towards valuing care and support, and directing production towards the satisfaction of local needs only can be achieved at the scale and the pace required if the international economic order is restructured to move beyond the still dominant patterns of neocolonialism, which the current scramble for resources and neomercantilist approaches have further reinforced. Thus, the proposals presented in the Roadmap are interdependent: they are designed to work in concert, addressing the structural drivers of poverty across labour markets, provisioning systems, fiscal policy, and international governance, and combining reforms to be adopted at the domestic level with the establishment of an enabling international environment.

7. Thirdly, the policy measures proposed may have to be adopted gradually, over a number of years, following a sequence specific to each context. Some measures can be taken immediately: that includes the adoption, by participatory means, of an anti-poverty strategy with time-bound objectives, designed to gradually reduce growth dependencies by making markets more inclusive by design and supporting social investment. Others may only be taken after several years, once the right conditions are created. What matters however is that the short-term measures contribute to fulfilling the long-term vision, preparing the adoption of bolder reforms: to address the polycrisis they are facing, governments should move beyond crisis management to more ambitious reforms, or what might be called "non-reformist reforms" — policy measures that respond to urgent needs while progressively transforming the structural conditions that produce poverty, inequality and ecological degradation.

8. Fourth and finally, the Roadmap is experimentalist in spirit. Each of the policy measures is subjected to a detailed "policy profile", which assesses its pros and cons, drawing the lessons from past experiments, and asking whether such experiments can be generalized or transposed to other settings — scaled up or scaled out.[11] This too should support collective learning, and increase accountability. It should equip governments, as well as social movements and civil society groups, including unions, to seek inspiration in promising policy measures adopted in other jurisdictions to identify what can be done to combat poverty and inequalities and to break the vicious cycles that perpetuate poverty from one generation to the next[12], without simply hoping that this will result from growing the total economic output, if and when such growth will be achieved.

9. Altogether, the Roadmap is meant as an antidote to the pessimistic view that, in the current context, no significant reforms can be adopted, because of the geopolitical tensions, the obsession for competitiveness, and the pressures that militarization exerts on public budgets. The year 2024 witnessed the slowest progress in the global Human Development Index (HDI) since records began 35 years ago, and HDI gaps between very high and low HDI countries, which for decades had been shrinking, have widened since 2020: it is becoming increasingly obvious that we have gone on the wrong track.[13] Yet it is not despite this context, but precisely because of it, that we need imaginative proposals to be put forward

[10] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), *Borrowers' Platform*, 2026; Policy profile prepared by Fadhel Kaboub, Associate Professor of Economics at Denison University and President of the Global Institute for Sustainable Prosperity, Denison University & Andres Chiriboga, Postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Economic Research (IIEc-UNAM), available at www.neep.poverty.org.

[11] Policy profiles can be found on the repository website of the Roadmap, built under the New Economies for Eradicating Poverty (NEEP) initiative of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, at: www.neep-poverty.org.

[12] See A/76/177.

[13] United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report 2025. A matter of choice: people and possibilities in the age of AI* (UNDP: New York, 2025), p. 5.

to break existing deadlocks. First however, we need to escape the trap of growthism: the ideological belief that no progress is possible without first increasing the total output of the economy, as measured by the Gross Domestic Product indicator. As Oscar Wilde once remarked, all progress can be seen as the realisation of utopias: here is where we start.

II. Guiding Principles

10. The central objective of this Roadmap is the eradication of poverty in all its dimensions, through the dismantling of social exclusion and institutional maltreatment, and the structural reduction of inequalities in income, wealth, power, status, gender and voice. The shift beyond growth is not an abstract economic choice; it is a necessary condition for fulfilling States' obligations under international human rights law — including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights — in a manner that is sustainable, democratic and consistent with planetary boundaries. The following Guiding Principles articulate the normative foundations of this transformation.

11. **Primacy of human rights, dignity and poverty eradication**: All economic and social policies must be designed and assessed with the effective realisation of human rights, ensuring dignity and the eradication of poverty — understood as material deprivation, social exclusion, stigma and institutional maltreatment — as their primary objective. Poverty is relational and multidimensional: it denies equal participation in society and undermines human dignity. States must move beyond compensatory approaches and address the structural drivers of poverty embedded in economic governance, labour markets, fiscal systems and social institutions. No economic objective, including growth, can justify policies that entrench deprivation or exclusion.

12. **Substantive equality and structural redistribution of resources and power**: Reducing inequalities in income, wealth, power, status and voice is indispensable to poverty eradication. Extreme concentrations of wealth and corporate power distort democratic decision-making and undermine equal enjoyment of rights. States must deploy fiscal, monetary, financial, competition and regulatory policies to redistribute resources and curb the concentration of economic power. Equality and non-discrimination — including on grounds of race, ethnicity, caste, descent, religion, gender, language, disability, age, social origin, migration status, sexual orientation and gender identity — must guide all economic reforms. Structural redistribution is not optional; it is a human rights obligation.

13. **A human rights economy beyond growth dependence**: Economic growth is neither a sufficient nor a reliable precondition for the realization of human rights. What matters is the social, distributive and ecological character of development, and the extent to which macroeconomic governance is aligned with rights, decent work, equality and care. The Roadmap affirms the transition toward a human rights economy that organizes production, distribution, investment and consumption around the satisfaction of needs, universal access to essential public goods and services, and collective well-being within planetary boundaries. Macroeconomic governance — including fiscal, monetary, financial, trade and industrial policy — must be aligned with human rights obligations and assessed for its impacts on people in poverty and marginalized groups. Moving beyond growth-focussed economic models is necessary to prevent ecological breakdown, social fragmentation and the "modernization" of poverty in increasingly unequal societies.

14. **Ecological sustainability, intergenerational justice and responsibility toward future generations**: The economy is embedded within ecological systems and dependent upon them, and decisions taken today shape the rights, opportunities and living conditions of present and future generations. States have obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights in ways that safeguard ecological integrity and exercise stewardship over natural, financial and institutional resources, including the legal recognition of the rights of nature and the strengthening of biodiversity protection. Economic governance must be reoriented toward sufficiency, regeneration and long-term resilience, ensuring that the satisfaction of present needs does not compromise the ability of future generations to enjoy their rights. This requires precautionary approaches, long-term planning and budgeting based on democratic

participation, and governance arrangements that integrate future impacts into present decision-making, consistent with respecting planetary boundaries.

15. **Democratic governance and economic planning in the public interest**: The economy is a site of political choice, not a neutral technical sphere. Decisions about investment, production, taxation, employment, scientific and technological progress, and resource allocation must be subject to democratic deliberation and accountability. States should institutionalize participatory and deliberative mechanisms — including robust social dialogue institutions, citizens' assemblies, participatory budgeting and social audits — and ensure binding follow-through. Democratic planning, anchored in multi-year anti-poverty and well-being strategies, is essential to manage trade-offs, phase down harmful activities, protect livelihoods, and allocate resources fairly between present and future needs.

16. **Fair social organisation of care and support**: Care and support work and social reproduction are foundational to both economic life and poverty eradication. States must strengthen a fair social organisation of care and support by recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care and support work, by rewarding those (mostly women) who perform it and by ensuring adequate representation of care workers; ensuring decent working conditions, fair remuneration and social protection for paid care workers; and investing in universal, high-quality and accessible care and support systems. Reorienting economic priorities toward care, social cohesion and collective well-being strengthens resilience, supports decent job creation, reduces gender and social inequalities, and addresses the structural drivers of poverty. It also requires fostering social norms grounded in sufficiency, cooperation and reciprocity, rather than hyper-competition and the maximization of productivity.

17. **Centrality of lived experience and the dismantling of social exclusion**: Policies must be grounded in the lived experience of people in poverty. Those directly affected must participate actively, freely and meaningfully in the design, implementation and monitoring of anti-poverty strategies. Institutional practices that stigmatize, surveil, or punish people in poverty must be dismantled. Poverty eradication demands repairing social relationships, restoring trust and ensuring full participation in civic, economic and cultural life.

18. **Collective self-determination and rights of indigenous peoples and minorities**: Poverty and inequality are inseparable from histories of colonialism, dispossession and structural domination. The Roadmap is grounded in the lived realities, priorities and development challenges of countries and communities in the Global South, recognising the diversity of pathways to poverty eradication. The Roadmap affirms the right of all peoples to self-determination, including economic self-determination. The rights of Indigenous peoples — to lands, territories and resources; to maintain and strengthen their distinct institutions; to free, prior and informed consent; and to preserve knowledge systems — must be fully respected. Commons-based governance systems and collective tenure arrangements should be protected from privatization and extractive exploitation. Post-growth transitions must be anti-colonial in orientation and attentive to global asymmetries.

19. **International solidarity and common but differentiated responsibilities**: Eradicating poverty within planetary boundaries requires a just international order. States must cooperate to create enabling global conditions, including fair taxation, responsible financial governance, debt justice and equitable trade rules. High-income countries, having contributed most to ecological overshoot and accumulated wealth through unequal global arrangements, bear heightened responsibilities to reduce excessive consumption, mobilize resources and support policy space in low- and middle-income countries. International solidarity is not charity; it is a legal and moral obligation grounded in shared humanity and differentiated capabilities.

20. **Accountability, transparency and institutional integrity**: A rights-based post-growth transition requires that States are held accountable to what truly matters: well-being, rather than growth. Measuring progress requires indicators that capture multidimensional deprivation, hidden dimensions of poverty, and collective agency — not merely aggregate output. Accountability also requires robust safeguards against corruption, corporate capture and undue influence. States must ensure transparency in lobbying and political financing, protect whistleblowers, strengthen independent oversight institutions, and guarantee access

to information and effective remedies. National statistical systems should be independent, democratically oriented and equipped to measure inequality, well-being, ecological impact and collective agency. Accountability mechanisms must enable individuals and communities — especially marginalized groups — to challenge policies that undermine their rights.

21. **Together, these Guiding Principles establish a coherent normative framework**: poverty eradication and the dismantling of inequality are the primary objectives; ecological sustainability, democratic governance, international solidarity, and macroeconomic reform are the means through which those objectives can be achieved. Moving beyond growth dependence is not a rejection of development, but the condition for a development trajectory that contributes to the full realization of human rights, and that is inclusive, and sustainable for present and future generations.

III. Structure of the Roadmap

22. This Addendum establishes the analytical and normative foundations for change. **Chapter IV** traces the evolution from income-based to multidimensional understandings of poverty, before situating poverty within a broader framework that integrates its lived and relational dimensions, its dynamic and socially constructed character, and the structural role of inequality in producing and reproducing deprivation over time. Taken together, these perspectives show that poverty is not a static condition that can be reduced to a lack of income, but a multidimensional, relational and evolving process of exclusion. **Chapter V** provides a comprehensive diagnosis of the intertwined social, ecological and democratic crises of our time, examining the limits and failures of growth-dependent anti-poverty strategies and explaining why a decisive shift is necessary. It demonstrates that reliance on GDP growth as the primary engine of poverty reduction has become increasingly ineffective, environmentally unsustainable and socially destabilising. **Chapter VI** then articulates the Roadmap's alternative: a post-growth approach to poverty eradication anchored in the concept of a human rights economy. This framework positions internationally recognised human rights at the centre of economic governance, and embeds accountability, non-discrimination, participation and ecological limits into the architecture of policy design. It presents the human rights economy as a unifying, legally grounded framework capable of bridging and systematising diverse "new economy" approaches — including wellbeing, feminist, care-centred, decolonial and ecological perspectives — within a coherent normative structure focused on rights, democratic governance and planetary boundaries.

23. The Roadmap itself — the detailed exposé of operational measures, each accompanied by a 'policy profile' describing the measure and the lessons learned from past experiences — is presented online, on the neep-poverty.org website. It is organised around six mutually reinforcing policy pillars — (1) transforming economic systems; (2) labour, care and economic democracy; (3) universal basic services and social protection; (4) ecological justice; and (5) transforming the international economic order — complemented by a (6) transversal pillar (the governance core) on democratic planning and economic governance.

24. These pillars are not conceived as standalone silos, but as interdependent domains of transformation that must advance in parallel to eradicate poverty while remaining within planetary boundaries. The governance pillar underpins the five other pillars. It sets out the institutional architecture required to steer and sustain the transition to a human rights economy beyond growth. This pillar explains how collective priorities can be democratically defined, how long-term social and ecological objectives can be embedded into public decision-making, and how progress can be assessed through multidimensional wellbeing frameworks beyond GDP. It also details the safeguards needed to prevent corporate capture, the reform of budgeting, macroeconomic modelling and national accounts, and the institutionalisation of participatory and deliberative mechanisms. In doing so, the governance core chapter clarifies how decision-makers can be held accountable for advancing human rights, and for eradicating poverty and reducing inequality within planetary boundaries, ensuring that economic governance serves people and the public interest rather than markets and short-term growth imperatives.

25. The following table presents a summary of the policy measures proposed in the Roadmap:

PILLAR 1 - ECONOMIC SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATIONS		
FAIR AND EFFECTIVE FISCAL SYSTEMS		
Redistribution and limits	1.1.	Extreme wealth line
	1.2.	Wealth tax
	1.3.	Inheritance and gift caps
	1.4.	Maximum income schemes
Fair share from corporations	1.5.	Minimum corporate tax
	1.6.	Excess profit tax
	1.7.	Digital tax
Ecological fiscal reform	1.8.	Taxation of resource use and environmental harm
	1.9.	Luxury carbon taxation
MONETARY POLICY FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD		
	1.10.	Central bank mandates for social and ecological objectives
	1.11	Public Monetary Financing for Social and Ecological Investment
DEMOCRATIC INDUSTRIAL AND INVESTMENT POLICY		
	1.12.	Favouring public, municipal and cooperative ownership of strategic assets in the low-carbon transition
	1.13.	Binding credit steering of private investment
	1.14.	Public spending for social and ecological priorities
CURBING FINANCIAL SPECULATION		
	1.15.	Reorienting financial regulation
	1.16.	Nationalisation of pension funds
	1.17.	Competition policy as countervailing power
TRANSITIONING TO A SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY		
	1.18.	Supporting Purpose-Driven and Mission-Oriented Enterprises
	1.19.	Institutional frameworks for Social and Solidarity Economies
	1.20.	Public and cooperative financial infrastructure for the SSE
	1.21.	Intergenerational public procurement

PILLAR 2 - LABOUR POLICIES AND THE CARE ECONOMY		
LIVELIHOOD GUARANTEES AND DECENT WORK STANDARDS		
	2.1.	Employment guarantee
	2.2.	Fair and living wages

PILLAR 2 - LABOUR POLICIES AND THE CARE ECONOMY

LIVELIHOOD GUARANTEES AND DECENT WORK STANDARDS

2.3. Working time reduction

2.4. Platform and gig worker protections / atypical forms of employment

2.5. Protecting informal workers and encouraging transition from informal to formal work

2.6. Inclusive labour policies

COLLECTIVE POWER AND ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY

2.7. Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

2.8. Strengthening labour rights and fair working conditions in supply chains

2.9. Workplace Democracy

STEERING WORK TOWARD SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL PRIORITIES

2.10. Valuing work beyond economic growth

BUILDING A FAIR SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF CARE

2.11. Investing in care

2.12. Universal Care Income

PILLAR 3 - UNIVERSAL BASIC SERVICES AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

UNIVERSAL BASIC SERVICES

3.1. Universal access to education

3.2. Universal access to nutritious food

3.3. Universal access to health coverage

3.4 Universal Access to Housing

3.5. Universal access to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)

3.6. Universal Access to Clean Energy

3.7. Affordable and accessible public transportation

3.8. Universal Digital Connectivity and Access

UNIVERSAL SOCIAL PROTECTION

3.9. Universal social protection

3.10. Minimum Income Guarantees

3.11. Universal Childcare Benefits

3.12. Universal Basic Income

PILLAR 4 - ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

ECOLOGICAL LIMITS AND SUFFICIENCY

4.1. Caps on Resource Use, Emissions, and Pollution

4.2. Rationing luxury commodities

4.3. Right to repair and anti-obsolescence

4.4. Promotion of Circular Economy

STEWARDSHIP OF THE COMMONS

4.5. Community Governance of the Commons

4.6. Affirming Rights of nature and Biodiversity protection

CLIMATE JUSTICE AND GLOBAL SOLIDARITY

4.7. Loss and damage fund 2.0

RESOURCE JUSTICE AND SOVEREIGNTY

4.8 Agroecology and Food Sovereignty

4.9. Energy Transition Minerals Governance

4.10. Land ceiling and agricultural land redistribution

PILLAR 5 - TRANSFORMING THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ORDER

DEBT JUSTICE

5.1. Sovereign debt cancellation and Global South debtors' coalition

5.2. Curbing the dominance of private credit ratings agencies through multilateral credit rating

5.3 A Clearing Integrated Monetary Area (CIMA)

FINANCING THROUGH INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

5.4. Global Fund for Social Protection

5.5. Expanded allocations of Special Drawing Rights

5.6. A United Nations Framework Convention on Tax Cooperation

REDEFINING THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ORDER

5.7. A binding Covenant on the Right to Development

5.8. South-South Trade and Investment Compacts & Payment Systems

5.9. Democratization of Intellectual Property Regimes, Technology sharing and establishing knowledge commons

5.10. Ending Investor-State Dispute Settlement mechanisms

FROM WARFARE TO SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL WELLBEING

5.11. Ending the use of unilateral sanctions

PILLAR 5 - TRANSFORMING THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ORDER

DEBT JUSTICE

5.12. Advancing a unified Disarmament Agenda

PILLAR 6 - DEMOCRATIC PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE

DEMOCRATIC PLANNING FOR A POST-GROWTH TRANSITION

6.1. Democratic planning & National anti-poverty strategies

6.2. Protecting the Integrity of Democratic Decision-Making

6.3. Future Generations planning

REDEFINING PROGRESS BEYOND GDP

6.4. Democratising the macroeconomic modelling toolbox

6.5. Multi-dimensional wellbeing indicators

6.6. Global account systems for sustainable and inclusive well-being

6.7. Wellbeing and participatory budgeting

BUILDING PARTICIPATORY AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

6.8. Citizens' assemblies with binding follow-through

6.9. Institutionalise participatory social audits and community monitoring

6.10. Universal access to accurate, pluralistic, and independent information

6.11. Democratic governance of digital and AI systems

BUILDING COUNTERVAILING POWER

6.12. Community bargaining power

6.13. Reforming and decolonizing of economics education

IV. What Is Poverty?

26. The concept of poverty is not politically neutral. How poverty is defined determines how it is measured; how it is measured shapes what is prioritised; and what is prioritised determines who will be supported in escaping poverty, and who will not. Definitions of poverty therefore carry profound policy implications: they influence not only how many people are counted as poor, but also what forms of deprivation are made visible, how responsibility is assigned, and what responses are deemed appropriate. This chapter traces the evolution from income-based to multidimensional understandings of poverty, before situating poverty within a broader framework that integrates its lived and relational dimensions, its dynamic and socially constructed character, and the role of inequality in producing and reproducing deprivation over time. Taken together, these perspectives show that poverty is not a static condition that can be reduced to a lack of income, but a multidimensional, relational and evolving process of exclusion. The chapter concludes by situating poverty within a human rights framework and drawing out the implications for anti-poverty strategies.

