



The Economic and Social Council
(ECOSOC)

Study Guide

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The Economic and Social Council¹:

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is the United Nations' central platform for reflection, debate, and innovative thinking on sustainable development.

- One of the six main organs of the United Nations established by the UN Charter in 1946, is the principal body for coordination, policy review, policy dialogue and recommendations on economic, social and environmental issues, as well as for implementation of the internationally agreed development goals.
- Serves as the central mechanism for the activities of the United Nations system and its specialized agencies, and supervises the subsidiary and expert bodies in the economic, social and environmental fields
- Has undergone reforms (A/RES/61/16, A/RES/68/1) in the last decade to strengthen the Council and its working methods, giving special attention to the integrated and coordinated implementation of, and follow-up to, the outcomes of all major United Nations conferences summits in the economic, social, environmental and related fields

Functions

ECOSOC engages a wide variety of stakeholders – policymakers, parliamentarians, academics, major groups, foundations, business sector representatives and 3,200+ registered non-governmental organizations – in a productive dialogue on sustainable development through a programmatic cycle of meetings. The work of the Council is guided by an issue-based approach, and there is an annual theme that accompanies each programmatic cycle, ensuring a sustained and focused discussion among multiple stakeholders.

The programmatic cycle of ECOSOC includes

- **High-Level Segment**
 - **High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)** provides political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development, follow-up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments;
 - **Annual Ministerial Review (AMR)**, held annually since 2007, assesses progress in the implementation of the United Nations development agenda;
 - **Development Cooperation Forum (DCF)**, held on a biannual basis since 2007, reviews trends and progress in development cooperation on a biannual basis.
- **Integration Segment**, held annually since 2014, promotes the balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development both within the United Nations system and beyond.

¹ <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/about/>

- **Humanitarian Affairs Segment**, that takes place in alternate years in New York and Geneva, seeks to strengthen the coordination of the United Nations' humanitarian efforts.
- **Operational Activities for Development Segment**, held annually, provides overall coordination and guidance for United Nations funds and programs on a system-wide basis.
- **Coordination and Management Meetings (CMM)**, held throughout the year, review the reports of its subsidiary and expert bodies; promote system-wide coordination and review of development issues; and consider special country situation or regional issues.
- **Youth Forum**, held annually since 2012, brings the voice of youth into the discussion of the Millennium Development Goals and post-2015 development agenda.
- **Partnership Forum**, held annually since 2008 and linked to the theme of the Council's Annual Ministerial Review, aims at finding innovative ways to collaborate with the private sector and foundations in search of solutions for the many development challenges facing governments today.

Topic A: Refugee situation

Introduction²:

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established by the UN General Assembly on December 14, 1950, and began work in Geneva, Switzerland, a fortnight later on January 1, 1951. Initially, it was given a three-year mandate to help find solutions for about 1 million European refugees remaining in the aftermath of World War II. Then it was supposed to disband, the refugee problem 'resolved' once and for all. Sixty years later, however, UNHCR is still here and the plight of the world's uprooted people remains as serious as ever.

Definition³:

A **refugee** is a person who is outside their country of citizenship because they have well-founded grounds for fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, and is unable to obtain sanctuary from their home country or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country; or in the case of not having a nationality and being outside their country of former habitual residence as a result of such event, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to their country of former habitual residence. Such a person may be called an "**asylum seeker**" until considered with the status of "refugee" by the Contracting State where they formally make a claim for sanctuary or right of asylum.

History of the problem:

The idea that a person who sought sanctuary in a holy place could not be harmed without inviting divine retribution was familiar to the ancient Greeks and ancient Egyptians. However, the right to seek asylum in a church or other holy place was first codified in law by King Æthelberht of Kent in about AD 600. Similar laws were implemented throughout Europe in the Middle Ages. The related concept of political exile also has a long history: Ovid was sent to Tomis; Voltaire was sent to England. By the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, nations recognized each other's sovereignty. However, it was not until the advent of romantic nationalism in late 18th-century Europe that nationalism gained sufficient prevalence for the phrase "country of nationality" to become practically meaningful, and for people crossing borders to be required to provide identification.

