

International Panel on Inequality

Vision Statement and Concept Note

Vision Statement

“ As the UN has repeatedly emphasised, persistent disparities in income, wealth and opportunities undermine trust in institutions, weaken perceptions of fairness and fuel social frustration. Inequality undermines economic performance and social cohesion for all and denies opportunities for too many people across the world. At the international level, persistent inequalities can undermine the foundations of the multilateral order itself.

It is not inevitable that inequality be as high as it is, and it is in our shared interest to reduce it. Inequality trends differ even among countries with similar levels of development and other circumstances, demonstrating that policies matter and that reducing inequality is both possible and desirable. There are common forces at play, including the international rules of the game, implying that there may be real benefits from taking common actions. In today's interconnected economy we must work together to address our common challenges.

Our governments recognise that tackling inequality across the world and within countries has become one of the defining challenges for the international community.

A first step to good policy design is to better equip policymakers and the public to understand and address inequality.

The International Panel on Inequality – anchored in neutral, science-based and objective analysis – would serve as the go-to global body to organise, synthesise, and assess the best knowledge on inequality from around the world for policymakers, the private sector, civil society in its broadest sense and public audiences. It would provide authoritative assessments of inequality, systematically monitoring trends, analysing their drivers and consequences, and assess policy responses at both global and national levels.

As a lean and independent body relying largely on voluntary contributions of researchers from around the world but connected to the multilateral system, it will work with and support actors across national and international levels. It will be an important example of renewed and reformed multilateralism for our time.

We therefore support the establishment of an International Panel on Inequality (IPI), and we will work with other governments and partners to advance its creation. ”

The International Panel on Inequality: Concept

This concept note reflects the proposal, as put forward by the Founding Committee of the IPI, including the member states of Brazil, Norway, South Africa and Spain. It is the substantive basis for discussion with member states and other parties, who are welcomed to participate in its creation. The establishment of the IPI would be supported by a United Nations General Assembly resolution.

The IPI is proposed as an independent scientific body tasked with assessing the state of knowledge on inequality, with an uncompromising commitment to academic rigor, independence and credibility.

The IPI stands in a strong tradition of science-policy interface bodies that have contributed to policy making for the common good of humankind through rigorous presentation of evidence and analysis. These include (inter alia) the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change); Scientific Assessment Panel (SAP), operating under the auspices of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) which assessed the destruction of ozone in the atmosphere; the IPBES (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services); the IRP (International Resources Panel); and, more recently, the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI.

Purpose and objectives

It would produce periodic assessments on the nature, drivers, and consequences of income and wealth inequality within and between countries, as well as its structural interlinkages with other forms of inequality - including employment, voice, access to justice, opportunity, basic needs, health, education, or climate change. It would also examine intersectional and multidimensional inequalities across various categories, including race, gender, social class, ethnicity, or geography. In addition, the IPI would assess scientific research on the consequences of inequality, in all relevant dimensions, as well as the consequences for inequality of existing and proposed policies.

The primary purpose of the proposed Panel would be to provide policymakers worldwide – as well as the private sector and civil society in its broadest sense - with sufficient, reliable, and accessible information on inequality trends and their impacts and drivers, and to contribute to the development of a robust academic and scientific consensus on them. It would assess and build on the large amount of research on the subject that has been conducted over the past two decades, assess that research, and identify critical gaps in our knowledge.

The Panel would also seek to explore and evaluate the effectiveness of policy options available to Member States and organisations within the multilateral system to address inequality in all its dimensions.

Composition

It is proposed that the IPI would be composed of 40 individual experts serving in their personal capacities. The Panel would define a limited number of workstreams as appropriate. It would enjoy full academic independence.

In selecting members of the IPI, academic independence, excellence and credibility will be paramount to the credibility of its assessments. It is also imperative that the panel does not reconfirm the inequalities it seeks to address. In this regard, the Panel will strive to ensure gender

equality and equality of representation between Global North and Global South countries on the panel. Age, race, and academic diversity of disciplines will also be important considerations.

Reporting

It is envisaged that the IPI would produce a full report every three years, with other levels of reporting or updates to be defined by the panel.

The IPI would present its findings across a range of relevant forums within the UN system, as well as to regional and global bodies, upon request.

Finances

Taking into consideration the budgetary constraints of the UN, funding for the IPI will be entirely based on voluntary contributions, with a focus on predictable long-term finance.

The overall budget for the IPI is estimated to be up to \$15 million over each three-year reporting cycle. This is an average of up to \$5 million a year.

The IPI will primarily be funded by government donors but will also welcome philanthropic sources of funding.

Proposed link to UN system

Noting the UNU's charter for academic independence and autonomy, the United Nations University (UNU) will be requested to initially host the IPI. Under the Charter and Council of the UNU, it is proposed that the IPI would have a bespoke governance board responsible for its oversight, comprised of a supermajority of member states, with delegated operational powers. The process to create the IPI will continue to benefit from discussion and support from DESA. The IPI will seek to work closely with key agencies across the UN system, including in particular DESA.

Alongside this, we plan to secure a UN General Assembly resolution which would support the establishment of and welcome the IPI in the context of Member States' efforts to address inequality. It would also clarify reporting lines and create mechanisms by which the IPI can ensure its reports are considered and discussed by and with member states.

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