A. Monetary poverty

27. Monetary approaches to poverty define individuals as poor when their income falls below a threshold deemed sufficient to purchase a basket of essential food and non-food goods. This cost-of-basic-needs methodology underpins the World Bank's international poverty line and, through it, Sustainable Development Goal 1, which commits States to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030.[14] Despite progress since 1990, this objective is unlikely to be met: as of April 2026, an estimated 826 million people — more than one in ten people globally — were still living in extreme poverty.[15]

28. Measured against the international poverty line, the share of the global population in extreme poverty declined from 38 per cent in 1990 to 8.5 per cent in 2024.[16] However, not only is this methodology increasingly criticised,[17] the boasted progress has also slowed down significantly. Around 600 million people are projected to remain in extreme poverty in 2030, and only 69 million people are expected to escape extreme poverty between 2024 and 2030, marking what has been described as a "lost decade" in poverty reduction.[18] Moreover, deprivation has become increasingly concentrated: in 2000, one in four people living in extreme poverty resided in Sub-Saharan Africa or in fragile and conflict-affected contexts; by 2024, that share had risen to three in four. At higher poverty thresholds, the picture is more concerning. At USD 8.30 per day, approximately 3.7 billion people remain deprived, and the absolute number below this threshold has changed little over the past three decades, as population growth has largely offset reductions in the poverty rate.[19]

29. While absolute thresholds occupy the dominant position in global development reporting, relative measures of monetary poverty are increasingly recognised as essential complements, as they capture a dimension that fixed thresholds cannot: the inability to maintain a standard of living common in one's own society. Poverty, in this sense, is not only a fixed physiological state but a relation between individual resources and the prevailing social minimum of a given society at a given time. The most widely applied relative standard, used across European Union member states and by the OECD, sets the poverty threshold at 60 per cent of national median equivalised household income.[20] Households falling below this line lack the resources to participate in the customary standards and social expectations of their society, even if they cover their basic needs. Since 2018, the World Bank has introduced a complementary measure, the Societal Poverty Line (SPL), a measure intended to better approximate how poverty thresholds rise with average national income and thereby move closer to the logic of national poverty lines in countries where extreme poverty is not the only relevant benchmark.[21] Progress in reducing societal poverty thus understood has been consistently slower than progress in tackling absolute poverty, since it requires incomes at the lower end of the distribution to grow faster than the national average. In other words, it demands a reduction in inequality.

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[14] United Nations General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, Resolution 70/1, September 25, 2015, Goal 1; United Nations, "Sustainable Development Goal 1: End Poverty in All Its Forms Everywhere."

[15] World Bank, *Poverty and Inequality Platform*, accessed April 7, 2026.

[16] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025* (New York, 2025; rev. August 2025), 8.

[17] Anthony B. Atkinson, *Monitoring Global Poverty: Report of the Commission on Global Poverty* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2016); Michail Moatsos, "Global Absolute Poverty: Behind the Veil of Dollars," *Journal of Globalization and Development* 7, no. 2 (2016); Robert C. Allen, "Absolute Poverty: When Necessity Displaces Desire," *American Economic Review* 107, no. 12 (2017): 3690–3721; Robert C. Allen, "Poverty and the Labor Market: Today and Yesterday," *Annual Review of Economics* 12 (2020): 107–134.

[18] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025*, 8.

[19] World Bank, *Poverty and Inequality Platform.*

[20] Eurostat, "Glossary: At Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion (AROPE)."; OECD, "Poverty Rate.".

[21] World Bank, *Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report 2024: Pathways Out of the Polycrisis* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2024), 68–69.

B. Multidimensional poverty

30. From the mid-1990s onwards, States and human rights bodies increasingly converged around a multidimensional understanding of poverty that moves beyond income, recognising it as a condition associated with multiple and intersecting violations of human rights.[22] Poverty is thus understood as resulting from a lack of access to — and entitlement to — a range of essential goods and services deemed necessary for the full enjoyment of rights. This multidimensional understanding builds on a longer tradition of direct approaches to poverty, which sought to assess deprivation through actual living conditions and unmet needs rather than income alone. This perspective is grounded in a well-established empirical observation: people living in poverty face interlocking and mutually reinforcing deprivations across the life course.[23] Poor health undermines educational attainment and employment prospects; residing in segregated deprived areas restricts access to quality schools and professional networks; precarious and low-paid work contributes to chronic stress and deteriorating health; and discrimination within institutions and labour markets further constrains opportunities. Breaking these vicious cycles therefore requires addressing the full constellation of deprivations, rather than focusing on income alone.

31. The scale of multidimensional deprivation is significant. The World Bank's Multidimensional Poverty Measure shows that global poverty is 51 per cent higher when education and access to basic infrastructure are considered alongside income deprivation.[24] The 2025 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index estimates that 1.1 billion people — approximately 18.3 per cent of the population across 109 countries — live in acute multidimensional poverty, with more than half of them being children under the age of 18.[25] Multidimensional poverty is also increasingly shaped by environmental factors. Of the 1.1 billion people living in acute poverty, 887 million are exposed to at least one major climate hazard, including droughts, floods, extreme heat or air pollution. This underscores that poverty is not only persistent but is being reshaped by the climate crisis, which both intensifies existing vulnerabilities and reduces pathways out of poverty.

C. The lived experience of poverty

32. Understanding how poverty is lived — from the inside — is indispensable to moving beyond aggregate measures and grasping how deprivation is experienced, reproduced and resisted in everyday life. Participatory and ethnographic research has fundamentally reoriented the conceptualization of poverty by placing those who experience it at the centre of knowledge production. The landmark *Hidden Dimensions of Poverty* study, co-led by

[22] For instance, the Programme of Action adopted at the 1995 Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development states that: "Poverty has various manifestations, including lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterized by a lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life." See A/CONF.166/9, para. 19.

[23] Sabina Alkire, James. E. Foster, Suman Seth, Maria Emma Santos, Jose Manuel Roche, and Paola Ballon, *Multidimensional Poverty Measurement and Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Anthony B. Atkinson, *Monitoring Global Poverty: Report of the Commission on Global Poverty* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2016).

[24] The geography of multidimensional poverty is also strikingly unequal: in Sub-Saharan Africa, 52.6 per cent of the population experiences multidimensional poverty according to the World Bank's MPM — significantly exceeding the region's already high monetary poverty rate and far above the global average of 13.4 per cent. Multidimensional poverty is also more than twice as high in fragile and conflict-affected settings, where the incidence rises to some 34.8 per cent, compared to 10.9 per cent in countries not affected by war or minor conflict — a sobering reminder that without peace and institutional stability, poverty reduction stalls or reverses. World Bank, *Multidimensional Poverty Measure Database* (10th ed., circa 2022) (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2025).

[25] Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and United Nations Development Programme, *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2025: Overlapping Hardships: Poverty and Climate Hazards* (Oxford and New York: OPHI and UNDP, 2025).

ATD Fourth World and the University of Oxford across six countries (Bangladesh, Bolivia, France, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and the United States) using the Merging of Knowledge methodology — in which people in poverty, practitioners and academics function as equal co-researchers — identified nine dimensions of poverty, six of which had previously been absent from policy discourse.[26] Three of these newly mapped dimensions pertain to what the study terms the *core experience* of poverty: disempowerment (a lack of control and dependency resulting from severely constrained choices, in which options are structurally limited and the consequences of any misstep are catastrophic); suffering in body, mind and heart (the sustained physical, psychological and emotional anguish produced by material deprivation, including constant fear, shame, despair and the cognitive "bandwidth tax" that poverty imposes, distorting decision-making and narrowing temporal horizons to the immediate present);[27] and struggle and resistance (the largely invisible daily labour through which people in poverty exercise agency, solidarity and creativity to survive and to protect their children and communities, efforts that are systematically rendered invisible by conventional poverty frameworks). These three dimensions resist quantification: they capture poverty not as a condition defined by what one lacks, but as a *lived predicament* — dynamic, relentless and socially constituted.

33. The remaining three newly identified dimensions are *relational* in character. Social maltreatment — the systematic stigmatization, prejudicial negative judgement and social ostracism inflicted by community members, neighbours, employers and fellow citizens upon people in poverty — operates as a pervasive form of humiliation and social exclusion. The experience of being "othered", treated as belonging to a morally inferior category of person, is driven partly by the cultural belief that poverty reflects personal failure rather than structural circumstance. Institutional maltreatment compounds this harm: formal public and private institutions — welfare agencies, social services, courts, schools — routinely fail, through both action and inaction, to respond appropriately to the needs and circumstances of people in poverty, with their design and implementation reflecting, amplifying and entrenching discriminatory attitudes rather than challenging them. Finally, unrecognised contributions — the practical knowledge, solidarity networks, care and support work, and community-sustaining activities of people in poverty — are systematically discounted and rendered invisible, denying those living in poverty the social recognition that is a precondition for equal standing in political and civic life. Together, these relational dimensions establish that poverty is not merely the experience of lacking things; it is the experience of being denied recognition, voice and dignity.

D. The modern face of poverty

34. This lived experience is not static. As collective standards of living evolve, so does the threshold below which individuals are considered excluded — and so does the social harm that poverty inflicts. Poverty in contemporary societies must be understood as a moving and socially defined condition, shaped by the evolution of collective standards of living.[28] As societies grow richer and as technologies evolve, the threshold below which individuals are considered excluded rises. A household without electricity or indoor plumbing may once have been typical; today, in many high-income contexts, the absence of reliable internet access places individuals at a structural disadvantage across multiple domains of life — from education and employment to healthcare access and civic participation. Similarly, the ability to absorb economic shocks has become a tacit requirement for social integration: households lacking even minimal financial resilience are exposed not only to hardship, but to cascading and often irreversible forms of exclusion. Moreover, research on subjective well-being

[26] Rachel Bray, Marianne De Laat, Xavier Godinot, Alberto Ugarte, and Robert Walker, *The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty* (Montreuil: Fourth World Publications, 2019).

[27] Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir, *Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means So Much* (New York: Times Books, 2013).

[28] For a fuller account of this approach, see Olivier De Schutter, *The Poverty of Growth* (London: Pluto Press, 2024).

demonstrates that individuals attach significant importance to their relative position and to prevailing social norms of consumption.[29]

35. This evolution reflects a broader transformation in the nature of poverty. Poverty is no longer adequately captured as the inability to meet basic needs alone; it increasingly denotes the inability to meet socially determined expectations that expand with collective affluence. In this sense, poverty is inherently dynamic: it is defined not only by what individuals lack, but by how far they fall short of the norms that govern participation in their society. Even where basic services are available and certain deprivations are alleviated, individuals may remain excluded if they cannot access the goods, services and forms of human security that have become standard.[30] This implies that economic growth can simultaneously reduce extreme deprivation while deepening relative exclusion, as the social baseline itself continuously shifts.

36. This modern face of poverty is further shaped by structural transformations in the organisation of economies. As services that were once collectively provided — such as housing, healthcare, education or transport — suffer from insufficient public funding and become increasingly commodified, access to essential goods depends more heavily on purchasing power. This raises the effective cost of participation for low-income households and amplifies the consequences of income inequality, even in contexts where average incomes are rising. Understanding poverty in this way has profound implications. It means that poverty cannot be eradicated solely by lifting individuals above a fixed threshold or by ensuring access to a minimum bundle of goods and services. It requires addressing the structural drivers of inequality and social exclusion, including the distribution of resources, the organisation of essential services, and the norms that define social participation. In a context where the "race for more" continually raises the bar of inclusion, strategies that rely exclusively on economic growth risk becoming self-defeating: they may reduce absolute deprivation while reproducing — or even intensifying — the very forms of exclusion that define poverty in contemporary societies.

E. Inequality breeds poverty

37. High inequality does not simply coexist with poverty — it produces and reproduces it over time. This is particularly visible in the interlocking dynamics of inequality and intergenerational transmission. Nine in ten people in the world live in countries that meet the

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[29] Paul Dolan, Tessa Peasgood, and Mathew White, "Do We Really Know What Makes Us Happy? A Review of the Economic Literature on the Factors Associated with Subjective Well-Being," *Journal of Economic Psychology* 29, no. 1 (2008): 94–122; Sara J. Solnick and David Hemenway, "Is More Always Better? A Survey on Positional Concerns," *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 37, no. 3 (1998): 373–83.

[30] Human security—defined as "freedom from want, freedom from fear, and freedom from indignity"—is linked to the human rights framework and encompasses three interconnected aspects: protection, empowerment, and solidarity. First introduced in the 1994 Human Development Report as a framework centered on people rather than states, human security addresses threats to individual and community wellbeing across economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political dimensions. The concept was revisited and updated in the 2022 Human Development Report, which identified new threats to human security emerging in the Anthropocene era and called for greater solidarity in building peaceful and sustainable development processes. Recent scholarship has further elaborated how human security provides a foundation for action in addressing the interconnected challenges of environmental degradation, inequality, and social fragmentation that characterize the current epoch. Mario Biggeri and Heriberto Tapia, "Human Security in the Anthropocene: A New Base for Action," *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 24, no. 2 (2023): 253–62; Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen, *Human Security Now: Commission on Human Security* (New York: Commission on Human Security, 2003); United Nations Development Programme, *New Threats to Human Security in the Anthropocene: Demanding Greater Solidarity* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2022); United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1994: New Dimensions of Human Security* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 1994); United Nations Development Programme, *New Threats to Human Security in the Anthropocene: Demanding Greater Solidarity* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2022).

World Bank's threshold for high inequality,[31] mostly due to circumstances beyond the control of the individual: in OECD countries, at least a quarter of income inequality is explained by such circumstances (mostly by the socio-economic position of the parents),[32] and in countries such as Brazil, Colombia and South Africa, it takes nine generations or more for those born in low-income families to approach mean income levels.[33] These inequalities are further entrenched by structural forms of discrimination based on social hierarchies and social origin, including those historically linked to work and descent. Such systems confine affected communities to stigmatized and hazardous occupations — including bonded labour, sexual exploitation, sewage work,— on the basis of inherited status.[34] These dynamics reinforce intergenerational exclusion by locking individuals into occupations assigned at birth while further stigmatizing them because of this work. Even when individuals exit these occupations, discrimination tied to their identity or community often persists, trapping them in cycles of intergenerational poverty. Under such conditions, inequality hardens into a quasi-caste structure in which poverty functions as an inherited status rather than a temporary condition.

38. The relationship between inequality and poverty is not merely empirical; it is structural and self-reinforcing. According to the *World Inequality Report 2026*, the top 10 per cent of income earners globally receive more income than the remaining 90 per cent combined, while the poorest half of the global population captures less than 10 per cent of total global income.[35] Wealth is even more concentrated: the top 10 per cent own around three-quarters of global wealth, whereas the bottom half holds just 2 per cent. At the very top, the concentration is more extreme still: the wealthiest 0.001 per cent — fewer than 60,000 individuals — control around three times more wealth than half of humanity combined, with their share rising from nearly 4 per cent in 1995 to over 6 per cent today. These disparities are not only persistent but increasing, as the wealth of billionaires and centi-millionaires has grown at around 8 per cent annually since the 1990s, nearly twice the rate observed for the bottom half of the population. The result is a global economy in which extreme concentration of wealth continues to outpace improvements at the bottom, entrenching exclusion on a massive scale.

39. Labour market exclusion, discriminatory practices and fiscal subordination then operate as transmission belts through which inequality is converted into persistent deprivation. In 2024, 57.8 per cent of the global workforce — more than 2 billion workers, with women overrepresented — were in informal employment, with 9 in 10 workers informal in least developed countries and in sub-Saharan Africa;[36] many fall into the "missing middle", excluded both from social insurance and from assistance targeted to the very poorest.[37] Decades of labour-market deregulation, weakening of minimum wage protections and attacks on trade union rights have shifted bargaining power from labour to capital, depressing the labour share of income and entrenching precarious work.[38] At the same time, high and often unsustainable public debt — USD 31 trillion in developing countries, with debt-service payments already exceeding health or education spending in one third of them

[31] G20 Extraordinary Committee of Independent Experts on Global Inequality, *Report of the G20 Extraordinary Committee of Independent Experts on Global Inequality* (2025), 5.

[32] OECD, To Have and Have Not: How to Bridge the Gap in Opportunities (Paris: OECD, 2025), 11, 48.

[33] OECD, A Broken Social Elevator? How to Promote Social Mobility (Paris: OECD, 2018), 26.

[34] Yozo Yokota and Chin-Sung Chung, Final Report of Yozo Yokota and Chin-Sung Chung, Special Rapporteurs on the Topic of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent, A/HRC/11/CRP.3 (Geneva: United Nations, 2009).

[35] Lucas Chancel, Ricardo Gómez-Carrera, Rishabh Kumar Moshrif, Thomas Piketty, et al., World Inequality Report 2026 (Paris: World Inequality Lab, 2025), 12.

[36] High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, SDG 3: Good Health and well-being (2025), https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2025/2025_Factsheets.pdf.

[37] See A/HRC/50/38, paras. 37-41.

[38] David Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Anita Szymańska and Małgorzata Zielenkiewicz, "Declining Labour Income Share and Personal Income Inequality in Advanced Countries," Sustainability 14, no. 15 (2022): 9403; International Labour Organization and OECD, Policy Measures to Address Inequalities and Increase the Labour Income Share, G20 Technical Paper, Employment Working Group (2025).