The term "refugee" is sometimes applied to people who might fit the definition outlined by the 1951 Convention, were it to be applied retroactively. There are many candidates. For example, after the Edict of Fontainebleau in 1685 outlawed Protestantism in France, hundreds of thousands of Huguenots fled to England, the Netherlands, Switzerland, South Africa, Germany and Prussia. The repeated waves of pogroms that swept Eastern Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries prompted mass Jewish emigration (more than 2 million Russian Jews emigrated in the period 1881–1920). Beginning in the 19th century, Muslim people emigrated to Turkey from

²<http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/briefingpapers/refugees/aboutUNHCR.html>

³<http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b66c2aa10.pdf>

Europe. The Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 caused 800,000 people to leave their homes. Various groups of people were officially designated refugees beginning in World War I.

The World Refugee Crisis in Numbers⁴

Current number of refugees worldwide	Vulnerable refugees needing resettlement by end-2017	Percentage of refugees hosted by developing countries
19.5M	1.45M	86%

International attitude:

Law:

Under international law, refugees are individuals who:

- are outside their country of nationality or habitual residence;
- have a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion; and
- are unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution.
- Refugee law encompasses both customary law, peremptory norms, and international legal instruments. These include:
 - The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees; also referred to as the Geneva Convention;
 - The 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees;
 - The 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa
 - The 1974 United Nations *Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict*

⁴ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2015/10/eight-solutions-world-refugee-crisis/>

World Refugee Day:

World Refugee Day occurs on 20 June. The day was created in 2000 by a special United Nations General Assembly Resolution. 20 June had previously been commemorated as African Refugee Day in a number of African countries.

In the United Kingdom World Refugee Day is celebrated as part of Refugee Week. Refugee Week is a nationwide festival designed to promote understanding and to celebrate the cultural contributions of refugees, and features many events such as music, dance and theatre.

In the Roman Catholic Church, the World Day of Migrants and Refugees is celebrated in January each year. It was instituted in 1914 by Pope Pius X.

Statistics⁵:

Country	Total asylum seekers 2007 to 2011	Country	Major source countries in 2011	Country	Number of asylum applications in 2012 (EU only)	
United States	278,850	Afghanistan	35,729	Germany	77,650	
France	206,890	China	24,446	France	61,455	
Germany	265,767	Iraq	23,469	Sweden	43,945	
Canada	147,000	Serbia	21,246	Belgium	28,285	
Sweden	146,380	Pakistan	18,141	United Kingdom	28,260	
United Kingdom	138,350	Iran	18,128	Austria	17,450	
Italy	106,140	Somalia	15,482	Italy	17,350	
Belgium	88,300	Eritrea	10,616	Netherlands	13,100	
Greece	80,500	Nigeria	10,498	Poland	10,755	

⁵ <http://c15119308.r8.cf2.rackcdn.com/infographic-global-refugee-populations-1975-2010/index.html#>

Switzerland	74,900	Mexico	8,906	Greece	9,575	
Austria	66,020	Syria	8,383	Denmark	6,075	
Netherlands	60,330	Tunisia	7,907	Finland	3,115	
Norway	57,300	Bangladesh	7,644	Spain	2,565	
Turkey	53,710	India	6,772	Romania	2,510	
Australia	40,320	Georgia	6,700	Hungary	2,155	
Poland	36,720	Turkey	6,688	Malta	2,080	
Spain	21,340	DR Congo	6,574	Luxembourg	2,055	
Cyprus	18,840	Armenia	6,220	Cyprus	1,635	
Finland	18,470	Guinea	6,113	Bulgaria	1,385	
Israel	17,175	Macedonia	5,607	Ireland	955	
South Africa	16,900	Algeria	4,982	Czech Republic	755	
Denmark	16,810	El Salvador	4,610	Slovakia	730	
Hungary	15,010	Hungary	4,488	Lithuania	645	
Ireland	13,780	Haiti	3,915	Slovenia	305	
Malta	8,370	Egypt	3,841	Portugal	295	
Russia	8,000	Guatemala	3,656	Latvia	205	
Japan	6,880	Albania	3,330	Estonia	85	
Czech Republic	5,930	Sudan	3,236			
Slovakia	5,360	Ethiopia	3,180			
Romania	5,250	Nepal	2,913			
Bulgaria	4,500	Ghana	2,817			

