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World Inequality Report 2022

A world of growing inequality

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The richest capture a huge share of income, own most of the wealth and are responsible for a disproportionate share of CO2 emissions. These are the main findings of the latest [Global Inequality Report](#) by an international group of economists and statisticians.

Since the 1980s, income and wealth inequality has been increasing almost everywhere, as a result of deregulation and liberalization programmes. This trend accelerated during the Covid epidemic.

Currently, the richest 10% of the world's population earns 52% of global income, while the poorest half earns only 8%. Wealth inequality is even more pronounced than income inequality. The poorest half of the world's population has virtually no wealth, owning only 2% of the total. In contrast, the richest 10% of the world's population own 76% of the world's wealth. The share of wealth held by the richest 0.01% increased from 7% to 11% between 1995 and 2021.

At the top, the richest 0.001% represent 55,200 adults in 2021 globally, and own just over 6% of the world's wealth, meaning that their wealth is more than 6,000 times greater than the average. To put this into perspective, the total wealth of the poorest 50% of the world's population, a group that is 50,000 times larger than the richest 0.001%, is three times smaller (2%).

The issue of climate change

One of the most interesting points in the report concerns the contribution to climate change. The authors highlight the link between income and wealth inequality and unequal contributions to climate change. On average, humans emit 6.6 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO2) per capita per year, with large disparities within the global population.

The poorest 50% emit on average 1.6 tonnes per year and contribute 12% of the total. The middle 40% emit 6.6 tonnes on average, or 40.4% of the total. The richest 10% emit 31 tonnes (47.6% of the total). The richest 1% emit 110 tonnes (16.8% of the total). Nearly half of all emissions are therefore caused by one tenth of the world's population, and one hundredth of the world's population (77 million people) emits more than the entire poor half of the population (3.8 billion people).

The report highlights a fundamental issue: contrary to how it is commonly presented, this inequality is not simply a matter of rich and poor countries. There are large emitters in low- and middle-income countries, and small emitters in rich countries. According to the authors, in 1990, the bulk of global carbon inequality (63%) was due to differences between countries: at that time, the average citizen of a rich country unequivocally polluted more than the rest of the world's citizens.

This situation has been almost entirely reversed in 30 years. Inequalities within countries now account for almost two-thirds of global inequalities in emissions. This does not mean that there are no significant (often huge) emissions inequalities between countries and regions of the world. In fact, it means that in addition to the great inequality in carbon emissions between countries, there are even greater inequalities between individuals and social groups.

In Europe, the poorest half of the population emits about five tonnes per year per person; in East Asia, they emit about three tonnes and in North America about ten. This is in stark contrast to the emissions of the top 10% of these

regions (29 tonnes in Europe, 39 in East Asia and 73 in North America).

No way out without challenging competition

The report therefore concludes that the scale of transformation needed to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions in rich countries cannot be achieved unless environmental and social inequalities are integrated into the very design of environmental policies.

The authors criticize taxes such as the carbon tax, which hit the rich and poor indiscriminately. But is it enough to limit wealth inequalities? In capitalism, the richest 1% are first and foremost those who have power because they own the means of production. They are the ones who determine investments and the direction of production, and influence the policies of states. They are the dominant class. It is this power that must be challenged.

As our comrade Daniel Tanuro, author of several books on the ecological crisis, points out in a recent text based on similar data, reducing inequalities is necessary but not sufficient: "There is no way out without questioning the competition for profit, the motor of productivism based on capitalist property rights." [1]

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[1] *Gauche Anticapitaliste*, 9 December 2021 "[Climat, inégalités et lutte des classes](#)".