— severely constrains the fiscal space needed to finance social protection floors and pre-distributive investments.[39] Countries with high inequality are seven times more likely to experience democratic decline than more equal societies, underscoring that inequality and poverty are not only economic phenomena, but also corrosive of the democratic governance that is itself a precondition for sustained poverty eradication.[40]

40. Social and economic inequalities may be further widened and amplified with the rapid development of new technologies which is often not followed by the timely development of robust and effective regulatory frameworks. From the structural transformations in the labour market and the erosion of labour protections and rights, to digital borders and the accumulation of a soaring global wealth in the hands of the few, new technologies, AI-based innovations, the expanding digital infrastructure and their socio-economic impact, offer another perspective in the overall understanding of the dynamic character of modern poverty.

F. Poverty as a human rights violation

41. The preceding analysis — from monetary and multidimensional measures to lived experience and structural inequality — points to a central conclusion: poverty is not merely a descriptive condition but a matter of justice and responsibility. As argued in the final report of the Special Rapporteur, poverty is manufactured, produced and reproduced, through institutional choices about how welfare systems are structured, how labour is valued, how wealth is taxed, how care and support is organised and remunerated, and how markets are regulated.[41] It is the human rights framework that transforms this understanding into a normative and legally actionable one. In 2001, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights defined poverty as “a human condition characterized by sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights”.[42] This definition recognises that the multiple deprivations identified by multidimensional measures are part of a self-reinforcing process in which disadvantages interact, accumulate and persist over time. People living in poverty face obstacles in accessing education, healthcare, housing, adequate nutrition, work and political participation; yet these very deprivations also make it more difficult to escape poverty, trapping individuals and households in a vicious cycle of exclusion.[43] The 2005 Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies acknowledge this dynamic dimension, by describing poverty not only as multidimensional, but also as a process in which deprivations are “mutually reinforcing” and closely associated with “stigma, discrimination, insecurity and social exclusion”.[44]

42. From this human-rights based perspective, poverty can therefore be understood as both a cause and a consequence of human rights violations, undermining the effective enjoyment of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights alike. The human rights-based approach introduces three main dimensions. First, accountability: poverty is not an inevitable outcome but the result of policy choices and institutional arrangements; States are legally bound to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights. These obligations include duties of non-retrogression, of mobilizing maximum available resources and of ensuring minimum essential levels of rights. The question is therefore not only how much poverty exists, but who is responsible for its persistence. Second, it places equality and non-discrimination at the centre of analysis. Poverty is systematically concentrated among specific groups, including women, racial and ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples and migrants; and poverty itself (living on low incomes, or originating from a disadvantaged socio-economic status)

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[39] UNCTAD, A World of Debt 2025: It Is Time for Reform (Geneva: UNCTAD, 2025).

[40] Eli G. Rau and Susan C. Stokes, “Income Inequality and the Erosion of Democracy in the Twenty-First Century,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 122, no. 1 (2025).

[41] See A/HRC/62/42.

[42] See E/C.12/2001/10, para. 8.

[43] See A/76/177.

[44] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies* (Geneva: OHCHR, 2006), para. 15.

often gives rise to discrimination, which the Special Rapporteur described as povertyism. These patterns reflect structural inequalities embedded in labour markets, social protection systems, access to land, education and public services. Human rights law requires States to address these inequalities, including their intersecting and cumulative forms. Third, it emphasizes participation. People living in poverty are often excluded from decision-making processes that shape the policies governing their lives. This exclusion is itself a form of rights deprivation. Meaningful participation requires more than consultation: it requires co-construction of policies, grounded in the recognition of the expertise of those directly affected.[45]

43. This understanding shifts the focus from identifying deficits to ensuring the effective enjoyment of rights, from describing outcomes to assigning responsibilities, and from fragmented interventions to integrated strategies capable of breaking the self-reinforcing cycle of deprivation, exclusion and powerlessness. It provides the normative foundation upon which the Roadmap's approach to poverty eradication is built. National anti-poverty strategies, grounded in rigorous diagnosis, sustained inter-ministerial coordination and long-term planning, are the principal instrument through which this approach is operationalised as elaborated in the final report of the Special Rapporteur[46] and in pillar 6 of this Roadmap.

Box 1 – Understanding poverty

For the purposes of this Roadmap, poverty is understood as a multidimensional, relational and dynamic process of exclusion — in which individuals or groups experience sustained or chronic deprivations of capabilities, resources, security, power and recognition that prevent them from enjoying their human rights and participating as equals in society. These deprivations are lived and experienced, socially constructed, and produced and reproduced over time by unequal economic, social and political structures, within and often in tension with planetary limits.

Five principles guide the Roadmap's approach:

1. Poverty is multidimensional, lived and relational, and must be assessed through a human rights lens. Both absolute and relative dimensions matter. Extreme monetary deprivation remains an urgent priority, but the international poverty line is an extremely low and insufficient minimum threshold. At all income levels, poverty includes interlocking deprivations across multiple domains of human rights — income and material security; health, education, housing, water, sanitation, energy and digital connectivity; personal safety; participation in cultural, social and political life; and environmental security. It also encompasses relational and experiential dimensions, including stigma, discrimination, institutional mistreatment, disempowerment and the denial of recognition and dignity. A human rights-based approach shifts the focus from measuring deficits to assigning responsibilities: States bear legally binding obligations to respect, protect and fulfil these rights.

2. Poverty is dynamic and socially constructed. Poverty evolves with changing societal standards, technological developments and economic structures. It is not defined solely by the inability to meet basic needs, but increasingly by the inability to meet socially determined expectations required for full participation in society. As societies grow richer, the threshold of exclusion rises, and new forms of deprivation emerge. This implies that poverty cannot be eradicated solely by lifting individuals above fixed thresholds, but requires addressing the shifting social conditions that define inclusion and exclusion.

[45] The methodology co-designed by the Special Rapporteur and ATD Fourth World, known as IDEEP (Inclusive and Deliberative Elaboration & Evaluation of Policies), provides guidance. It is inspired by the *Guidelines for the Merging of Knowledge and Practices when Working with People Living in Situations of Poverty and Social Exclusion*. ATD Fourth World, *Guidelines for the Merging of Knowledge and Practices when Working with People Living in Situations of Poverty and Social Exclusion*, https://www.4thworldmovement.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Guidelines_for_the_Merging_of_Knowledge_and_Practices.pdf.

[46] As elaborated in the final report of the Special Rapporteur (A/HRC/62/42) and in pillar 6 of this Roadmap.

3. Poverty eradication is inseparable from reducing inequality. High and persistent inequalities in income, wealth and power are key drivers of poverty, shaping its distribution, depth and persistence, including across generations. Without direct action on the distribution of resources, opportunities and bargaining power, economic growth risks leaving the poorest behind or reproducing deprivation in new forms. In affluent and ecologically constrained economies, redistribution within planetary limits is not a complement to poverty reduction — it is its precondition.

4. Poverty is structural and manufactured. Poverty is not a natural condition or the aggregate result of individual misfortune. It is produced and reproduced through institutional arrangements and relations of power — including labour market structures, unequal access to land and resources, exclusionary financial systems, discriminatory norms, and political processes that marginalise certain groups. Socioeconomic status must be explicitly recognised as a prohibited ground of discrimination. Eradicating poverty therefore requires transforming the structures that generate it, not merely compensating for its effects.

5. National anti-poverty strategies grounded in participation and rights are essential. Translating this understanding into policy requires integrated national anti-poverty strategies grounded in rigorous diagnosis — including of multidimensional, relational and hidden dimensions of poverty — sustained inter-ministerial coordination, binding and time-bound targets, and long-term planning that moves beyond growth dependency. Central to this approach is the active, free, and meaningful participation of people living in poverty, recognising them as rights-holders and as agents of knowledge and change. Such strategies are the primary instrument through which States fulfil their human rights obligations to eradicate poverty.

V. The Unfulfilled Promise of Growth

44. For decades, economic growth has been treated as the central pillar of poverty eradication strategies, based on the assumption that expanding output will generate employment, increase incomes, and provide the fiscal resources needed for redistribution. This “grow first, redistribute later” paradigm has shaped national policies and international development agendas alike. Yet its promise has remained only partially fulfilled. While growth has contributed to poverty reduction in some contexts, its effects have proven uneven, contingent, and increasingly fragile. The links between growth, job creation and decent work have weakened; the gains from growth have been captured disproportionately by the wealthiest; and in many cases, growth has been accompanied by rising economic insecurity, social fragmentation and deteriorating mental health. At the same time, the ecological costs of continued expansion have become impossible to ignore: planetary boundaries are being exceeded, and the environmental impacts of growth are distributed in ways that disproportionately affect those already living in poverty.

45. The pursuit of continuous economic growth has led to “a world out of balance”.[47] Although global gross domestic product (GDP) more than doubled between 2000 and 2022, human deprivation remains widespread: the pace of progress would need to accelerate fivefold to meet basic needs for all by 2030. At the same time, ecological pressures are intensifying, with overshoot needing not only to stop immediately but to reverse at nearly twice the current pace in order to remain within planetary boundaries and safeguard Earth-system stability by 2050. As long as economic growth is treated as a precondition for social progress, governments are trapped in a dilemma: while growth appears necessary, it is environmentally unsustainable, and the pursuit of it risks crowding out other, more effective pathways to poverty eradication.

46. This chapter examines the limits of growth as a strategy for eradicating poverty, not to deny its role in specific contexts, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, but to

[47] Andrew L. Fanning and Kate Raworth, “Doughnut of Social and Planetary Boundaries Monitors a World Out of Balance,” *Nature* 646 (2025): 47–56.

challenge its status as a universal and indispensable precondition for social progress. Growth is neither a sufficient nor a reliable instrument for poverty reduction, and under certain conditions it may even become counterproductive. It argues for moving beyond the ideology of "growthism" [48] and for adopting a human rights-based approach as developed in the following chapter, in which the eradication of poverty is pursued directly through redistribution, public provision and the reorganisation of economic systems around the satisfaction of needs within planetary boundaries.

A. The hegemony of growth

47. Defined as the increase in gross domestic product (GDP), economic growth has been treated not merely as one policy instrument among many, but as the master variable upon which all other social objectives depend. The ideological "hegemony of growth" played a decisive institutional role in making GDP growth the universal index of governmental performance and policy legitimacy, thereby marginalizing alternative indicators of social progress.[49] Human rights bodies, international financial institutions, and national governments have consistently proceeded from the assumption that without growth there would be no resources to finance public services, no demand for labour sufficient to absorb the workforce, and no prospect of improving the living standards of those in poverty.[50] By the late twentieth century, growth had acquired the character of "State imperative" — a political commitment so deeply embedded in fiscal systems, electoral cycles, and institutional design that governments would accept severe social dislocation and violations of human rights rather than question it.[51] Confirmed at the highest level by the 2015 Sustainable Development Agenda, with Goal 8 referring to "sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth",[52] this orthodoxy has become so entrenched that any suggestion of poverty reduction without relying on growth is often dismissed as eccentric.

48. An explanation may be found in what has been described a form of "growth dependence": a situation in which economic, social and political institutions are configured in ways that make continued growth appear indispensable, even where its benefits are uncertain or diminishing.[53] Modern economies are indeed organized in ways that make them reliant on continuous expansion: public finances often depend on growth to sustain tax revenues without increasing tax rates; employment systems rely on growth to absorb labour productivity gains and avoid unemployment; pension systems, debt structures, and financial markets are premised on expectations of future growth. At the same time, political expectations have been shaped by decades of rising living standards in high-income countries, reinforcing the perception that continued improvement depends on further expansion of economic output. In an increasingly interconnected global economy, growth in one region is also seen as supporting demand in others, reinforcing its perceived necessity.

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[48] Matthias Schmelzer, "Without Growth, Everything Is Nothing': On the Origins of Growthism," in *De Gruyter Handbook of Degrowth*, ed. Lauren Eastwood and Kai Heron (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2024), 25–40.

[49] Matthias Schmelzer, *The Hegemony of Growth: The OECD and the Making of the Economic Growth Paradigm*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[50] Matthias Petel and Norman Vander Putten, "Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Their Dependence on the Economic Growth Paradigm: Evidence from the ICESCR System," *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights* 39, no. 1 (2021): 53–72.

[51] John Barry, "A Genealogy of Economic Growth as Ideology and Cold War Core State Imperative," *New Political Economy* 25, no. 1 (2020): 18–29.

[52] Under SDG8, which relates to decent work and economic growth, target 8.1 is to 'sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries'. The associated indicator (8.1.1), is the annual growth rate of real GDP per capita.

[53] Lorenz Keyßer, Julia Steinberger, and Matthias Schmelzer, "Economic Growth Dependencies and Imperatives: A Review of Key Theories and Their Conflicts," *Ecological Economics* 238 (2025).

B. Is economic growth the solution?

49. Overall, a broad consensus has persisted: sustained economic growth is a precondition for poverty eradication. This dominant narrative rests on two closely related claims.[54] First, increases in GDP are expected to create jobs, thus not only reducing unemployment but also strengthening the bargaining position of workers and their unions. Second, growth is assumed to expand public revenues, enabling governments to finance public services and social protection. Together, these mechanisms are said to produce a virtuous cycle: rising output benefits investors through higher returns, strengthens public finances through increased taxation, and raises wages in line with productivity gains. By sustaining demand, this dynamic is also expected to reinforce further growth, smoothing economic fluctuations over time. This "win-win-win" model draws its intellectual foundations from Keynesianism and has long commanded broad political consensus.

50. The evidence, however, suggests that growth is neither sufficient nor automatically pro-poor, and its effects depend on the structure of the economy, labour market institutions, public investment, the distribution of bargaining power, and the extent to which gains are captured by labour or capital. Yet, while disagreements have persisted over how to achieve growth and how its benefits should be distributed — with different emphasis placed on fiscal discipline, labour protections or social redistribution — its centrality has rarely been questioned. Across the political spectrum, growth has been treated as a necessary condition for social progress and poverty eradication. It is time to ask whether this assumption still holds.

1. Jobless growth

51. The first claim assumes that economic growth leads to job creation and, through employment, to poverty reduction. This logic is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where Goal 8 links "sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth" to "full and productive employment and decent work for all," noting that "[s]ustainable economic growth will require societies to create the conditions that allow people to have quality jobs that stimulate the economy while not harming the environment".[55] Evidence supports the importance of employment for poverty reduction: while social protection played a larger role in reducing extreme poverty, labour income was the main driver of reductions in 'moderate' poverty across a set of 16 low- and middle-income countries between 2000 and 2010.[56]

52. The relationship between growth and employment is neither stable nor automatic, however: over the past 40 years, the relationship between economic growth and jobs, where additional growth is needed to absorb productivity gains (a relationship known as Okun's law)[57], has fragmented dramatically. Since 2012, the correlation between GDP increase and unemployment reduction has amounted to a meagre 0.34 for OECD countries.[58] In many contexts, growth has translated only weakly into job creation, particularly in middle and low-income countries, with variations in outcomes mainly depending on labour market institutions and the structure of the economy, the role of small- and medium-sized enterprises,

[54] For a full account of the arguments made in this section, see Olivier De Schutter, "Growth, Degrowth, and Poverty Reduction," in *The Routledge Handbook on Degrowth*, ed. Anitra Nelson and Vincent Liegey (London: Routledge, 2025), chap. 26, 349–63.

[55] Sustainable Development Goals, "Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth.", https://sdgs.gov.ng/goals/economic-growth/.

[56] Facundo Alvaredo, Bertrand Garbinti, and Thomas Piketty, "On the Share of Inheritance in Aggregate Wealth: Europe and the United States, 1900–2010," *Economica* 84 (2017): 239–60.

[57] Arthur M. Okun, "Potential GNP: Its Measurement and Significance," *Proceedings of the Business and Economic Statistics Section of the American Statistical Association* (1962); reprinted as Cowles Foundation Paper 190.

[58] Éloi Laurent, "From Welfare to Farewell: The European Social-Ecological State Beyond Economic Growth," Working Paper 2021.04 (Brussels: European Trade Union Institute, 2021), 13.

informal sector and technological developments.[59] Global economic growth is expected to remain too weak to significantly reduce the jobs gap or meaningfully improve working conditions.[60] In many developed economies, growth without corresponding job creation has become an established pattern, driven by rapid technological change and structural transformations. If increases in output are achieved primarily through higher labour productivity — particularly via labour-saving technologies — employment gains cannot be assumed and may even be negative.[61] Moreover, the weakening relationship between growth and employment reflects not only technological change but also the erosion of labour market institutions, collective bargaining, employment protections, industrial policy and public investment that once helped convert productivity gains into rising wages and broad-based employment. In this context, "jobless growth" risks no longer being an exception, but becoming the norm.

2. Financing welfare provisions

53. The second component of the dominant narrative holds that economic growth is necessary to finance public services and social protection. Because public revenues are largely derived from economic activity — through taxes on income and consumption, social security contributions, trade tariffs and resource rents — growth is seen as indispensable to sustaining state capacity. Under existing institutional arrangements, any reduction in total economic output may place pressure on public finances, threatening the continuity of social protection systems; a risk that is particularly acute when output contraction is accompanied by rising unemployment, which simultaneously compresses the tax base and increases expenditure on unemployment benefits.[62] The challenge is further compounded in developing countries particularly, due to the high costs of debt servicing they face, illicit financial flows, tax avoidance and evasion.[63]

54. Yet this reasoning, while not without foundation, is incomplete. It conflates the level of economic activity with the structure of taxation, overlooking the fact that the resources available to the State depend as much on how wealth is distributed and taxed as on how much is produced. The composition of welfare state revenues from different tax bases is therefore a critical determinant of welfare states' growth dependence.[64] For instance, greater reliance on the taxation of accumulated wealth — including inheritances, land and financial assets — would both reduce dependence on growth and address the structural drivers of inequality: yet only 24 of 37 OECD countries tax inheritance and gifts, and even these levies typically account for a mere 0.5 per cent of total tax revenues on average for these 24 countries.[65]

55. Macroeconomists are now developing models showing how the financing of welfare can be ensured even without growth.[66] Such models are based on three ideas: it is cheaper to prevent poverty or ill-health than to remedy them; taxing wealth and inheritance is less dependent on growth than taxing income; and while costly in the short term, social

[59] Sangheon Lee et al., *Does Economic Growth Deliver Jobs? Revisiting Okun's Law*, ILO Working Paper 17 (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2020); M. Sylvina Porras-Arena and Ángel L. Martín-Román, "The Heterogeneity of Okun's Law: A Metaregression Analysis," *Economic Modelling* 128 (2023).

[60] International Labour Organization, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2025* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2025), 16.

[61] G20 Extraordinary Committee of Independent Experts on Global Inequality, Report of the G20 Extraordinary Committee, 33.