Luxembourg	4,270	Bosnia and Herzegovina	2,732
South Korea	2,840	Morocco	2,696
Croatia	1,610	Mali	2,363
New Zealand	1,490	Azerbaijan	2,363
Slovenia	1,410		
Lithuania	1,340		
Macedonia	1,090		
Portugal	960		
Bosnia and Herzegovina	810		
Latvia	530		
Liechtenstein	530		
Iceland	280		
Montenegro	280		
Estonia	160		
Albania	70		
<u>Total</u>	<u>1,942,520</u>		

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees⁶:

The UN Refugee Agency emerged after World War II to help Europeans displaced by this conflict. Established on December 14, 1950, the agency was given a three-year mandate to complete its work.

But the work did not end. In 1956, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) faced its first major emergency – the flight of refugees from Hungary after Soviet forces crushed its revolution.

In following years, displacement grew into a worldwide phenomenon. In the 1960s, decolonization in Africa sparked the continent's first refugee crises, and UNHCR responded. Over the following decades, UNHCR went on to tackle emergencies in Asia and Latin America.

By the end of the 20th century, displacement had come full circle. Fresh crises emerged in Africa and conflicts in the Balkans created Europe's first refugees since the end of WWII.

With the turn of the 21st century, UNHCR has continued its work in Africa (in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia), and is active in Asia where the Afghan refugee situation marks its thirtieth anniversary.

In recent years, UNHCR has expanded its role by coming to the aid of the internally displaced, and by helping millions of stateless people who have been denied basic rights because of their lack of citizenship.

In Africa and Latin America, regional legal instruments on refugees have strengthened UNHCR's original 1951 mandate.

In 1954, UNHCR was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its ground-breaking work aiding the plight of European refugees. In 1981, UNHCR received another peace prize for its worldwide efforts. The citation for this prize noted the political obstacles the agency faces and overcomes in the completion of its mandate.

From a staff of 34 at the time of its founding, UNHCR now boasts 7,685 national and international staff members. The majority of these professionals work in the field. The agency is active in over 125 countries, and has 414 offices, most of which are remote sub-offices and field offices.

Today, UNHCR's activities affect 35.8 million people – 10.5 million refugees, 17.7 million internally displaced people, 525,940 returnees, 3.3 million stateless people, and 936,740 asylum-seekers.

The Refugee Agency's budget has grown from US \$300,000 in its first year to more than US \$4.3 billion in 2012.

In December 2003, the UN General Assembly abolished the requirement that the agency renew its mandate every few years. In 2010, UNHCR celebrated its 60th anniversary, a proud and humbling milestone that revealed how humanitarian needs are unlikely to disappear anytime soon.

⁶ <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c2.html>

Role of the UN⁷:

Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (established 14 December 1950) protects and supports refugees at the request of a government or the United Nations and assists in their return or resettlement. All refugees in the world are under the UNHCR mandate except Palestinian refugees who fled the current state of Israel between 1947 and 1949, as a result of the 1948 Palestine War, and their descendants, who are assisted by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). However, Palestinian Arabs who fled the West Bank and Gaza after 1949 (for example, during the 1967 Six Day war) are under the jurisdiction of the

UNHCR provides protection and assistance not only to refugees, but also to other categories of displaced or needy people. These include asylum seekers, refugees who have returned home but still need help in rebuilding their lives, local civilian communities directly affected by the movements of refugees, stateless people and so-called internally displaced people (IDPs). IDPs are civilians who have been forced to flee their homes, but who have not reached a neighboring country and therefore, unlike refugees, are not protected by international law and may find it hard to receive any form of assistance. As the nature of war has changed in the last few decades, with more and more internal conflicts replacing interstate wars, the number of IDPs has increased significantly to an estimated 5 million people worldwide. According to Bogumil Terminski the stabilization of refugee problem worldwide is the main cause of the development of the studies on internal displacement.

The agency is mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally or to resettle in a third country.

UNHCR's mandate has gradually been expanded to include protecting and providing humanitarian assistance to what it describes as other persons "of concern", including internally displaced persons (IDPs) who would fit the legal definition of a refugee under the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, the 1969 Organization for African Unity Convention, or some other treaty if they left their country, but who presently remain in their country of origin. UNHCR thus has missions in Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Serbia and Montenegro and Ivory Coast to assist and provide services to IDPs. Asia – 8,603,600 Africa – 5,169,300 Europe – 3,666,700 Latin America and Caribbean – 2,513,000 North America – 716,800 Oceania – 82,500.