[62] Keyßer, Steinberger, and Schmelzer, "Economic Growth Dependencies and Imperatives.", 9.

[63] UNCTAD, A World of Debt 2025.

[64] Laua Wiman, Raphael Kaufmann, Katharina Bohnenberger, and Steffen Lange, "The Growth-Independent Welfare State," in *The Eco-Social Polity?*, ed. Ekaterina Domorenok, Paolo Graziano, and Katharina Zimmerman (Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press, 2025), 58.

[65] OECD, *Inheritance Taxation in OECD Countries* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2021).

[66] Christine Corlet Walker, Angela Druckman, and Tim Jackson, "Welfare Systems without Economic Growth: A Review of the Challenges and Next Steps for the Field," *Ecological Economics* 186 (August 2021); Laua Wiman, Raphael Kaufmann, Katharina Bohnenberger, and Steffen Lange, "The Growth-Independent Welfare State," in *The Eco-Social Polity?*, ed. Ekaterina Domorenok, Paolo Graziano, and Katharina Zimmerman (Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press, 2025).

investment provides high returns in the long term. Thus, a coherent multi-lever strategy — combining preventive and pre-distributive reforms that reduce long-term welfare demand, a restructured fiscal base drawing, among others, on wealth, environmental and corporate taxation, and carefully governed monetary-fiscal coordination to expand fiscal space — can stabilise welfare financing without requiring perpetual GDP expansion.[67] A range of these instruments are described in pillars 1 and 3 of the Roadmap. It is precisely because post-market redistribution faces significant constraints that greater attention must be given to two complementary levers: in-market inclusion and pre-market social investment, as outlined by the Special Rapporteur in his final report.[68] Similarly, the objective of the present Roadmap is to demonstrate how a coherent set of policies can reduce welfare states' dependence on economic growth while improving social outcomes and advancing the progressive realisation of economic and social rights.

56. The persistence of relatively low growth rates in many advanced economies also calls for such an evolution. Growth rates have more than halved in OECD countries since the 1960s, and it is highly unlikely that the kind of growth seen in the past will resume.[69] Against this background of secular stagnation, relying exclusively on growth to sustain welfare systems introduces a degree of fragility that responsible policymaking cannot ignore. Developing welfare strategies that remain robust under conditions of low or uncertain growth is therefore not an ideological departure: it is a matter of sound policy.[70] It is precisely this approach that the present Roadmap seeks to advance.

3. The capture of growths gains

57. The direct relationship between economic growth and poverty reduction is itself prone to debate.[71] Empirical research exists showing that where it is sustained and broad-based, growth is generally positively associated with reductions in income poverty: increases in national income are, on average, associated with increases in the incomes of the poorest segments of the population.[72] However, apart from the fact that this research adopts a narrow understanding of poverty as income poverty, such relationship is neither automatic nor consistent: in some cases, growth has had limited or no impact on poverty, and may even exacerbate it when its benefits are unevenly distributed by reinforcing inequalities in access to assets, markets and decision-making power.[73]

58. Moreover, while growth may be "good for the poor"[74], certain studies show that it is also often and mainly "(really) good for the (really) rich".[75] According to these, top incomes tend to increase faster than those of the rest of the population during periods of expansion, and are less affected during downturns; an asymmetric dynamic which contributes to widening inequalities and reflects the disproportionate influence that top earners exert over

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[67] Milena Büchs, "Proposals for Sustainable Welfare Policies," in *The Eco-Social Polity?*, ed. Ekaterina Domorenok, Paolo Graziano, and Katharina Zimmerman (Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press, 2025).

[68] See A/HRC/62/42.

[69] Tim Jackson, "The Post-Growth Challenge: Secular Stagnation, Inequality and the Limits to Growth," *Ecological Economics* 156 (2019): 236–46.

[70] European Economic and Social Committee, *The Sustainable Economy We Need*, own-initiative opinion NAT/765 (Brussels, January 23, 2020), para. 1.6.

[71] For a review, see Anders Danielson, When Do the Poor Benefit from Growth, and Why? Background paper to Sida's poverty project (Lund: Department of Economics, Lund University, 2001), 45–46.

[72] David Dollar and Aart Kraay, "Growth Is Good for the Poor," Journal of Economic Growth 7, no. 3 (2002): 195–225; David Dollar, Tatjana Kleineberg, and Aart Kraay, "Growth Still Is Good for the Poor," European Economic Review 81 (2016): 68–85.

[73] Martin Ravallion and Shaohua Chen, "China's (Uneven) Progress against Poverty," *Journal of Development Economics*82 (2007): 1–42; John A. Donaldson, "Growth Is Good for Whom, When, How? Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction in Exceptional Cases," *World Development* 36, no. 11 (2008): 2127–43.

[74] Dollar and Kraay, "Growth Is Good for the Poor"; Dollar, Kleineberg, and Kraay, "Growth Still Is Good for the Poor."

[75] Raymundo M. Campos-Vazquez, Emmanuel Chavez, and Gerardo Esquivel, "Growth Is (Really) Good for the (Really) Rich," *World Economy* 40 (2017): 2639–75.

economic decision-making, both nationally and internationally.[76] This pattern is borne out starkly when looking at wealth inequalities: over the past 30 years, the wealth of billionaires and centi-millionaires has grown at approximately 8 per cent annually — nearly twice the rate experienced by the bottom half of the population —, with the top 1 per cent alone capturing 36.7 per cent of total global wealth growth between 1995 and 2025, compared with just 1.1 per cent captured by the bottom 50 per cent.[77] And this trend is accelerating.[78] This concentration of gains is further compounded corporate capture and influence of public institutions and decision-making processes, weak regulatory and oversight frameworks and systems, as well as by the regressive character of tax systems at the very top, enabling the world's wealthiest individuals to accumulate and pass on fortunes largely untaxed: the next decade alone is expected to see more than USD 70 trillion transferred to heirs, largely untaxed, cementing the intergenerational transmission of advantage that is among the most durable drivers of structural poverty.[79] Growth, in other words, does not automatically translate into shared prosperity: where it occurs in contexts of extreme wealth concentration and weak redistribution, it risks reinforcing rather than dismantling the structural inequalities that sustain poverty. Overall, the relationship between economic growth and poverty is complex and contingent: the extent to which growth reduces poverty depends on its inclusiveness, the quality of institutions, and the policies that shape how its benefits are distributed.

4. The social limit to growth

59. It is also important to recognise, finally, that there are social limits — and even social costs — to what increases in GDP can deliver in terms of well-being. A first such limit lies in the observation that, beyond a certain level of income, further GDP growth no longer translates into improvements in human well-being. The contribution of growth to subjective well-being diminishes as individuals adapt to higher income levels and evaluate their situation relative to others whose incomes are also rising, or as additional production is increasingly directed towards positional, zero-sum goods.[80] And as noted above, poverty in modernising societies becomes a moving target, with its threshold rising alongside general prosperity. As collective affluence increases, the social norms of consumption that define full membership in society evolve accordingly. As a result, the share of the population experiencing meaningful social exclusion may expand even as poverty headcount ratios, measured against fixed thresholds, decline. In this sense, growth can raise the bar of social participation faster than it raises the incomes of those at the bottom.[81] Furthermore, beyond a certain threshold, the negative externalities associated with growth — including pollution, deteriorating mental health and social fragmentation — may offset, or even outweigh, its benefits. Under such conditions, economic growth may become "uneconomic", in the sense that it generates more social and ecological costs than welfare gains.[82]

[76] Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, and Stefanie Stantcheva, "Optimal Labor Income Taxation: A Tale of Three Elasticities," American Economic Journal: Economic Policy 6, no. 1 (2014): 230–71.

[77] Chancel et al., *World Inequality Report 2026*, 12, 15.

[78] Between 2000 and 2024, the richest 1 per cent similarly captured 41 per cent of all new wealth, while the average person in the bottom half of humanity saw their wealth increase by a mere USD 585 over the entire period. G20 Extraordinary Committee of Independent Experts on Global Inequality, Report of the G20 Extraordinary Committee, 5.

[79] G20 Extraordinary Committee of Independent Experts on Global Inequality, Report of the G20 Extraordinary Committee, 16.

[80] Richard A. Easterlin and Kelsey J. O'Connor, "The Easterlin Paradox," in *Handbook of Labor, Human Resources and Population Economics*, ed. Klaus F. Zimmermann (Cham: Springer, 2022), 1–25.

[81] See also chapter one, section D, 'The modern face of poverty'.

[82] Herman E. Daly, "Uneconomic Growth in Theory and in Fact," The First Annual Feasta Lecture, Trinity College, Dublin, April 26, 1999, http://www.feasta.org/documents/feastareview/daly.htm; Herman E. Daly, *From Uneconomic Growth to a Steady-State Economy* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2014).

C. The counterproductivity of growth

1. The poverty of pro-growth policies

60. These dynamics point to a deeper paradox: economic growth is not only insufficient, on its own, to ensure poverty reduction; under certain conditions, it may even become counterproductive. This counterproductivity is often embedded in the very policy instruments governments have deployed in the name of growth. The OECD's own Advisory Group on a New Growth Narrative has acknowledged that progress expected from higher GDP "can often be harmed by the ways it is generated, particularly for those on lower incomes and in more precarious work, and where private consumption is prioritised over public goods".[83] In the name of raising GDP, governments have since the 1980s consistently pursued a cluster of policies — trade liberalisation, labour market deregulation, fiscal consolidation, and the privatisation of public services — that have operated, in practice, to cancel out or reverse any welfare gains growth might otherwise have generated for lower-income groups.

61. These policies form a coherent ideological programme — commonly described as neoliberal — which lead directly to higher inequality: deregulation of labour markets and anti-trade-union legislation reduced the bargaining power of workers relative to capital; the shift away from progressive taxation towards regressive levies such as VAT, combined with dramatically falling effective tax rates on corporations and the wealthiest individuals, compressed the redistributive capacity of the state; privatisation of services in energy, water, transport, education, and health drove up corporate profits and consumer prices, reducing access for people living in poverty — and, in many countries, served as an opportunity for the outright transfer of valuable public assets to private wealth-owners.[84] Financial and capital market liberalisation compounded these effects by generating the volatility that produced successive crises, forcing governments to restrict countercyclical spending for fear of capital flight, while facilitating unprecedented levels of tax avoidance and evasion. When crises did materialise — as they invariably did, in large part as a consequence of the absence of effective oversight and of financial deregulation —, the policy response compounded the damage: austerity measures and fiscal consolidation, enacted in the name of restoring confidence and creditworthiness, translated into cuts to public spending and welfare retrenchment that fell disproportionately on those least able to absorb them, while further entrenching inequalities.[85]

62. The neoliberal wager was explicit: proponents acknowledged that these policies would increase inequality, but argued that the predicted acceleration of GDP growth would more than compensate the losers. Facts did not follow these optimistic predictions. Growth in advanced economies has been lower in the era of neoliberal policies than in the post-war decades,[86] and in the Global South it is largely countries that departed from the neoliberal policy playbook, such as China, that showed significant growth,[87] while several developing regions that were required to implement these policies saw growth collapse.[88] The result is a policy paradigm that has simultaneously failed on its own economic terms and deepened the poverty and inequality it claimed to remedy.

83 OECD, *Beyond Growth: Towards a New Economic Approach* (Paris: OECD, 2020), 15.

84 For a review, G20 Extraordinary Committee of Independent Experts on Global Inequality, Report of the G20 Extraordinary Committee, 29-30.

85 Isabel Ortiz, Matthew Cummins, Jeronim Capaldo, and Kalaivani Karunanethy, *The Decade of Adjustment: A Review of Austerity Trends 2010–2020 in 187 Countries*, ESS Working Paper No. 53 (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2015).

86 Thomas Piketty, *Capital and Ideology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

87 Kaiser Kuo, "How China Got Rich: A Deep Dive into China's 40-Year History of Economic Transformation," *World Economic Forum*, June 19, 2025, https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/06/how-china-got-rich-40-year-history-of-economic-transformation/.

88 Ha-Joon Chang, Kicking Away the Ladder: Development Strategy in Historical Perspective (London: Anthem Press, 2002).

2. The burnout economy

63. Another telling illustration of how growth can become uneconomic, generating costs that outweigh its benefits, is what the Special Rapporteur has described as the "burnout economy": a growth model that, by treating individuals as resources to be rendered maximally productive, manufactures the very conditions that undermine health, social cohesion and, ultimately, economic capacity itself.[89] Today, 970 million people — 11 per cent of the world's population — live with a mental health condition;[90] over 280 million suffer from depression and 301 million from anxiety;[91] and 700,000 people die by suicide every year.[92] The economic toll is considerable: mental health conditions generate losses of USD 1 trillion annually, between one third and one half of all new disability benefit claims in OECD countries are for mental health reasons,[93] and among young adults that share rises above 70 per cent.[94] Yet, GDP accounting registers the prescription of antidepressants and the hospitalisation of burnout patients as economic activity rather than as evidence of economic failure — an invisibility worsened when an exclusively biomedical framing considers these conditions as only problems of individual neurochemistry to be treated pharmaceutically, thereby obscuring the important social, economic and commercial determinants of mental health[95] and distracting from systemic reform.

64. The structural drivers of this crisis are rooted in the organisation of a competitive, growth-oriented economy. It is not only absolute deprivation,[96] but also relative poverty, inequality and economic insecurity — the chronic stress of precariousness, the fear of falling behind, the erosion of social capital in highly unequal societies — that most powerfully predict mental ill-health: studies show that individuals in more unequal countries report more symptoms of depression and elevated incidence rates for schizophrenia, psychosis and anxiety disorders,[97] and almost 60 per cent of people worldwide are very worried about losing their job or not finding one.[98] The post-Fordist reorganisation of work — with its unpredictable schedules, algorithmic management, just-in-time staffing and casualisation of employment — along with the explosive growth of gig and platform economies, within the increasingly deregulated labour markets, further compounds these risks, with evidence showing that a poor-quality job with high demands, unfair pay and low task-control can

[89] See A/79/162.

[90] World Health Organization, "Mental Health.", www.who.int/health-topics/mental-health#tab=tab_2.

[91] World Health Organization, "Global Strategic Direction for Mental Health.", www.who.int/observatories/global-observatory-on-health-research-and-development/analyses-and-syntheses/mental-health/global-strategic-direction.

[92] World Health Organization, *Suicide Worldwide in 2019: Global Health Estimates* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2021), 4, 7.

[93] World Health Organization, "Global Strategic Direction for Mental Health", www.who.int/observatories/global-observatory-on-health-research-and-development/analyses-and-syntheses/mental-health/global-strategic-direction; Dan Chisholm et al., "Scaling-Up Treatment of Depression and Anxiety: A Global Return on Investment Analysis," *The Lancet Psychiatry* 3, no. 5 (May 2016): 415–24.

[94] OECD, *Sick on the Job? Myths and Realities about Mental Health and Work* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2012).

[95] James B. Kirkbride, Deidre M. Anglin, Ian Colman, Jennifer Dykxhoorn, Peter B. Jones, Praveetha Patalay, Alexandra Pitman, Emma Soneson, Thomas Steare, Talen Wright, and Siân Lowri Griffiths, "The Social Determinants of Mental Health and Disorder: Evidence, Prevention and Recommendations," *World Psychiatry* 23, no. 1 (2024): 58–90.

[96] Lee Knifton and Greig Inglis, "Poverty and Mental Health: Policy, Practice and Research Implications," *BJPsych Bulletin* 44, no. 5 (2020): 193–96.

[97] Ioana van Deurzen, Erik van Ingen, and Wim J. H. van Oorschot, "Income Inequality and Depression: The Role of Social Comparisons and Coping Resources," *European Sociological Review* 31, no. 4 (August 2015); Jonathan K. Burns, Andrew Tomita, and Amy S. Kapadia, "Income Inequality and Schizophrenia: Increased Schizophrenia Incidence in Countries with High Levels of Income Inequality," *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 60, no. 2 (March 2014).

[98] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research, *World Social Report 2025: A New Policy Consensus to Accelerate Social Progress*(New York: United Nations, 2025), 2.

produce worse mental health outcomes than unemployment itself.[99] These dynamics are not incidental: they are self-reinforcing. Mental health conditions in turn push people deeper into poverty — in OECD countries, people with a severe mental disorder are six to seven times more at risk of unemployment[100] — while the stigma attached to such conditions restricts access to employment, housing and care simultaneously.[101] People in poverty face a triple threat whereby they are simultaneously economically disadvantaged, disproportionately exposed to mental health conditions, and denied adequate treatment and social support. And the status competition and consumerist culture that "growthism" fosters, binding individual wellbeing to positional rank and debt-financed consumption, deepens this dynamic. The mental health pandemic is not a side-effect of growth that can be corrected at the margins; it is a structural feature of a model of development that prioritises the maximisation of output over the realisation of wellbeing, illustrating an arguably extreme case of means-ends inconsistency in regard to the purpose of economic advancement.

D. The Earth boundaries

65. The most significant cost of uneconomic growth is ecological. According to the 2025 Planetary Health Check report, seven out of nine Planetary Boundaries have already been breached, and all seven are showing worsening trends, pointing to further destabilisation of the Earth system in the near future.[102] These boundaries define the Earth's stability, resilience and life-support functions — the "safe operating space" within which human well-being and societal development can be sustained.[103] Protecting the Earth's stability, on which all life depends, is therefore a prerequisite for the well-being of present and future generations. Yet economic activity has exceeded this capacity, with pressures on planetary systems accelerating rapidly in recent decades — a phenomenon referred to as the "Great Acceleration".[104] Since the 1970s, Earth scientists have consistently warned that infinite economic growth is incompatible with a finite planet — one characterised by limited resources and a constrained capacity to absorb waste and pollution.[105] Dominant growth-led development models are now driving the Earth system towards what scientists describe as a "Hothouse Earth" trajectory, in which climate tipping points risk triggering irreversible changes that could undermine the very conditions that have supported human civilisation for millennia.[106] Climate-related risks are becoming more frequent and severe with droughts, floods, heatwaves, storms and wildfires becoming the new normal across the globe.[107] At the same time, biodiversity loss has reached such a scale that it is increasingly described not only as a "sixth mass extinction", but also as a systemic risk with profound economic, social and

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[99] Ted Schrecker and Clare Bambra, *How Politics Makes Us Sick: Neoliberal Epidemics* (London: Springer, 2025), 154-58.

[100] OECD, *Sick on the Job? Myths and Realities about Mental Health and Work* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2012), 9.

[101] Graham Thornicroft et al., "The Lancet Commission on Ending Stigma and Discrimination in Mental Health," *The Lancet*400, no. 10361 (October 22, 2022): 1438–80.

[102] The seven boundaries breached (either in a zone of increasing risk or in high-risk zone) are: climate change, change in biosphere integrity, land system change, freshwater change, modification of biogeochemical flows, ocean acidification, and introduction of novel entities. The two remaining ones, which remain in "safe operating space" are increase in atmospheric aerosol loading, stratospheric ozone depletion. Planetary Boundaries Science (PBScience), *Planetary Health Check 2025* (Potsdam, Germany: Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, 2025), 24–25.

[103] Johan Rockström, Will Steffen, Kevin Noone, et al., "A Safe Operating Space for Humanity," *Nature* 461 (2009): 472–75.

[104] Will Steffen et al., "The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration," *Anthropocene Review* 2, no. 1 (2015): 81–98.

[105] Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jørgen Randers, and William W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

[106] William J. Ripple et al., "The Risk of a Hothouse Earth Trajectory," One Earth 9, no. 2 (2026): 101565.

[107] World Meteorological Organization, State of the Global Climate 2025 (Geneva: World Meteorological Organization, 2026).

even security implications.[108] Resource extraction and use — already responsible for approximately 55 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions and 90 per cent of land-use-related biodiversity loss — are projected to increase by a further 60 per cent between 2020 and 2060.[109]

1. Double disproportionality

66. These environmental crises do not affect all populations equally. While over half the world's population is at risk of major disruptions linked to climate change, this risk is highly unevenly distributed: of those exposed, 2.3 billion are at the $6.85 poverty line, and 390 million live in extreme poverty below $2.15 per day.[110] Over the past 30 years, 9 out of 10 deaths and 60 per cent of economic losses from disasters have occurred in developing countries[111] and between 2000 and 2019, low-income countries accounted for 23 per cent of total deaths due to disasters, despite representing less than 10 per cent of the world's population.[112] This unequal exposure is compounded by heightened vulnerability: people living in poverty often depend directly on ecosystems for their livelihoods, are more likely to reside in climate-exposed areas, and have limited capacity to cope with shocks such as rising food prices, declining labour productivity or deteriorating health conditions linked to environmental degradation.[113] Disadvantaged groups are also more likely to suffer long-term losses in income-earning capacity as a result of climate-related events.[114] Together, these dynamics illustrate the "dual disproportionality" of climate change: its impacts fall most heavily on low- and lower-middle-income countries and within them, disproportionately affecting those already living in poverty.[115]

67. At the same time, people in poverty are less likely to benefit from adequate social protection and have limited savings or assets to draw upon in times of crisis. Globally, although around half of the population benefits from at least one form of social protection, 47.6 per cent — or approximately 3.8 billion people — remain entirely unprotected.[116] In the 50 most climate-vulnerable countries, only 25 per cent of the population is covered, leaving an estimated 2.1 billion people unprotected. In the 20 most vulnerable countries, coverage drops to just 8.7 per cent — fewer than one in ten individuals — leaving 364 million people to fend for themselves. As a result, large populations are exposed to climate-related shocks without adequate protection, relying primarily on informal support networks and their own coping strategies. Moreover, even where social protection systems do exist, they are often ill-equipped to handle covariate shocks, such as extreme weather events linked to climate change that simultaneously affect entire communities or large population groups.[117]

[108] M. B. Mahon et al., "A Meta-Analysis on Global Change Drivers and the Risk of Infectious Disease," *Nature* 629 (2024): 830–36; Government of the United Kingdom, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, *Global Biodiversity Loss, Ecosystem Collapse and National Security: A National Security Assessment* (January 2026).

[109] United Nations Environment Programme, *Global Resources Outlook 2024: Bend the Trend – Pathways to a Liveable Planet as Resource Use Spikes* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2024).

[110] Miki Khanh Doan et al., Counting People Exposed to, *Vulnerable to, or at High Risk from Climate Shocks: A Methodology*, World Bank Working Paper 10619 (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2023), 26.

[111] World Bank, "Climate Action Game Changers: Adaptation to Climate Shocks.", https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2023/11/14/climate-action-game-changers-adaptation-to-climate-shocks.

[112] Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters and United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, *The Human Cost of Disasters: An Overview of the Last 20 Years (2000–2019)*, 22.

[113] See A/HRC/59/51, paras. 8-10.

[114] Barbara D'Ambrogi-Ola et al., *Actuarial Considerations Around Climate-Related Risks on Social Security* (June 2024), 16.

[115] See A/79/168, para. 45.

[116] International Labour Office, *World Social Protection Report 2024–26: Universal Social Protection for Climate Action and a Just Transition* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2024), xxii.

[117] See A/HRC/59/51, paras. 15-38.

2. The green growth (dis)illusion

68. Against this backdrop, the dominant policy response has nevertheless been to promote "green growth" — the idea that economic expansion can be reconciled with planetary boundaries through the decoupling of GDP from carbon emissions and material use (and environmental pressures writ large), driven by technological innovation, renewable energy, efficiency gains, and circular economy. However, while theoretically possible, there is no empirical evidence that such decoupling is occurring at the scale, speed, and scope required.[118] A 2019 systematic review found "no empirical evidence supporting the existence of an absolute, global, permanent, and sufficiently fast and large decoupling of environmental pressures from economic growth". [119] This finding was confirmed by another review the year after, concluding that "large rapid absolute reductions of resource use and GHG emissions cannot be achieved through observed decoupling rates, hence decoupling needs to be complemented by sufficiency-oriented strategies and strict enforcement of absolute reduction targets."[120] A third review from the same year affirmed there was "no evidence of economy-wide national/international absolute resource decoupling" and "no evidence of the kind of decoupling needed for ecological sustainability," which prompted the authors to conclude that "in the absence of robust evidence, the goal of decoupling rests partly on faith."[121] These studies were cited in the IPCC AR6 "Mitigation of Climate Change" report, with a short section that ended up being quite sceptical of decoupling and green growth.[122] Looking at global, regional, and national patterns of decoupling between economic output and greenhouse gas emissions, a 2025 study found that 60% of cumulative fossil-fuel CO_2 reduction during 1820-2022 happened during recessions, concluding that "historical episodes compatible with sustained growth and the required emission reductions are anecdotal."[123]

69. Even where high-income countries have achieved some degree of absolute decoupling, the reductions fall far short of Paris-compliant trajectories.[124] At current rates, these countries would, on average, require more than 220 years to reduce emissions by 95%, while emitting approximately 27 times their remaining 1.5°C-compatible fair shares in the process. Moreover, 73 per cent of climate scientists (and 86 per cent among those based in the European Union) express high levels of scepticism regarding the feasibility of green growth.[125] Continuing to premise economic development strategies on the eventual realization of green growth amounts to a high-risk wager, one that the world's poorest populations cannot afford to lose.

E. Global dependencies and historical responsibilities

1. Extractive growth

70. Global material use has increased markedly over the past half century. As of 2017, the world economy was consuming over 90 billion tonnes of materials per year — across all categories including biomass, metals, non-metallic minerals, and fossil fuels — well in

[118] For a review, see Kallis, Hickel, O'Neill, et al., "Post-Growth," e62–e78, esp. e64–e66.

[119] Timothée Parrique, Jonathan Barth, François Briens, et al., *Decoupling Debunked: Evidence and Arguments against Green Growth as a Sole Strategy for Sustainability* (Brussels: European Environmental Bureau, 2019).

[120] Helmut Haberl et al., "A Systematic Review of the Evidence on Decoupling of GDP, Resource Use and GHG Emissions, Part II: Synthesizing the Insights," *Environmental Research Letters* 15, no. 6 (2020): 065003.

[121] Tere Vadén, Ville Lähde, Antti Majava, Paavo Järvensivu, Tero Toivanen, Emma Sofia Hakala, and Jussi Tuomas Eronen, "Decoupling for Ecological Sustainability: A Categorisation and Review of Research Literature," *Environmental Science & Policy* 112 (2020): 236–44.

[122] Timothée Parrique, "Decoupling in the IPCC AR6 WGIII," April 8, 2022.

[123] Juan Infante-Amate, Emiliano Travieso, and Eduardo Aguilera, "Green Growth in the Mirror of History," *Nature Communications* 16 (2025): 3766.

[124] Jefim Vogel and Jason Hickel, "Is Green Growth Happening? An Empirical Analysis of Achieved versus Paris-Compliant CO2–GDP Decoupling in High-Income Countries," *The Lancet Planetary Health* 7, no. 9 (2023): e759–e769.

[125] Lewis C. King, Ivan Savin, and Stefan Drews, "Shades of Green Growth Scepticism among Climate Policy Researchers," *Nature Sustainability* 6, no. 11 (2023): 1316–20.

excess of what industrial ecologists consider the sustainable limit.[126] Responsibility for this overshoot is heavily concentrated: high-income nations account for 74% of global excess material use, driven primarily by the United States (27%) and the high-income countries of the EU-28 (25%), while the rest of the Global South — the low- and middle-income countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia — is responsible for only 8%. The material inequality between individuals is even more striking: the top 20% global richest people are responsible for 54% of the world material footprint, consuming 42% of all biomass, 64% of non-metallic materials, 67% of all fossil fuels, and 72% of all metals in 2017.[127]

71. The counterproductivity of growth takes on a structurally distinct and historically deeper dimension in the global South, marked by a post-colonial pattern of domination.[128] The current growth model is the source of a deeply unequal exchange, in which growth in the global North relies on exploiting resources in the global South, and in which wealth creation in the global South largely depends on producing for the high-value markets of rich countries, in large part to pay back a foreign debt labelled in hard currencies.[129] A comprehensive empirical study using environmental input-output analysis to trace the resources and labour embodied in international trade found that, in the year 2015 alone, the North net-appropriated 12 billion tons of raw materials, 822 million hectares of land, 21 exajoules of energy, and 188 million person-years of labour from the South — a transfer valued at $10.8 trillion, roughly a quarter of Northern GDP, and enough to end extreme poverty 17 times over.[130] Over the period 1990–2015, this drain reached $242 trillion, far exceeding total aid flows by a factor of 30. This analysis shows that unequal exchange is a significant driver of global inequality, uneven development, and ecological breakdown, reflecting structural power imbalances such as the capacity of Northern firms and states to leverage monopoly power, intellectual property monopolies, and geopolitical dominance in the institutions of global economic governance.

72. The transition to renewable energy and the growing resource needs to support the rapid technological and digital developments are increasingly perpetuating and reproducing historical global power imbalances, through new forms of extractivism, including but not limited to "green extractivism". [131] Rising demand for critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, nickel and copper, driven primarily by the clean energy needs of high-income countries, has triggered a surge in mining projects concentrated in the global South. While presented as essential to a low-carbon future, these projects often entail significant socio-environmental harms: ecosystem degradation, depletion of scarce water resources, pollution, and the disruption of indigenous livelihoods and social structures. In many cases, they lead to the commodification of land and the displacement of local communities, creating new "green

[126] Jason Hickel, Daniel W. O'Neill, Andrew L. Fanning, and Huzaifa Zoomkawala, "National Responsibility for Ecological Breakdown: A Fair-Shares Assessment of Resource Use, 1970–2017," *The Lancet Planetary Health* 6, no. 4 (2022): e342–e349.

[127] Peipei Tian, Kuishuang Feng, Xiangjie Chen, Dan Li, Meng Jiang, Jiashuo Li, Heran Zheng, Yuli Shan, and Laixiang Sun, "Consumption Inequalities in Material Use Undermining Resources Sustainability," *Nature Sustainability* 9 (2026): 459–69.

[128] Claudius Gräbner-Radkowitsch and Birte Strunk, "Degrowth and the Global South: The Twin Problem of Global Dependencies," ICAE Working Paper Series, no. 142 (Linz: Johannes Kepler University, Institute for Comprehensive Analysis of the Economy, February 2023), 18; Jason Hickel, "Is It Possible to Achieve a Good Life for All within Planetary Boundaries?" *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2019): 18–35 ; Jason Hickel, "What Does Degrowth Mean? A Few Points of Clarification," *Globalizations* 18, no. 7 (2021): 1105–11.

[129] Prapimphan Chiengkul, "The Degrowth Movement: Alternative Economic Practices and Relevance to Developing Countries," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 43, no. 2 (2018): 81–95; Jeffrey Althouse, Giulio Guarini, and José Gabriel Porcile, "Ecological Macroeconomics in the Open Economy: Sustainability, Unequal Exchange and Policy Coordination in a Center-Periphery Model," *Ecological Economics* 172 (June 2020): 106628.

[130] Jason Hickel, Christian Dorninger, Hanspeter Wieland, and Intan Suwandi, "Imperialist Appropriation in the World Economy: Drain from the Global South through Unequal Exchange, 1990–2015," *Global Environmental Change* 73 (2022).

[131] Muhammad Sikandar Ali Chaudary, "Lithium Dreams, Local Struggles: Navigating the Geopolitics and Socio-Ecological Costs of a Low-Carbon Future," *Energy Research & Social Science* 121 (2025): 103952.

sacrifice zones" that echo the impacts of earlier fossil fuel extractive industries. At the same time, the structure of global value chains remains largely unchanged: extraction occurs in the South, while processing, technological control and value capture are concentrated in advanced economies. As a result, the green transition risks entrenching existing patterns of unequal exchange, whereby resources, labour and environmental costs are borne in the South for the benefit of economic actors in the North.

2. Carbon inequality

73. Climate change further exposes these structural asymmetries, revealing a double injustice at the heart of the current development model.[132] Those who are most exposed to its impacts—low-income countries and poorer households—are also those who have contributed least to its causes. This imbalance is evident both across countries and within them. As of 2015, the United States alone was responsible for 40% of excess global CO_2 emissions, the EU-28 for 29%, and the G8 nations collectively for 85%; while the Global North as a whole accounted for 92% of excess emissions.[133] At the individual level, disparities are even more pronounced: the poorest half of the global population contributes only 10 per cent of consumption-based emissions (and just 3 per cent of emissions linked to private capital ownership), whereas the top 10 per cent account for nearly half of consumption emissions and 77% of emissions associated with capital ownership.[134] The wealthiest 1 per cent alone are responsible for 41 per cent of ownership emissions—almost twice as much as the entire bottom 90 per cent combined.

74. These patterns underscore that climate change is not only an environmental crisis, but also the outcome of deeply unequal systems of production, consumption and wealth accumulation, in which those who benefit most from growth are least exposed to its consequences. While high-income countries and wealthier populations, historically responsible for the bulk of greenhouse gas emissions, have derived the greatest benefits from carbon-intensive development, the gravest consequences are now borne by those with the least capacity to respond. Small island developing States face existential threats, least developed countries experience the most severe disruptions, and within all societies, marginalized and low-income groups are disproportionately vulnerable to environmental shocks.

3. Growth in the Global South

75. Overcoming these dependencies requires a fair allocation of efforts across countries. While the economies of high-income countries have become ecologically "obese", those of many low-income countries remain materially and energetically "under-provisioned". Recent empirical evidence confirms the depth of this imbalance: growth in energy and material use is occurring primarily in countries that do not need it, while it is insufficient, or even declining, in countries where it is most required to secure decent living standards.[135] Although global resource use already exceeds what would be necessary to ensure decent living standards for all, nearly half of all countries remain in conditions of shortfall. At current rates, convergence between the global North and South is far too slow: many countries will not reach sufficient levels of energy and material use even by the end of the century. A substantial redistribution of resource use, both within and between countries, is therefore indispensable. Without such redistribution, it will be impossible to simultaneously achieve decent living standards for all and remain within planetary boundaries.

76. The development imperatives facing low- and middle-income countries remain substantial, reflecting the scale of unmet needs and the continued necessity, in many contexts,

[132] See A/HRC/59/51, paras. 11-14.

[133] Jason Hickel, "Quantifying National Responsibility for Climate Breakdown: An Equality-Based Attribution Approach for Carbon Dioxide Emissions in Excess of the Planetary Boundary," *The Lancet Planetary Health* 4 (2020): e399–e404.

[134] Chancel et al., *World Inequality Report 2026*, 12.

[135] Joel Millward-Hopkins, Jason Hickel, and Suryadeepto Nag, "Is Growth in Consumption Occurring Where It Is Most Needed? An Empirical Analysis of Current Energy and Material Trends," *The Lancet Planetary Health* 9, no. 6 (2025): e503–e510.

of economic growth to ensure a decent standard of living and the fulfilment of human rights. Social protection coverage, for instance, is still deeply inadequate: only 52.4 per cent of the world's population benefits from at least one form of protection.[136] The financing gap to achieve universal social protection in 133 low- and middle-income countries is estimated at USD1.4 trillion annually, equivalent to 3.3 per cent of their combined GDP.[137] For low-income countries, this gap is far larger in relative terms, reaching 52.3 per cent of GDP, or USD 308.5 billion per year. These figures highlight the scale of investment required to ensure basic economic security and access to essential services. To close this gap, governments in low and middle-income countries need to significantly increase their social protection spending, a daunting challenge in low-income countries in particular, where the financing gap exceeds four times their current government expenditure and a staggering 28 times their current social protection spending.

77. These realities also call for a fundamental reorientation of development pathways grounded in international solidarity and redistribution,[138] and anchored in the core principles of the right to development, namely adoption of human-centred approaches, active, free and meaningful participation, non-discrimination, equality of opportunity, self-determination, and fair distribution of benefits.[139] The support of the international community in that direction should be guided by the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, to take into account both the past contributions of countries to environmental pressures and their ability to contribute to reversing this trend as measured by financial resources and technologies.[140]

78. Yet, poverty eradication in the global South cannot rely on replicating resource-intensive growth trajectories, nor on continued dependence on demand from the high-value OECD markets. If it is to contribute to the realization of human rights, the nature and direction of growth must fundamentally change. This requires addressing the structural dependencies that shape current development pathways, including through a reconfiguration of trade patterns enhancing the capacity of developing countries to meet domestic needs, including through technology transfers, as well as pursuing debt restructuring and, where necessary, cancellation, so that heavily indebted countries are not compelled to prioritize export-led production at the expense of local needs.[141]

F. No silver bullet

79. There is no systematic mechanism for poverty reduction that applies uniformly across contexts. Poverty reduction depends not on any single universal lever, but on the nature of development processes and the policies that shape their distributional outcomes in particular economic contexts. To paraphrase Amartya Sen, economic growth is a means rather than an end, and often an inefficient one.[142] Economic growth is neither a sufficient nor a reliable instrument for poverty eradication. The search for a single, universal solution — reducing complex and multidimensional social realities to one explanatory variable — is profoundly

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[136] International Labour Office, *World Social Protection Report 2024–26.*

[137] Umberto Cattaneo, Helmut Schwarzer, Shahra Razavi, and Annalisa Visentin, *Financing Gap for Universal Social Protection: Global, Regional and National Estimates and Strategies for Creating Fiscal Space*, ILO Working Paper 113 (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2024), 6–7.