⁷ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2005/51662.htm>

Possible solutions⁸:

1. Opening up safe routes to sanctuary for refugees is one important solution. That means allowing people to reunite with their relatives, and giving refugees visas so they don't have to spend their life savings and risk drowning to reach safety.
2. It also means resettling all refugees who need it. Resettlement is a vital solution for the most vulnerable refugees – including torture survivors and people with serious medical problems. Right now, 1.15 million people urgently need this lifeline. But so far, the world's wealthiest nations are offering to resettle less than 10% every year. Amnesty estimates that 1.45 million refugees will need resettlement by end-2017.
3. World leaders also need to put saving lives first. No one should have to die crossing a border, and yet almost 7,000 people drowned in the Mediterranean alone in the two years since the first big shipwreck in October 2013. In May 2015, thousands of people fleeing persecution in Myanmar suffered for weeks onboard boats while Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia bickered over who should help them. States can stop this by investing in search and rescue operations and immediately helping people in distress.
4. And whether they travel by land or by sea, people fleeing persecution or wars should be allowed to cross borders, with or without travel documents. Pushing people back and putting up massive fences only forces them to take more dangerous routes to safety.
5. All countries should **investigate and prosecute trafficking gangs** who exploit refugees and migrants, and put people's safety above all else. Amnesty recently met survivors in Southeast Asia who said traffickers killed people on board boats when their families couldn't pay ransoms. Others were thrown overboard and left to drown, or died from because there was no food and water.
6. Governments also need to stop blaming refugees and migrants for economic and social problems, and instead **combat all kinds of xenophobia and racial discrimination**. Doing otherwise is deeply unfair, stirs up tensions and fear of foreigners, and sometimes leads to violence – even death. In Durban, South Africa, at least four people died, many were seriously injured, and over 1,000 mainly Burundian and Congolese refugees forced to flee after violence and looting broke out in April and May 2015.
7. “Financially broke” is how Antonio Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, described UN agencies in September 2015. Wealthy countries quite simply aren't keeping their high-profile promises to fund aid for refugees abroad. For example, the UN has received less than half the funding it needs to support Syria's 4 million refugees. This is now forcing 80% of refugees living outside camps in Jordan to do dangerous, degrading jobs or send their children out to beg. South Sudan's forgotten refugee crisis has been met with a pitiful 18% of the money needed for absolute basics like food and medicine. People are dying while governments spend billions on border control. They urgently need to guarantee full funding to alleviate refugee crises worldwide.

⁸ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2015/10/eight-solutions-world-refugee-crisis/>

8. The world has a very short memory. In the aftermath of World War II, most countries agreed to protect refugees through the 1951 Refugee Convention, and through UN agencies like the UNHCR. Barbed wire fences and chronic underfunding have left that vision of a better world in tatters. By ignoring the warning signs, world leaders have allowed a huge, global humanitarian crisis to unfold. Ultimately, it will be resolved by ending the conflicts and persecution that forced people to flee in the first place. But no one knows when that will be. Meanwhile, we need radical solutions, visionary leadership and global co-operation on a scale not seen for 70 years. That involves **setting up strong refugee systems**: allowing people to apply for asylum, treating their refugee claims fairly, resettling the most vulnerable of all, and providing basics like education and healthcare. None of these eight solutions are impossible to achieve, if politicians listen to the millions of people saying “refugees welcome”, and put solidarity and compassion above petty wrangling over who should host a few thousand refugees.

Questions:

1. What is Europe doing to promote solutions for the world's millions of refugees and IDPs (International Displaced People) living in protracted displacement?
2. How are refugee issues integrated in development planning and external action?
3. Is the transition from humanitarian assistance to long-term solutions ensured for refugees and IDPs?
4. What can be considered as feasible solutions nowadays, and how can the EU and its Member States better promote them?
5. Why is mostly Europe affected by the refugee?
6. Should other countries play active role and provide with financial support to Europe?
7. What are some useful UNHCR references on refugee resettlement?
8. How should the family members of resettled refugees be dealt with?