[138] Olivier De Schutter, *Financing Social Protection Floors: Contribution of the Special Rapporteur to FfD4* (January 20, 2025), https://www.srpoverty.org/2025/01/17/financing-socialprotection-floors-contribution-of-the-special-rapporteur-to-ffd4/.

[139] Declaration on the Right to Development, Arts. 1(2) and 2(1).

[140] Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, principle 7; United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, art. 3; Convention on Biological Diversity, art. 20(4); United Nations General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, Resolution 70/1, September 25, 2015, targets 10.a and 12.1; United Nations, *Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development*, para. 59; and Maastricht Principles on the Human Rights of Future Generations, art. 20(c)(ix).

[141] See pillar 5 for further development.

[142] Amartya Sen, "Development: Which Way Now?," *The Economic Journal* 93, no. 372 (1983): 742–62, here 754.

disabling. It forecloses the exploration of alternative pathways and, in contexts where structural or cyclical constraints limit growth, leads to the conclusion that the only option is to reignite it, regardless of the social and ecological costs associated with its pursuit. This understanding is longstanding. Already in 1996, the UNDP's Human Development Report emphasized that economic growth can be detrimental to human rights and sustainable human development.[143] The HDR identified five types of distortive and extractive growth: jobless growth, where the overall economy grows but does not expand employment opportunities; ruthless growth, where the fruits of economic growth mostly benefit the rich while leaving millions in poverty; voiceless growth, where economic expansion is not accompanied by extensions of democracy, empowerment, or women's participation in economic management; rootless growth, which causes people's cultural identity to wither as minority cultures are marginalized or eliminated; and futureless growth, where the present generation squanders resources needed by future generations through environmental degradation, pollution, and depletion of natural resources. More recent scholarship has extended this framework to include additional dimensions of harmful growth patterns, such as health-less growth that generates negative effects on health in production and consumption processes, connection-less growth that increases loneliness and social isolation, and peace-less growth that produces violence and sustains conflicts.[144]

80. From a human rights perspective, the "growth-first" sequence is fragile for a fundamental reason highlighted in Chapter IV: poverty is not merely a lack of income, but a cumulative constellation of deprivations—material, social, institutional and political—sustained by relations of power, stigma, insecurity and exclusion. If poverty is understood as a violation of rights, the policy question shifts from "how to grow first" to "how to guarantee effective access to rights and essential services now", including through redistribution, institutional design and public provision. In this sense, increases in GDP are not a precondition for the realization of human rights, nor for combating poverty and inequality.

81. It is on this premise that the present Roadmap proceeds: redirecting policy attention from the maximisation of aggregate output to the democratic organisation of production and distribution around the satisfaction of needs and the fulfilment of rights.

Box 2 – Scanning the future: What the models tell us

Earth4All - System dynamics modelling lends quantitative weight to the diagnosis made in this chapter. The Earth4All model — a causal simulation of interactions between population, economy, inequality, energy, food, and climate out to 2100 — tests two contrasting pathways.[145] Under the Too Little Too Late scenario, in which current economic policies continue, GDP per capita keeps growing but inequality deepens, climate pressures intensify, and social cohesion erodes: growth comes at the expense of stability, and governments progressively lose the capacity to respond to converging crises. Under the Giant Leap scenario, five simultaneous turnarounds — in poverty, inequality, empowerment, energy and food systems — shift the underlying goals and feedbacks of the global economy toward wellbeing within planetary boundaries. The modelling is unambiguous on one point: the five turnarounds must be implemented together. Partial or sequenced reforms are too slow, because reinforcing feedbacks — in which poverty and inequality drive political instability, which in turn undermines climate and food policy — quickly overwhelm isolated interventions. Only simultaneous, system-wide transformation can keep wellbeing high while avoiding escalating ecological and social crisis. Poverty, in this framework, is never a siloed social challenge: it is an outcome of how the whole economic system is designed — and it can only be undone by redesigning that system.

[143] United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1996: Economic Growth and Human Development* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 1996).

[144] Mario Biggeri and Andrea Ferrannini, eds., *Navigating Transitions to Sustainable Human Development: Frameworks, Evidence and Policies* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2026).

[145] Sandrine Dixson-Declève, Owen Gaffney, Jayati Ghosh, Jørgen Randers, Johan Rockström, and Per Espen Stoknes, *Earth for All: A Survival Guide for Humanity* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2022).

MAPS - Participatory foresight modelling offers a complementary perspective. The MAPS project (Models, Assessment, and Policies for Sustainability) used an integrated foresight methodology — combining horizon scanning, co-created scenario building, and an e-Delphi process involving experts from academia, NGOs and the private sector — to map the structural conditions under which post-growth transitions succeed or fail.[146] The research generated four contrasting futures: Democratic Caring for Nature, in which participatory governance, sufficiency-based living, and decommodified access to essential services converge toward a regenerative economy; Autocratic Collapse, in which ecological and social pressures overwhelm institutions in the absence of systemic change; Ecocracy, in which ecological restoration is achieved but without democratic participation, producing authoritarian governance and deepening inequality; and the Elitist Green Bubble, in which a privileged green transition leaves structural inequalities and extractive practices intact. The experts' verdict on these scenarios carries a stark warning: the majority assessed Autocratic Collapse — not as an extreme outlier, but as the trajectory closest to current conditions. The only fully desirable scenario, Democratic Caring for Nature, requires simultaneous transformation across the social, economic, ecological and governance dimensions; partial or single-domain interventions risk producing the hybrid dystopias of ecocracy or elite capture. What the model adds to the Roadmap's argument is a qualitative but rigorous demonstration that the question is not whether to transform, but whether that transformation will be democratic and equitable — or imposed and exclusive.

VI. The Human Rights Economy

82. Poverty is not an accident. It is manufactured — produced and reproduced through the choices societies make about how to organise production, distribute resources, value care and support, and structure power.[147] If poverty is manufactured, it follows that unmaking it requires more than redistribution at the margins: it requires changing the architecture of the economy itself. Yet the dominant response to poverty has been to wait for growth to do the work — to expand the pie before attending to how it is divided. This wager has failed: growth has proven unable to reliably generate decent employment, ecological sustainability, or the fiscal capacity needed to provide universal basic services; and in its pursuit, it has often entrenched the very inequalities it was meant to dissolve. The question that remains is not whether to grow, but how to organise the economy differently: around what it produces, for whom, at what ecological cost, and under what conditions of equality and power. A variety of ‘post-growth’ approaches have addressed exactly that question. What it has lacked, until now, is a vehicle with the institutional reach, legal teeth, and universal normative grounding to translate those insights into binding obligations. The human rights economy provides exactly that.

A. From ‘Beyond GDP’ to ‘Beyond Growth’

83. Significant progress has been made over recent decades in developing alternatives to GDP as a measure of social progress. In 2009, the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress noted that GDP systematically fails to capture human wellbeing, environmental sustainability, and the distributional dimensions of economic activity.[148] The institutional momentum has since been substantial. The OECD,

[146] Judit Gáspár, András Köves, Tuuli Hirvilammi, et al., *Post-growth Futures Report* (Budapest: The MAPS Project, Corvinus University of Budapest, 2025).
[147] See A/HRC/62/42.
[148] Joseph E. Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi, *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress* (Paris: Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, 2009).

through its Centre on Well-Being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity (WISE)[149] and its OECD Wellbeing Measurement Framework[150], has played a central role in shaping this agenda, anchoring the *How's Life?* reports[151] and the public outreach tool, the Better Life Index.[152] The OECD monitors over 80 well-being indicators spanning material conditions, quality of life, community relationships and the systemic resources required to sustain well-being for future generations.[153] At the UN level, the Secretary-General's *Our Common Agenda* (2021) acknowledged GDP's fundamental inadequacy,[154] and explicitly called for moving beyond GDP to "valuing what counts" in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda.[155] The Pact for the Future then reaffirmed the need to "urgently develop measures of progress on sustainable development that complement or go beyond gross domestic product" and mandated the establishment of a High-Level Expert Group on Beyond-GDP metrics.[156] At the European level, the 2023 Strategic Foresight Report launched the Sustainable and Inclusive Wellbeing initiative[157] which aimed at developing complementary indicators and a multidimensional dashboard,[158] while the 8th Environment Action Programme called for a summary dashboard measuring economic, social, and environmental progress beyond GDP.[159] Most recently, Spain, the OECD, Secretaría General Iberoamericana (SEGIB) and UNCTAD, launched the 'Beyond GDP Global Alliance'[160] at the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development in 2025. At the same time, the Beyond Lab, Rethinking Economics International, and UNCTAD launched the 'Youth moving beyond GDP' initiative, calling for intergenerational equity as a guiding principle to finance what we value.[161] The OHCHR's own engagement on 'Moving Beyond GDP' situates this agenda within a human rights framework, affirming that what societies measure shapes what they collectively value and pursue.[162] Overall, despite the lack of full convergence across institutional initiatives, the "sustainable and inclusive wellbeing" conceptual framework is increasingly prevalent in international policy discourse, a consolidation reflected in a recent

[149] OECD, "Centre on Well-Being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity (WISE).", https://www.oecd.org/en/about/directorates/centre-on-well-being-inclusion-sustainability-and-equal-opportunity.html.

[150] OECD, "Well-Being and Beyond GDP.", https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/measuring-well-being-and-progress.html.

[151] OECD, *How's Life? 2024: Well-Being and Resilience in Times of Crisis* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024).

[152] OECD, "Better Life Index.", https://www.oecd.org/en/data/tools/well-being-data-monitor/better-life-index.html.

[153] OECD, "OECD Well-Being Data Monitor.", https://www.oecd.org/en/data/tools/well-being-data-monitor.html.

[154] See A/75/982, paras 38-39.

[155] United Nations Secretary-General, "Valuing What Counts: Framework to Progress Beyond Gross Domestic Product," *Our Common Agenda* Policy Brief 4 (May 2023), 9.

[156] See A/RES/79/1, action 53.

[157] European Commission, *Strategic Foresight Report 2023: Sustainability and People's Wellbeing at the Heart of Europe's Open Strategic Autonomy* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023), 3.

[158] Pál Benczúr, Ana Boskovic, Enrico Giovannini, Andrea Pagano, and Anna-Maria Sandor, *Measuring Sustainable and Inclusive Wellbeing: A Multidimensional Dashboard Approach* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2025).

[159] European Parliament and Council of the European Union, Decision (EU) 2022/591 of 6 April 2022 on a General Union Environment Action Programme to 2030, *Official Journal of the European Union* L 114 (April 12, 2022).

[160] OECD, "New Approaches for Renewed International Cooperation: 'Insights for the Beyond GDP Global Alliance,'" event page, July 2025, https://www.oecd.org/en/events/2025/07/new-approaches-for-renewed-international-cooperation-insights-for-the-beyond-gdp-global-alliance.html.

[161] Beyond Lab, "Youth Moving Beyond GDP.", https://www.thebeyondlab.org/initiative/beyond-gdp.

[162] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Moving Beyond GDP to Accelerate Progress on Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda.", https://www.ohchr.org/en/sdgs/moving-beyond-gdp-accelerate-progress-human-rights-and-2030-agenda.

review of the 90 most important beyond-GDP metrics, which finds growing agreement around its core dimensions.[163]

84. At the national level, a growing number of governments have moved from rhetorical commitment to institutional embedding. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index, enshrined in its 2008 Constitution, measures progress across nine domains including psychological wellbeing, health, education, ecological resilience, cultural diversity, and living standards.[164] New Zealand's Wellbeing Budget, launched in 2019, places wellbeing and environmental sustainability at the heart of fiscal decision-making.[165] Scotland's National Performance Framework, Wales's Well-being of Future Generations Act, and the Wellbeing Economy Governments network (WEGo) — uniting Scotland, New Zealand, Finland, Iceland, and Wales — represent significant advances in translating the beyond-GDP agenda into political architecture.[166]

85. These developments reflect a consolidating consensus, from the UN Secretary-General's office to national parliaments, that GDP is a profoundly inadequate compass for policy. Better measurement however, while necessary, does not by itself change what economies produce, how they distribute resources, or how much they extract from the biosphere. A government that adopts a wellbeing dashboard while leaving intact the policy architecture of growth dependency — including growth-conditioned fiscal rules, debt structures that require perpetual expansion, and labour markets that tie livelihoods to aggregate output — will find that its indicators improve only marginally, if at all. The challenge is not simply to replace GDP with a new composite index, but to transition from a system in which GDP-based metrics, institutions, and political orientations mutually reinforce the imperative of growth, to one in which technical infrastructure, governance and policies are aligned toward the delivery of sustainable and inclusive wellbeing.[167] To paraphrase Herman Daly, one of the founders of ecological economics, when you fall off an airplane, what you need is not only a better altimeter — it is also a parachute. In other words, what is required is a transition from *measuring* differently to *governing* differently: from ‘beyond GDP’ indicators to ‘beyond growth’ policy frameworks.

B. Living well within planetary boundaries

86. Building on this shift in perspective, the policy debate must therefore move from “how do we measure progress differently?” to “how do we organise the economy differently?” — and the central question of economic governance must shift from “how much does the economy grow?” to “what does the economy provide, for whom, at what cost to ecosystems and future generations, and under what conditions of equality and power?”.

87. Post-growth economic thinking has sought to analyse the conditions under which all people can live well within planetary boundaries and how those conditions can be secured

[163] For a review of the 90 most important “Beyond GDP” metrics, see Irlan Rum, Rutger Hoekstra, Annegeke Jansen, Joseph Eastoe, Ida Kubiszewski, Robert Costanza, Raphael Kaufmann, and Mario Biggeri, *Are Beyond-GDP Metrics Converging? Consolidation of the Measurement of Sustainable and Inclusive Wellbeing*, MERGE Project Deliverable D1.1 (Leiden University, July 31, 2024). See also Mario Biggeri, Andrea Ferrannini, András Gábos, Camilla Sofia Grande, Orsolya Lelkes, Amaia Palencia-Esteban, and Eric Rougier, *Towards a Consensus on Measuring Transition Performances within a Sustainable Human Development Paradigm*, SPES Working Paper no. 3.3, SPES project – Sustainability Performances, Evidence and Scenarios (Florence: University of Florence, 2025).

[164] OECD, “Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index.”, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/well-being-knowledge-exchange-platform-kep_93d45d63-en/bhutan-s-gross-national-happiness-gnh-index_ff75e0a9-en.html#:~:text=Abstract,and%20robust%20assessment%20of%20poverty.

[165] New Zealand Treasury, *The Wellbeing Budget 2019* (Budget 2019, B.19) (Wellington, May 30, 2019), https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/wellbeing-budget/wellbeing-budget-2019-wellbeing-budget.

[166] Wellbeing Economy Governments, “WEGo.”, https://weall.org/wego.

[167] MERGE Consortium, *Potential Policy Instruments for Sustainable and Inclusive Wellbeing*, MERGE Project Deliverable, WP4 (Brussels: MERGE Consortium, April 4, 2025), 5.

without continued aggregate expansion of material production and consumption.[168] Post-growth approaches aim to rapidly build the provisioning systems and infrastructures required for human needs satisfaction regardless of, or in the absence of, economic growth — in short, to build prosperity without growth.[169]

88. Post-growth is organised around five interconnected principles.[170] The first is *wellbeing*. Post-growth economics starts from a simple but radical premise: human needs are real, finite, and satisfiable. Unlike the 'unlimited wants' of classical economics — which assumes that more is always better — needs for nutrition, shelter, healthcare, mobility, and education can actually be met. Once they are, additional material consumption adds little to a good life. What determines whether people live well is not how large the economy is, but whether what it produces and how it distributes resources actually reaches the people and the purposes that matter.

89. The second is *sufficiency*. There is a corridor within which economies should operate: wide enough that everyone's basic needs are met, and bounded above by the limits of what the planet can sustain. Between these two boundaries lies the ecologically safe and socially just space that constitutes the proper ambition of twenty-first century economic policy.[171] Strikingly, research shows that these two boundaries are actually not in tension — human needs could be satisfied universally with less than half the energy and materials the world currently consumes.[172] The problem is not scarcity but allocation: roughly 70% of global energy goes to goods and services that contribute little to human wellbeing. Sufficiency means deliberately redirecting economic activity away from that excess and toward what genuinely matters.

90. The third is *reduced inequalities*. The gap between the world's heaviest and lightest consumers is not merely a moral scandal, it is a physical obstacle to any credible post-growth strategy. The wealthiest 1% consume, on average, forty times more energy per capita than the poorest 10% in the Global South, which means that bringing everyone up to a decent standard of living while staying within planetary boundaries is arithmetically impossible without bringing excess consumption down.[173] Redistribution is therefore not a secondary or compensatory concern: it is the mechanism that makes the whole framework viable, and it must be designed to close indecent living gaps entirely rather than merely narrow them.

91. The fourth principle is the *repurposing of the economy*. Moving beyond growth does not mean recession, stagnation, or austerity.[174] What post-growth calls for is a deliberate shift in *what* economies produce: scaling down weapons, oversized vehicles, luxury goods, and industrial meat, while expanding renewable energy, public services, nutritious food, efficient housing, and public transit. That distinction — between the volume of output and its composition — is one that GDP, as a single aggregate, is structurally incapable of making: a dollar of arms production and a dollar of childcare count identically in national accounts. Governing for wellbeing within planetary boundaries therefore requires a higher-definition picture of the economy, one that tracks what is being produced, for whom, and at what

[168] For a review, see Kallis, Hickel, O'Neill, et al., "Post-Growth," e62-e78.

[169] Tim Jackson, *Prosperity without Growth: Foundations for the Economy of Tomorrow*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2017).

[170] This section elaborates on Aljoša Slameršak, Vivien Fisch-Romito, Jason Hickel, et al., "Principles for a Post-Growth Scenario of Ambitious Mitigation and High Human Well-Being," *Nature Climate Change* 16, no. 4 (2026): 405–15.

[171] Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2017) ; Joyeeta Gupta, Xuemei Bai, Diana M. Liverman, et al., "A Just World on a Safe Planet: A *Lancet Planetary Health*–Earth Commission Report on Earth-System Boundaries, Translations, and Transformations," *The Lancet Planetary Health* 8, no. 10 (2024): e813–e873.

[172] These five principles outlined below draw on Slameršak, Fisch-Romito, Hickel, et al., "Principles for a Post-Growth Scenario of Ambitious Mitigation and High Human Well-Being," 408.

[173] Yannick Oswald, Anne Owen, and Julia K. Steinberger, "Large Inequality in International and Intranational Energy Footprints between Income Groups and across Consumption Categories," *Nature Energy* 5 (2020): 231–39.

[174] Jason Hickel, "What Does Degrowth Mean? A Few Points of Clarification," *Globalizations* 18, no. 7 (2021): 1105–11.

ecological cost. Post-growth is not the absence of investment; it is the reorientation of investment — and of the *democratic deliberation* that should guide it — toward what genuinely serves human wellbeing and rights fulfilment.

92. Finally, the fifth principle is *North-South convergence*. As shown in chapter II, most countries in the Global South still need to increase their energy and material use to secure decent living standards for their populations; high-income economies must reduce theirs by scaling down destructive and less-necessary production. Convergence between these trajectories cannot be reduced to a technical accounting exercise. It must reckon with historical emissions responsibilities, the ongoing unequal exchange through which the Global North continues to appropriate resources and productive capacity from the South, and the consequent obligation of wealthy economies to dedicate resources to Southern low-carbon infrastructure and essential provisioning systems. A just post-growth transition is, by definition, a global one.

93. Taken together, these principles provide a coherent framework for understanding the conditions under which a post-growth transition can be both socially just and ecologically sustainable. Modelling scenarios for high-income countries demonstrate that decent social outcomes can be sustained at substantially lower levels of resource use and greenhouse gas emissions than currently prevail, provided that the right policy combination is in place: working-time reduction to sustain employment without growth, universal basic services to guarantee minimum provisioning, wealth redistribution to contain inequality, and public investment directed at ecological transition.[175] For some middle-income countries and for low-income countries in particular, increases in material provisioning remain necessary to meet basic social thresholds, but this need not replicate the high-resource pathways of industrialised economies: where post-growth transitions in high-income countries reduce the net appropriation of materials, energy, land, and labour from the Global South, they may in fact expand the fiscal and ecological space available to lower-income countries to organise production around domestic human needs and national development objectives.[176] This differentiated but interdependent pathway underscores that post-growth is not a uniform prescription, but a coordinated global transformation across unequal starting points.

C. The 'New Economy' landscape

1. A range of alternatives

94. Over the past fifty years, a range of alternatives have emerged, spanning approaches as varied as wellbeing economy and doughnut economics, degrowth, ecological and steady-state economics, feminist economics, the care economy, the social and solidarity economy, the foundational economy, the economy for the common good, Ubuntu economics, *Buen Vivir* and other pluriversal approaches rooted in Indigenous worldviews.[177] Despite their diversity in emphasis, scope, and cultural origin, as well as their critique of capitalism, these approaches converge on five shared commitments: the rejection of GDP growth as the primary economic goal; the embedding of the economy within social and ecological systems; a commitment to justice and redistribution; participatory and democratic governance; and the imperative of regenerative design over extractive logics.[178] The very proliferation of these frameworks, many of which were founded in the past decade alone, reflects both the breadth of dissatisfaction with the dominant growth model and the growing appetite for systemic

[175] Kallis, Hickel, O'Neill, et al., "Post-Growth," e62–e78, esp. e72.
[176] Kallis, Hickel, O'Neill, et al., "Post-Growth," e72-e73.
[177] For a mapping exercise, see Chris Monaghan, Eva Laláková, Serena Joury, and Sloane Woerdeman, *New Economy Landscape: Mapping the Field of New Economy Organisations and Approaches in Europe* (Amsterdam: Metabolic, commissioned by Partners for a New Economy, October 2025), 24–25.
[178] Monaghan et al., *New Economy Landscape*, 25 ; Jasper O. Kenter, Salvatore Martino, Samuel J. Buckton, et al., "Ten Principles for Transforming Economics in a Time of Global Crises," *Nature Sustainability* 8 (2025): 837–47.

alternatives. At their core, these approaches envision an economy that serves people and the planet, not the other way around.[179]

2. Public support

95. Surveys show substantial and cross-cutting public support for the values and policy orientations that post-growth frameworks express. A 2022 study across 34 European countries found that, on average, 61% of respondents favour post-growth, and that further emphasis on redistribution and improving livelihoods for disadvantaged people would secure stronger support among this part of the population.[180] Globally, more than two in three people across G20 countries (68%) agree that the economy should prioritise the health and wellbeing of people and nature rather than focusing solely on profit and increasing wealth, and majorities across the same countries support higher progressive taxation on wealth, income, and large corporations to fund the necessary transformations.[181] Specific post-growth policy instruments attract equally strong backing: European citizens' assemblies have recorded approval rates of 93% for sufficiency measures;[182] a recent study found that more than 70% of respondents in the UK and the US support the scaling down destructive production, expanding access to public services, deepening economic democracy, regardless of the label attached to it;[183] while a broader review of public attitudes toward post-growth policy proposals, such as job guarantees, workplace democracy, universal public services, rent controls, living wages, and climate justice, finds very large majorities in favour across the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union.[184] Taken together, this evidence suggests that the political conditions for a post-growth transition are far more permissive than conventional policy wisdom assumes, and that the principal obstacle is not public resistance but institutional inertia.

3. Expert opinion

96. Expert opinion converges in the same direction. A 2023 global survey of 461 sustainability scholars — the researchers to whom policymakers most naturally turn for guidance on the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — found that 77% favour post-growth pathways for high-income countries already in the current decade, a proportion that rises further when projecting to the 2030s.[185] The most widely supported of these pathways is growth agnosticism: 56% of scholars chose the option of focusing on societal wellbeing and environmental protection regardless of what happens to GDP. Critically, these findings expose a tension at the heart of the multilateral agenda: the scholars surveyed were almost unanimously familiar with the SDG framework, yet the majority of them favour pathways that the SDGs do not even mention, as post-growth is absent from the SDG framework. The North–South dimension of the findings is equally significant: for lower-middle-income countries, green growth is favoured by 64% of scholars, and for low-income countries by 58% — reflecting the continued need for material improvements in living

[179] To paraphrase Katherine Trebeck, as quoted by Monaghan, Laláková, Joury, and Woerdeman, *New Economy Landscape*, 23.

[180] Lily Paulson and Milena Büchs, "Public Acceptance of Post-Growth: Factors and Implications for Post-Growth Strategy," *Futures* 143 (2022): 103020.

[181] Earth4All and Global Commons Alliance, *Earth for All Survey 2024: G20+ Global Report — Attitudes to Political and Economic Transformation*, conducted by Ipsos (June 2024), https://earth4all.life/global-survey-2024/.

[182] Jonas Lage, Johannes Thema, Carina Zell-Ziegler, Benjamin Best, Luisa Cordroch, and Frauke Wiese, "Citizens Call for Sufficiency and Regulation — A Comparison of European Citizen Assemblies and National Energy and Climate Plans," *Energy Research & Social Science* 104 (2023): 103254.

[183] Dario Krpan, Frédéric Basso, Jason E. Hickel, and Giorgos Kallis, "Assessing Public Support for Degrowth: Survey-Based Experimental and Predictive Studies," *The Lancet Planetary Health* 9 (2025).

[184] As compiled in Jason Hickel, "How Popular Are Post-Growth and Post-Capitalist Ideas? Some Recent Data," *jasonhickel.org* (blog), first published November 24, 2023, updated periodically, https://www.jasonhickel.org/blog/2023/11/24/how-popular-are-post-capitalist-ideas.

[185] Teemu Koskimäki, "Targeting Socioeconomic Transformations to Achieve Global Sustainability," *Ecological Economics*211 (2023): 107871.

standards — though support for post-growth approaches is already substantial and rising in both contexts and is projected to increase further into the 2030s.

4. Converging institutional voices

97. At the institutional level, a parallel and partly distinct set of initiatives has also sought to go further than the beyond-GDP measurement agenda highlighted above, reorienting not just how progress is measured, but how economic activity is organised and governed. The OECD conceptualized 'the Economy of Well-Being', articulating a "virtuous circle" in which investment in individual wellbeing, through education, health, social protection, and gender equality, both depends on and reinforces long-term economic performance.[186] In 2020, the OECD Secretary-General's Advisory Group on a New Growth Narrative recommended that policymakers adopt four core objectives — environmental sustainability, rising well-being, falling inequality, and system resilience — as the organising framework for economic governance.[187] These objectives are not merely additive refinements to existing policy frameworks; they represent an acknowledgement that the pursuit of GDP growth could actively undermine each of them. The OECD has discussed well-being policy applications in terms of four mutually reinforcing shifts (the four R's): *refocusing* policies towards the outcomes that matter most to people, *redesigning* policy content from a more multidimensional perspective, *realigning* policy practice across government silos, and *reconnecting* public institutions with the people they serve.[188] The OECD works with governments to improve the monitoring of societal progress and to mainstream well-being into policy through its Knowledge Exchange Platform on Well-being Metrics and Policy Practice[189], launched in 2023.

98. The World Health Organization has also emerged as a leading multilateral actor calling for a "health for all" economy reoriented around health and wellbeing as ends in themselves,[190] arguing that "health for all must be the guiding principle in making a just transition to a post-carbon economy".[191] It has adopted a whole-of-society approach structured around three interdependent objectives: valuing planetary health, including essential common goods such as clean water, clean air, and a stable climate, with respect to planetary and local ecological boundaries; valuing the diverse social foundations and activities that promote equity, including social cohesion, support for people in need, and the conditions for communities to thrive; and valuing human health and wellbeing, with every person able to prosper physically, mentally, and emotionally, endowed with the capabilities and freedom needed to lead lives of dignity, opportunity, and community. [192]

99. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has also made major contributions to the effort to redesign the economy, not only by supporting social protection and the decent work agenda, but also by the adoption by the 110th and 112th sessions of the International Labour Conference, in June 2022 and June 2024 respectively, of resolutions and conclusions

[186] Ana Llena-Nozal, Neil Martin, and Fabrice Murtin, "The Economy of Well-Being: Creating Opportunities for People's Well-Being and Economic Growth," *OECD Statistics Working Papers*, no. 2019/02 (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2019), 9–11.

[187] OECD, *Beyond Growth: Towards a New Economic Approach* (Paris: OECD, 2020).

[188] OECD, *Economic Policy Making to Pursue Economic Welfare: OECD Report for the G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors* (Paris: OECD, May 2023), 37.

[189] OECD, "Knowledge Exchange Platform on Well-Being Metrics and Policy Practice (KEP).", https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/kep.html.

[190] World Health Organization, *Achieving Well-Being: A Global Framework for Integrating Well-Being into Public Health Utilizing a Health Promotion Approach* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2023); World Health Organization, *Implementing the Global Framework on Well-Being at Country Level: Policy Pathways* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2025); Faten Ben Abdelaziz, Colin Williams, et al., "Creating 'Wellbeing Societies': Moving from Rhetoric to Action," *Public Health Research & Practice* 33, no. 2 (July 2023): e3322310.

[191] WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All, *Health for All: Transforming Economies to Deliver What Matters. Final Report of the WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2023), 7.

[192] WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All, *Valuing Health for All: Rethinking and Building a Whole-of-Society Approach*, Council Brief no. 3 (Geneva: World Health Organization, March 8, 2022).

on Decent Work and the Social and Solidarity Economy, and on Decent Work and the Care Economy. The 2022 resolution provides the first internationally agreed definition of the social and solidarity economy (SSE), enshrining the principles of voluntary cooperation and mutual aid, democratic and/or participatory governance, autonomy and independence, and the primacy of people and social purpose over capital in the distribution and use of surpluses and/or profits, as well as assets.[193] The 2024 resolution marks the first international tripartite agreement on the care economy and highlights the essential links between the care economy, gender equality, decent work, sustainable development, and social justice. Both reinforce the importance of placing decent work, care, inclusion and social justice at the centre of economic and social policies.. Moreover, the ILO, together with OHCHR, is co-convening a key intervention on the Human Rights Economy under the Global Coalition for Social Justice, aiming at grounding economic and social policies in human rights and related labour rights, and supporting member States in implementing their commitments, thereby enabling meaningful progress towards equality, justice, and sustainability.

100. Other organisations have been even more explicit. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) adopted a report on Urban Development Beyond Growth, recommending “a shift towards postgrowth strategies for urban development” to overcome “the limitations of traditional growth models”.[194] The UN's own World Social Report 2025, published by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), calls for moving away from the “GDP-shareholder value paradigm”, described as “seriously flawed”,[195] and advocates instead a new policy consensus built on equity, economic security, and solidarity within and between generations, one that “must go beyond the quest for efficiency and growth”.[196]

5. Demand without delivery

101. Despite these evolutions, translating public demand and institutional initiatives into political action is not straightforward. As shown by a 2026 study based on interviews involving actors from four Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo) member countries,[197] while policy-makers acknowledge the potential of a wellbeing economy framework to transform citizens from passive recipients into active participants in decision-making, to enable cross-sectoral and integrated policymaking, and to reframe policy discourse by making the link between well-being and economic activity explicit, they also face the complexity of transforming a growth-dependent economy, exacerbated by short-term political cycles, fiscal constraints, and political polarisation. The challenge, it appears, is less one of ideological resistance than of institutional readiness: what is missing is not more evidence or better indicators, but a coherent normative architecture that can align diverse institutional actors around shared obligations and common accountability.

102. The initiatives described above are significant, but they remain, for now, a constellation without a centre. None of them, taken alone, provides the normative architecture and the legal grounds required to hold governments to account across all these dimensions simultaneously — or to ensure that progress on one front (eg. eradicating poverty) does not come at the expense of another (eg. ecological limits). What is needed is a framework acting as an anchor, capable of integrating these contributions, grounding them in existing legal

[193] International Labour Office, *Resolution concerning Decent Work and the Social and Solidarity Economy*, International Labour Conference, 110th Session (Geneva, June 2022); United Nations General Assembly, *Promoting the Social and Solidarity Economy for Sustainable Development*, Resolution 77/281, April 18, 2023; United Nations General Assembly, *Promoting the Social and Solidarity Economy for Sustainable Development*, Resolution 79/213, December 19, 2024.

[194] Demos Helsinki and United Nations Development Programme, *Urban Development Beyond Growth* (Mayors for Economic Growth / UNDP, October 2024), 4.

[195] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research, *World Social Report 2025: A New Policy Consensus to Accelerate Social Progress* (New York: United Nations, 2025), 75.

[196] UN DESA and UNU-WIDER, *World Social Report 2025*, 108.

[197] Simone Turrini, Mario Biggeri, Imke Schmidt, and Henning Wilts, “Policymakers’ Perceptions of the Wellbeing Economy: Emerging Patterns and Trade-Offs in Implementation,” *Frontiers in Sustainability* 7 (2026): 1772812.

obligations, and providing a common accountability structure that reaches across institutional mandates. The human rights economy offers precisely this.

D. The human rights economy

1. Fulfilling obligations

103. In 2023, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights launched the concept of a Human Rights Economy, calling on States to “dismantle the architecture of inequalities and to move beyond growth as the organising principle of economic policy — recognising that “growth on its own will not redress the structural injustices” underlying the “failure to achieve progress on the SDGs”.[198] In the High Commissioner's formulation, a human rights economy “seeks to redress root causes and structural barriers to equality, justice and sustainability by prioritising investment in economic, social and cultural rights”; it delivers universal social security, education, healthcare, access to justice and other public services, as well as fundamental freedoms and the broadest possible civic space; embeds effective climate and environmental action; and ensures that both business models and macroeconomic policies are guided by human rights standards. The following year, the Deputy High Commissioner sharpened the governance dimension of the concept, defining a human rights economy as one that places people and the planet at the centre of all economic decisions — anchoring fiscal, monetary, business and investment choices in the obligations that governments have already agreed to under international law, and recognising economic, social and cultural rights and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment “for what they are — part of the rule of law, not mere aspirations”.[199]

104. The Human Rights Economy promotes people-centred economic policies oriented toward the effective realisation of economic, social and cultural rights for all, without discrimination, and anchored in a commitment to a safe and healthy environment — drawing on the authoritative principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and deploying the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) as the primary structural lever for realising the UN's 2030 Agenda.[200] In particular, the Covenant’s obligation of progressive realisation of human rights, requiring States to make the maximum use of available resources and prohibiting retrogression, provides the normative backbone for rights-consistent economic policy-making.

105. Rather than introducing new normative requirements, it focuses on ensuring the fulfilment of obligations that states have already voluntarily undertaken, treating civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights — as well as the right to development and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment — as universal, indivisible and interdependent.[201] It places the equal, active, free and meaningful participation of individuals and peoples at the centre of all economic decision-making, embracing an intersectional approach to overcoming multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination, and recognising that the realisation of human rights depends on international cooperation, solidarity and mutual support among countries. It equally underscores the importance of responsible and sustainable business models, and affirms the inherent right of all peoples to enjoy and freely

[198] Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, statement delivered at the Workshop on Promoting and Protecting Economic, Social and Cultural Rights within the Context of Addressing Inequalities in the Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic, February 6, 2023, https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/02/turk-calls-human-rights-economy.

[199] Nada Al-Nashif, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, “The Human Rights Economy – from Concept to Practical Application,” statement delivered June 28, 2024, https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/06/human-rights-economy-concept-practical-application.

[200] Jyoti Sanghera, “Human Rights Economy for People and the Planet: Framing the Contours of an Approach,” in *Righting the Economy: Towards a People’s Recovery from Economic and Environmental Crisis*, ed. Marianna Leite and Matti Kohonen (Newcastle upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing, 2024), xvi.