Resources for further reading:

1. <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/teXis/vtx/home>
2. <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c4b8.html>
3. <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c4d6.html>
4. <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c4ca.html>
5. <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4ab346796.html>
6. <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c23c.html>
7. <http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/teXis/vtx/rwmain>
8. <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49da066c6.html>
9. <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a1d28526.html>

Topic B: Reducing inequality

Introduction⁹:

It is well documented that income inequality is on the rise, with the richest 10 percent earning up to 40 percent of total global income. The poorest 10 percent earn only between 2 and 7 percent of total global income. In developing countries, inequality has increased by 11 percent if we take into account the growth of population.

These widening disparities are a call for action that require the adoption of sound policies to empower the bottom percentile of income earners and promote economic inclusion of all regardless of sex, race or ethnicity.

Income inequality is a global problem that requires global solutions. This involves improving the regulation and monitoring of financial markets and institutions, encouraging development assistance and foreign direct investment to regions where the need is greatest. Facilitating the safe migration and mobility of people is also key to bridging the widening divide.

Reducing inequalities is one of 17 Global Goals that make up the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. An integrated approach is crucial for progress across the multiple goals.

Definition¹⁰:

Economic inequality, also known as **income inequality** and **wealth inequality**, is the difference found in various measures of economic well-being among individuals in a group, among groups in a population, or among countries. Economists generally focus on economic disparity in three metrics: wealth, income, and consumption. The issue of economic inequality can be relevant to notions of equity, equality of outcome, and equality of opportunity. Some studies point to inequality as a growing social problem. Too much inequality can be destructive, because income inequality and wealth concentration can hinder long-term growth.

History of the problem¹¹:

The broad facts of income inequality over the past six decades are easily summarized:

- The years from the end of World War II into the 1970s were ones of substantial economic growth and broadly shared prosperity.
- Incomes grew rapidly and at roughly the same rate up and down the income ladder, roughly doubling in inflation-adjusted terms between the late 1940s and early 1970s.

⁹ <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdoverview/post-2015-development-agenda/goal-10.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.economist.com/blogs/freeexchange/2014/07/measuring-inequality>

¹¹ <http://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/a-guide-to-statistics-on-historical-trends-in-income-inequality>

- The income gap between those high up the income ladder and those on the middle and lower rungs — while substantial — did not change much during this period.
- Beginning in the 1970s, economic growth slowed and the income gap widened.
- Income growth for households in the middle and lower parts of the distribution slowed sharply, while incomes at the top continued to grow strongly.
- The concentration of income at the very top of the distribution rose to levels last seen more than 80 years ago (during the “Roaring Twenties”).
- Wealth — the value of a household’s property and financial assets, minus the value of its debts — is much more highly concentrated than income. The best survey data show that the top 3 percent of the distribution hold over half of all wealth. Other research suggests that most of that is held by an even smaller percentage at the *very* top, whose share has been rising over the last three decades.

Data from a variety of sources contribute to this broad picture of strong growth and shared prosperity for the early postwar period, followed by slower growth and growing inequality since the 1970s. Within these broad trends, however, different data tell slightly different parts of the story (and no single source of data is better for all purposes than the others).

This guide consists of four sections. The first describes the commonly used sources and statistics on income and discusses their relative strengths and limitations in understanding trends in income and inequality. The second provides an overview of the trends revealed in those key data sources. The third and fourth sections supply additional information on wealth, which complements the income data as a measure of how the *most* well-off Americans are doing, and poverty, which measures how the *least* well-off Americans are doing.

Causes¹²:

There are many reasons for economic inequality within societies. Recent growth in overall income inequality, at least within the OECD countries, has been driven mostly by increasing inequality in wages and salaries.

¹² <http://www.oecd.org/social/dividedwestandwhyinequalitykeepsrisingspeech.htm>

Economist Thomas Piketty, who specializes in the study of economic inequality, argues that widening economic disparity is an inevitable phenomenon of free market capitalism when the rate of return of capital (r) is greater than the rate of growth of the economy (g).

Common factors thought to impact economic inequality include:

- labor market outcomes
- globalization, by:
 - suppressing wages in low-skill jobs due to a surplus of low-skill labor in developing countries
 - increasing the market size and the rewards for people and firms succeeding in a particular niche
 - providing more investment opportunities for already-wealthy people
 - increasing international influence
 - decreasing domestic influence
 - policy reforms
 - extra-legal ownership of property (real estate and business)
- more regressive taxation
- plutocracy
- computerization, automation and increased technology, which means more skills are required to obtain a moderate or high wage
- ethnic discrimination
- gender discrimination
- nepotism
- variation in natural ability
- neoliberalism
- Growing acceptance of very high CEO salaries, e.g. in the United States since the 1960s
- Land speculation- Followers of Henry George believe that landlords and land speculators derive excess wealth and income from the tendency of land to increase exponentially with development and at a much higher rate than population growth. Their solution is to tax land value, though not necessarily structures or other improvements. This concept is known as Georgism.

Goal 10 targets¹³

- By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average
- By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status
- Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard
- Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality
- Improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions and strengthen the implementation of such regulations
- Ensure enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions in order to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions
- Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies
- Implement the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, in accordance with World Trade Organization agreements
- Encourage official development assistance and financial flows, including foreign direct investment, to States where the need is greatest, in particular least developed countries, African countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries, in accordance with their national plans and programs
- By 2030, reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent

Facts and figures¹⁴

- On average—and taking into account population size—income inequality increased by 11 per cent in developing countries between 1990 and 2010
- A significant majority of households in developing countries—more than 75 per cent of the population—are living today in societies where income is more unequally distributed than it was in the 1990s

¹³<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/inequality/>

¹⁴<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/inequality/>

- Evidence shows that, beyond a certain threshold, inequality harms growth and poverty reduction, the quality of relations in the public and political spheres and individuals' sense of fulfilment and self-worth
- There is nothing inevitable about growing income inequality; several countries have managed to contain or reduce income inequality while achieving strong growth performance
- Income inequality cannot be effectively tackled unless the underlying inequality of opportunities is addressed
- In a global survey conducted by UN Development Programme, policy makers from around the world acknowledged that inequality in their countries is generally high and potentially a threat to long-term social and economic development
- Evidence from developing countries shows that children in the poorest 20 per cent of the populations are still up to three times more likely to die before their fifth birthday than children in the richest quintiles
- Social protection has been significantly extended globally, yet persons with disabilities are up to five times more likely than average to incur catastrophic health expenditures
- Despite overall declines in maternal mortality in the majority of developing countries, women in rural areas are still up to three times more likely to die while giving birth than women living in urban centres

Possible solutions:

1. **Correct political imbalances**—strengthen and protect the Voting Rights Act, level the playing field for political contributions, and limit the influence of corporate lobbyists.
2. **Ensure that the wealthiest people and profitable corporations that benefit the most from our political and economic system contribute their fair share:** reform “upside-down” tax expenditures (spending through the tax code that disproportionately benefits those with higher incomes), limit corporate welfare, and enact a robust inheritance tax.
3. **Amplify workers’ bargaining power** by increasing fines for illegal anti-union behavior, encouraging minority unions, and reversing state laws that undermine unions and prevent them from collecting dues for benefits they provide workers at unionized workplaces.
4. **Update labor standards**—raise the national minimum wage to \$12 and index it to wage growth, require fair scheduling for workers, target employee-contractor misclassification and wage theft, and enact the Paycheck Fairness Act.
5. **Modernize the safety net**—update Unemployment Insurance to reflect the changing nature of work; increase Social Security benefits and raise the cap on income subject to

- taxes; expand Medicaid in every state; and address flaws in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to refocus it on employment and child well-being outcomes.
6. **Provide families tools to manage their many responsibilities**—provide at least 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave, universal early learning and care, an expanded Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a child allowance, and comprehensive family planning services.
 7. **Expand opportunities for current and future workers**—invest in infrastructure and other nationally needed jobs; enact income-based loan repayment to increase higher education accessibility and affordability; and pursue full employment.
 8. **Increase affordable housing and bolster consumer financial protection rules**—promote fair and accessible banking, savings, and other financial vehicles and services for those excluded or abused by the current system.
 9. **Attack racial and other discrimination across the board and enact comprehensive immigration reform**, normalizing the status of more children and workers to increase their educational and work opportunities.
 10. **Reduce the over-incarceration and over-criminalization by every level of government** that restricts millions of Americans’ ability to support themselves and their families—especially among communities of color and high poverty areas.