[201] Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “The Human Rights Economy,” discussion paper (March 2025), 1, https://www.ohchr.org/en/sdgs/human-rights-economy-seeding-change-economy-enhances-human-rights#country-work.

utilise their natural wealth and resources — in full respect of everyone's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

2. A unifying framework

106. The rights-based economy framework thus shares the same foundational conviction as the broader family of beyond-growth approaches: that the purpose of economic life is human flourishing within ecological limits, not the accumulation of growth as an end in itself.[202] It insists that this requires simultaneously guaranteeing dignity and wellbeing across all stages of life, pursuing substantive equality through an intersectional lens on discrimination, redistributing power away from its current concentrations, and operating within planetary boundaries. Crucially, it also demands the democratisation and decolonisation of economic decision-making at all levels, recognising that the structural inequalities of class, gender, race and colonial legacy are not incidental features of the current model but constitutive ones.[203]

107. Rather than prescribing a single economic model, it functions as an umbrella concept that enables a plurality of alternative economic approaches, each anchored in the widely agreed values and obligations of international human rights law — deployed both as a normative foundation and as a practical ‘litmus test’ for the design, implementation and monitoring of economic policies and structures.[204] At its core, it demands action to redistribute resources, remedy inequalities and rebalance power in ways that the prevailing economic paradigm has systematically failed to deliver.

108. In this sense, reorienting the economy requires intervening in the power relations, norms and institutions that constitute economic life and reassembling them on a human rights basis, mobilising human rights principles, legal frameworks, constitutional guarantees and institutional mechanisms as tools of structural transformation.[205] It demands systemic shifts in how societies produce, distribute, consume and value goods and services: from the exploitation of natural resources to respect for planetary boundaries; from a fixation on GDP to holistic, human-centred measures of success; from the devaluation of care and support to its recognition as the foundation of economic life; from the dominance of private interests to a reassertion of public power; and from corporate monopoly and elite capture to worker, community and democratic control of the economy.[206] The process is simultaneously transformative and unifying: transformative because it challenges entrenched economic orthodoxies, and unifying because it grounds diverse policy agendas in a shared and universally recognised normative architecture. Critically, it presupposes a transformative State capable of establishing the institutional, legal, and financial foundations needed for alternative economies to develop and flourish.[207]

109. While other approaches have helped mainstreaming post-growth perspectives,[208] the added value of the human rights economy can be stated in five propositions. First, *legal bindingness*: human rights obligations are not aspirational targets — they generate enforceable duties, and their non-realisation generates remediable violations. Second, *universality*: human rights apply everywhere, across all income levels, all political traditions,

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[202] Center for Economic and Social Rights, “The Center for Economic and Social Rights’ Journey to Advance a Rights-Based Economy,” in *Righting the Economy: Towards a People’s Recovery from Economic and Environmental Crisis*, ed. Marianna Leite and Matti Kohonen (Newcastle upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing, 2024), 34–39; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “The Human Rights Economy,” discussion paper, 1; Caroline Dommen, *Human Rights Economics: An Enquiry* (Geneva: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Global and Regional Order Series, July 2022), 5–10.

[203] Donald et al., *A Rights-Based Economy*.

[204] Leite and Kohonen, eds., *Righting the Economy, 4.*

[205] Leite and Kohonen, eds., *Righting the Economy, 4.*

[206] Donald et al., *A Rights-Based Economy,* 24-28.

[207] Leite and Kohonen, eds., *Righting the Economy,* 9.

[208] Lorenzo Fioramonti, Luca Coscieme, Robert Costanza, Ida Kubiszewski, Katherine Trebeck, Stewart Wallis, Debra Roberts, Lars F. Mortensen, Kate E. Pickett, Richard Wilkinson, Kristín Vala Ragnarsdóttir, Jacqueline McGlade, Hunter Lovins, and Roberto De Vogli, “Wellbeing Economy: An Effective Paradigm to Mainstream Post-Growth Policies?,” *Ecological Economics* 192 (2022): 107261.

and all cultural contexts, without insisting on cultural uniformity, given that human rights themselves affirm the right to cultural diversity and to diverse knowledge systems. The Human Rights Economy is not one more alternative approach to be added to the list. It is the unifying normative framework. Third, *institutionalisation*: the UN human rights system provides existing and operational monitoring and accountability infrastructure — treaty bodies, periodic reviews, special procedures, and inter-State reporting mechanisms — that can be deployed without requiring new institutional architecture. Fourth, *accountability*: by creating a chain of obligation from identifiable rights-holders to identifiable duty-bearers, the framework enables advocacy, litigation, civic mobilisation, and democratic pressure in ways that indicator dashboards alone cannot. Fifth, *integration*: the human rights framework does not privilege economic rights over political ones, or individual rights over collective ones, or present generations over future generations — it affirms their indivisibility and interdependence.

3. Grounding the commitment

110. The constitutive elements of a Human Rights Economy draw from the corpus of international human rights law, as developed by human rights treaty bodies and special procedures established by the Human Rights Council, and by OHCHR's own conceptual development of the framework. These elements ground the commitment to a beyond growth transition in legal obligations.[209]

111. *Rights as the organising principle of economic governance.* In a Human Rights Economy, the primary metric of economic success is not GDP or profit maximisation, but the progressive realisation of all human rights — economic, social, cultural, civil, and political. This reframes the State's role from growth promoter to rights-guarantor. The CESCR has consistently held, since General Comment No. 3 (1990), on the nature of States parties' obligations, that economic, social and cultural rights impose an immediate obligation to take steps towards full realisation and a continuing duty to move as expeditiously and effectively as possible toward that goal, mobilising the maximum of available resources.[210] GDP growth may contribute to rights realisation in some contexts; it may be irrelevant or counterproductive in others. The question is always whether rights are being progressively realised — not whether aggregate output is increasing.

112. *Obligations as structuring constraints on macroeconomic policy.* No macroeconomic decision is rights-neutral. Fiscal consolidation, monetary tightening, trade liberalisation, and investment deregulation all have distributional consequences that may advance or impede the realisation of human rights. The CESCR's doctrine of maximum available resources requires States to demonstrate that they have made genuine efforts to mobilise all feasible resources — including progressive taxation of wealth and capital, closure of tax gaps, and reform of subsidies — before invoking resource constraints to justify non-realisation of rights. The principle of non-retrogression prohibits deliberate steps backward in the enjoyment of rights. The minimum core obligations of socio-economic rights requires that, regardless of resource levels, States ensure at least minimum essential levels of the rights to food, health, housing, education, and social security. These are not soft aspirations; they are justiciable legal constraints that structure the legitimate space for macroeconomic choice. For instance, the tension between debt service obligations and ESC rights obligations — acute for low-income countries in particular — is not a technical constraint to be arbitrated but a human rights challenge requiring the prioritization of rights.

113. *Accountability as an economic governance incentive.* What most fundamentally distinguishes the Human Rights Economy from other new economy frameworks is its accountability architecture. Human rights law provides binding enforcement mechanisms: treaty bodies, special procedures, national courts, and regional human rights systems. These mechanisms transform aspirational commitments into justiciable obligations. Accountability has both a preventive function — requiring that economic policies be transparently designed in compliance with human rights standards — and a corrective function — ensuring remedies

[209] Dommen, *Human Rights Economics*, 14-20.
[210] See E/1991/23, para. 9.

when those standards are violated.[211] Embedding accountability in economic governance creates an incentive structure that assigns obligations, identifies duty-bearers and rights-holders, and provides mechanisms for redress.

114. *Non-discrimination and substantive equality.* The human rights framework requires that all economic policies be assessed for their differential impacts on groups facing structural disadvantage. Non-discrimination is an overarching and immediately applicable norm: unlike progressive realisation, it does not admit of deferral. This is not an optional equity supplement to economic design; it is a legally binding requirement that transforms how policies are drafted, monitored, and remedied. An economy organised around human rights must address not only vertical inequalities — the distribution between the rich and the poor — but also horizontal inequalities generated by race, ethnicity, caste, descent, religion, gender, language, disability, age, social origin, migration status, sexual orientation and gender identity.[212] It requires the production and use of disaggregated data, the systematic assessment of distributional impacts, and the deployment of affirmative measures where group-based disadvantage persists. Critically, it insists that poverty be understood not as a random distributional outcome but as a pattern generated and maintained by structural discrimination — and that its eradication therefore requires dismantling those discriminatory structures, not merely alleviating their symptoms.[213] At the same time, the production of disaggregated data to this end must directly confront the phenomenon of "the uncounted", namely that members of precisely those groups most marginalised within societies are also those least likely to be fully captured in data systems and, consequently, in the distribution of public resources and services.[214]

115. *Meaningful participation.* Economic decisions are political decisions about whose needs are prioritised, whose labour is valued, and whose futures are protected. Human rights law requires genuine, informed, and effective participation of affected communities — especially people living in poverty — in the design, implementation, and monitoring of all economic policies and programmes that affect their lives.[215] This participation is not procedural formality; it is the antidote to technocratic and elite capture, to the siloing of economic policy from democratic accountability, and to the systematic exclusion of those in poverty from decisions about the structures that produce and reproduce their deprivation.

116. *Integration of environmental rights.* The right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, recognised by the General Assembly in resolution 76/300 (2022), extends the human rights framework to ecological integrity: it affirms that a liveable, healthy planet is a precondition for the enjoyment of all other human rights. The Maastricht Principles on the Human Rights of Future Generations (adopted 3 February 2023) consolidate and develop existing standards for intergenerational rights protection, providing legal grounding for embedding planetary boundary constraints within the human rights framework.[216] A Human Rights Economy is therefore not merely a framework for addressing present deprivation; it is a framework for organising the economy so that it does not compromise the rights of those yet to be born. Intergenerational equity is a human rights obligation — not merely a policy preference — and it lends legal authority to the ecological dimension of the post-growth transition.

[211] Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Center for Economic and Social Rights, *Who Will Be Accountable? Human Rights and the Post-2015 Development Agenda* (2015), as cited in Caroline Dommen, *Human Rights Economics: An Enquiry* (Geneva: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, July 2022), 14.

[212] For a full account of human rights and inequalities, see Gillian MacNaughton, Diane F. Frey, and Catherine Porter, eds., *Human Rights and Economic Inequalities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[213] See A/HRC/54/35, para. 29.

[214] Alex Cobham, *The Uncounted* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020).

[215] See A/HRC/54/35, para. 36.

[216] *Maastricht Principles on the Human Rights of Future Generations* (adopted February 3, 2023).

E. From framework to action

117. In practice, the human rights economy framework translates into six interconnected policy imperatives: reorienting fiscal, monetary, industrial and ownership structures toward rights fulfilment (pillar 1 of the Roadmap); guaranteeing decent work, valuing care and support as foundational economic infrastructure, and deepening economic democracy (pillar 2); ensuring universal access to public and social services and social security for all (pillar 3); embedding ecological limits and climate justice into every dimension of economic governance (pillar 4); transforming the international financial architecture so that it enables rather than constrains the policy space every country needs to realise rights (pillar 5); and building the democratic planning and governance institutions capable of holding all of the above accountable (pillar 6).[217] The operational part of the Roadmap lists the policy measures that could implement these commitments.[218]

VII. Conclusions and Recommendations

118. **In 2025, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognized that: "Respecting, protecting and fulfilling [the rights stipulated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights] requires addressing the root causes of the interconnected crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. These are driven by unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and an economic model based on unlimited growth. A transition to an economy that is centred on human rights and the well-being of the planet is imperative to ensure equal enjoyment of human rights within the Earth's ecological limits".[219] It therefore encouraged States parties to the Covenant to pursue the full realization of economic, social and cultural rights by implementing "a just transition towards a sustainable economy that puts human rights and the well-being of the planet at its centre".[220]**

119. **The Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth seeks to assist in this effort. It was co-constructed by a wide range of actors to assist States in designing their national anti-poverty strategies, in line with the Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights. The large number of individuals and organisations who joined forces to develop these proposals share the conviction that the fight against poverty, as a major obstacle to the enjoyment of human rights, can only succeed by taking into account the imperative to remain within planetary boundaries. This requires combining *ex post* redistribution tools with in-market reforms and *ex ante* social investment, to break the cycles that perpetuate poverty while at the same time respecting planetary boundaries by reducing dependency on economic growth. The Roadmap thus identifies a range of measures that can contribute to the fight against poverty without leading to further environmental collapse (pillars 1 to 4), emphasizing the need for a reformed international economic order to enable efforts at domestic level (pillar 5). It also identifies tools for the governance of the transition (pillar 6), recognizing the need for democratic planning of a post-growth transition, the role of indicators on equitable, inclusive and sustainable well-being to guide policy action, and the need to encourage participatory and deliberative democracy to strengthen legitimacy and the effectiveness of the transition, as well as to build countervailing power.**

120. **The most immediate role of the Roadmap will be to guide national anti-poverty strategies. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights could build on this**

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[217] Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "The Human Rights Economy," discussion paper, 2–3; Marianna Leite and Matti Kohonen, eds., *Righting the Economy: Towards a People's Recovery from Economic and Environmental Crisis* (2024); Donald et al., *A Rights-Based Economy: Putting People and Planet First*, 14–23; and Nada Al-Nashif, "The Human Rights Economy – from Concept to Practical Application," statement delivered June 28, 2024, https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/06/human-rights-economy-concept-practical-application.

[218] See www.neep-poverty.org.

[219] See E/C.12/GC/27, para. 15.

[220] See E/C.12/GC/27, para. 10.

Roadmap to develop the notion of a "human rights economy", to encourage member States to transform the economy in order to make it more inclusive and sustainable by design. It could strengthen its work and collaboration through the Global Coalition for Social Justice as a platform for the implementation of the Roadmap, leveraging its broad and diverse composition and global reach, in particular, with other UN partners, including in particular the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as well as with workers' and employers' organizations, international non-governmental organizations, international financial institutions, development banks and academic institutions, to ensure that a consistent message is addressed to the member States at country level: whether they are stand-alone strategies or part of broader development strategies, national anti-poverty strategies should take into account the full range of human rights, including the right to development and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment[221], as well as the principle of sustainable development, consistent with the duty of all States under international human rights law to take the necessary measures to protect the climate system and other parts of the environment, as reaffirmed by the International Court of Justice.[222] The Roadmap can serve as a repertoire of actions that could be adopted to solve this complex equation, taking into account the circumstances of each country and designed through a participatory process to ensure both legitimacy and effectiveness.

121. **As an attempt to reconcile social justice with planetary boundaries and as a means to enrich the policy toolbox and to stimulate democratic deliberation on alternatives, the Roadmap can also contribute to other processes. The International Labour Conference could seek inspiration in the Roadmap to consider how to better value care and support work, taking into account in this regard both the earlier contributions of the Special Rapporteur[223] and pillar 3 of this Roadmap. The ILC should also reiterate its commitment to establish a new financing mechanism to support countries' efforts to establish social protection floors, as stipulated in policies 3.9 and 5.3 of the Roadmap.**

122. **Within climate change negotiations, the Roadmap could inspire concrete action to implement the Just Transition Mechanism established at the 30th conference of parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP30).[224] The JTM seeks to contribute to efforts "to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty", by putting human rights a the heart of the necessary and inevitable phase out of fossil fuel production. It refers to a set of principles to guide the just transition, including "broad and meaningful participation" and "meaningful and effective social dialogue"; the need for "whole-of-economy approaches to just transition", taking into account the "multisectoral and multidimensional nature of just transitions"; as well as, in particular, the "importance of just transition pathways that respect, promote and fulfil all human rights and labour rights, the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, the right to health, the rights of Indigenous Peoples, people of African descent, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations, and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity". In identifying the just transition pathways in the design and implementation of national climate plans and strategies, including nationally determined contributions, national adaptation plans and long-term low-emission development strategies, countries could seek inspiration from this Roadmap, which could also guide the UNFCCC constituted bodies in the technical advice they provide, and the deliberations within the Conference of the Parties at the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement at its eighth session (November 2026).**

221 See A/76/L.75.

222 ICJ, *Obligations of States in Respect of Climate Change*, Advisory Opinion of July 23, 2025.

223 See A/78/175, paras. 17-23 and paras. 49-54; See A/HRC/56/61, paras. 16-19.

224 UNFCCC, UAE Just Transition Work Programme, Decision -/CMA.7, advance unedited version.

123. **Considering the central role of the fight against inequalities in reconciling social justice with planetary boundaries, the International Panel on Inequality may play an essential role in guiding member States towards identifying policy measures that can provide the right mix between social redistribution and transformative action to prevent poverty and fight in-market inequalities. The policy measures identified in this Roadmap can inspire, in particular, Working Group IV of the IPI, dedicated to identifying policy options. A priority in this regard is to ensure a financing of public services and social protection that does not contribute to further environmental collapse, by establishing fair and effective fiscal systems including wealth and inheritance taxes, taxes on resource use and on environmental harm, and on luxury commodities, measures that are considered under pillar 1. As with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, on which it is modelled, the Panel's work requires the most robust evidence base possible, starting with disaggregated data covering all relevant vertical and horizontal inequalities, and addressing the problem of the uncounted.**[225]

124. **The Roadmap should guide, finally, the next generation of development goals 2030-2045. Confirming target 17.19 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Pact for the Future already recognized the need to "develop measures of progress on sustainable development that complement or go beyond gross domestic product" (action 53)**[226]**, and in May 2026, the High-level Expert Group on Beyond GDP (HLEG) appointed by the Secretary-General submitted its proposals for a Beyond GDP dashboard organized around current well-being, equity and inclusion, and sustainability and resilience.**[227] **Agreement on indicators of equitable, inclusive and sustainable well-being, which the General Assembly might seek to achieve on the basis of the HLEG's proposals, is crucial. Yet, this alone with not suffice unless measures are adopted to reduce growth dependencies. The next development goals should affirm the need to accelerate the shift away from existing dependencies on economic growth wherever possible, and to ensure that where growth is still needed, in low-income countries in particular, it is less export-dependent, and does not rely on unsustainable resource use and exploitation of workers. The September 2027 Global Sustainable Development Report, to be addressed to the High-level Political Forum on sustainable development (SDG Summit) held under the auspices of the General Assembly, should incorporate a clear message in this regard.**

125. **A wide range of non-governmental organisations, unions, academic experts, and United Nations agencies, were involved in shaping the Roadmap's proposals, through the consultative process facilitated by the Special Rapporteur. Not all measures are consensual across all the stakeholders involved. Yet, the Roadmap outlines a way forward. It shows that there exists a ridge path between two risks: that of sacrificing social justice in the name of avoiding further environmental collapse, on the one hand; and on the other hand, that of prioritizing economic growth at all costs, based on the ideological view that no progress can be achieved without it. We can and must do better.**

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[225] Alex Cobham, *The Uncounted* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020).

[226] See A/RES/79/1.

[227] *Counting What Counts. A Compass of Progress for People and Planet* (2026).