Questions:

1. Does it matter if some people are much richer than others?
2. Is there a link between income inequality and health and social problems?
3. Does income inequality cause health and social problems?
4. As more and more jobs are automated, replacing a larger and larger portion of the workforce over time, do you think implementing a form of guaranteed income would be feasible in the world?
5. What do the world countries do to cope with this problem?

Further reading:

1. <http://www.theguardian.com/money/2015/oct/13/half-world-wealth-in-hands-population-inequality-report>
2. http://www.oregonlive.com/business/index.ssf/2014/01/12_questions_about_income_ineq.html
3. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/inequality-income-social-problems-full.pdf>
4. <http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/reducing-gender-gaps-and-poor-job-quality-essential-to-tackle-growing-inequality.htm>
5. https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/research-ties-economic-inequality-to-gap-in-life-expectancy/2013/03/10/c7a323c4-7094-11e2-8b8d-e0b59a1b8e2a_story.html

Topic C: Minimum standards of working conditions

Introduction¹⁵:

Working conditions are at the core of paid work and employment relationships. Generally speaking, working conditions cover a broad range of topics and issues, from working time (hours of work, rest periods, and work schedules) to remuneration, as well as the physical conditions and mental demands that exist in the workplace.

History of the problem¹⁶:

The concept of protecting workers from the perils of labor environments dates all the way back to 14th-century Europe. The first example of the modern labor rights movement, though, came in response to the brutal working conditions that accompanied the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1802, the Parliament of the United Kingdom passed what is now known as the English Factory Act. The act sought to regulate the workday of apprentices by restricting work hours to 12 per day. In doing so, the English Factory Act served as a precursor to the models of international labor standards seen today. Minimal regulations similar to those found in English legislation subsequently became increasingly commonplace among 19th century industrializing nations. Early attempts at the provision of labor standards were limited in scope, though. Such conventions focused primarily on improving working conditions in relation to hours of work, women's and children's labor, and the use of hazardous materials. While it was evident that support for workers' rights was inconsistent across international boundaries, activists originally only employed the use of moral suasion to deal with differences in labor standards. It was not until the latter parts of the 19th century that efforts were made to implement uniform standards on an international scale.

Role of the UN¹⁷:

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN). As with other UN specialized agencies (or programs) working on international development, the ILO is also a member of the United Nations Development Group.

The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** is a United Nations agency dealing with labour issues, particularly international labour standards, social protection, and work opportunities for all. The ILO has 186 member states: 185 of the 193 UN member states plus the Cook Islands are members of the ILO.

In 1969, the organization received the Nobel Peace Prize for improving peace among classes, pursuing decent work and justice for workers, and providing technical assistance to other developing nations.

¹⁵ <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-law/lang--en/index.htm>

¹⁶ http://www.jstor.org/stable/2696558?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

¹⁷ <http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/lang--en/index.htm>

The ILO organizes the International Labour Conference in Geneva every year in June, where conventions and recommendations are crafted and adopted. Also known as the **parliament of Labour**, the conference also makes decisions about the ILO's general policy, work programme and budget.

Through July 2011, the ILO has adopted 189 conventions. If these conventions are ratified by enough governments, they become in force. However, ILO conventions are considered international labour standards regardless of ratifications. When a convention comes into force, it creates a legal obligation for ratifying nations to apply its provisions.

Every year the International Labour Conference's Committee on the Application of Standards examines a number of alleged breaches of international labour standards. Governments are required to submit reports detailing their compliance with the obligations of the conventions they have ratified. Conventions that have not been ratified by member states have the same legal force as do recommendations.

In 1998, the 86th International Labour Conference adopted the *Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*. This declaration contains four fundamental policies:

- 1.The right of workers to associate freely and bargain collectively;
- 2.The end of forced and compulsory labour;
- 3.The end of child labour; and
- 4.The end of unfair discrimination among workers.

The ILO asserts that its members have an obligation to work towards fully respecting these principles, embodied in relevant ILO Conventions. The ILO Conventions which embody the fundamental principles have now been ratified by most member states.

Minimum wages and conditions¹⁸:

Minimum entitlements for wages and conditions of employment are most often found in enterprise agreements or modern awards. Employers must provide their employees with at least their minimum entitlements.

Some employees are not covered by an award or an enterprise agreement. For these employees, a national minimum wage order provides a safety net of minimum wages.

The National Employment Standards (NES) are minimum standards that cannot be overridden by the terms of enterprise agreements or awards.

¹⁸ <https://www.fwc.gov.au/awards-and-agreements/minimum-wages-conditions>

Your minimum wages and conditions are most likely to be set by an enterprise agreement.

Most enterprise agreements include:

- wage rates
- employment conditions (e.g. hours of work, meal breaks, overtime)
- a consultation process
- dispute resolution procedures
- deductions from wages for any purpose authorised by an employee.

Enterprise agreements cannot include unlawful content (such as discriminatory or objectionable terms).

National employment standards:

Minimum wages and conditions in agreements and awards for all employees are underpinned by the NES.

The NES relate to the following matters:

- maximum weekly hours
- requests for flexible working arrangements
- parental leave and related entitlements
- annual leave
- personal/career's leave and compassionate leave
- community service leave
- long service leave
- public holidays
- notice of termination and redundancy pay, and
- the Fair Work Information Statement.

Effects of Labor Standard

Advocates argue that enforcement of labor standards through trade agreements will improve the working conditions and wages of workers in poor countries, thereby reducing the wage differentials between rich and poor countries. They believe that this will protect jobs of workers in the rich countries. The question is whether working conditions in poor countries can

be raised, and whether jobs of workers in rich countries can be protected with the application of standards that are designed and enforced by the rich countries.

In this connection, there is evidently a marked difference between the worldview of most advocates linking international labor standards to trade and most economists, including ourselves. Advocates of attaching labor standards to trade agreements seem to see the world in terms of a struggle between capital and labor for the rewards from production, without much regard to the determinants of the size of the output that each party gets. These advocates see the outcome as depending on power, not on economics. Economists see the world in terms of how resources are allocated to production with a view to maximizing the total output. They see the distribution of that output between capital and labor as depending on scarcity and productivity, not on power. Therefore labor standards advocates favor the use of intervention to tilt the balance of power in favor of labor, believing then that labor will get a larger share of a fixed pie. Economists have found that those same policies shrink the pie while altering the slices, i.e., by making poor workers in developing countries poorer and more numerous. This, we argue is not a result of changing power but due to changing the markets within which scarcity determines the rewards to capital and labor.

Possible solutions:

Working conditions can be improved considerably at relatively little cost and effort. In conjunction with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Geneva and the Faridabad Small Industries Association (FSIA), SECO launched the Sustaining Competitive and Responsible Enterprises (SCORE) Programme at two industrial clusters between 2006 and 2007. SCORE is a nine-month modular training and consulting programme consisting of joint seminars to formulate solutions for improving working conditions and follow-up factory visits to monitor the introduction of SCORE.

Increased productivity

The programme has now been successfully implemented. The SMEs have invested in making the workplace more employee-friendly, so as to improve their workers' health and safety. There is

more communication and trust between management and workers. The consequences of this are measurable too, with productivity up by 20 per cent and absenteeism down by 20 per cent. The quality of the work itself has improved, and some of the measures taken have even reduced the number of working hours. This makes the businesses more competitive, enabling them to participate in global value chains. And with the local SME association FSIA also involved, the programme has become autonomous. The Ministry for Labour has now expressed an interest in expanding such measures to other areas.

Questions:

1. What can unions do to support the acceptance of more international labour standards in their countries and globally?
2. How can labour organizations be encouraged to participate more actively in the monitoring of the application of international labour standards?
3. What are the solutions to the poor working conditions in the Industrial Revolution?

Further reading:

1. <http://www.ilo.org/global/lang--en/index.htm>
2. <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=706>
3. <https://www.government.nl/topics/health-and-safety-at-the-workplace/contents/working-conditions-act>
4. <http://firstindustrialrevolution.weebly.com/working-and-living-conditions.html>
5. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_120133.pdf
6. <https://www.unison.org.uk/get-help/knowledge/health-and-safety/working-conditions/>
7. http://www.ilo.int/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---safework/documents/publication/wcms_110306.pdf