Policy Framework on

Reducing Inequality



solidar suisse

Guiding principles and objectives

In the scope of its international programs, Solidar Suisse is committed to advance social justice globally and to reduce inequality in its different dimensions and expressions. Reducing inequality has become a key distinction of Solidar Suisse in the Swiss NGO landscape and a strategic core profile in its institutional communication. This policy framework – together with Solidar Suisse´s Gender Policy (2021) and Localization Policy (2025) and in the scope of the Strategy 2025-2028 – guides Solidar Suisse´s interventions in Global South countries as well as in Switzerland and, in cooperation with like-minded players, globally.

Purpose and Objectives

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Scope of Policy

This Policy framework is applicable to all three thematic domains of Solidar Suisse: 1) Economy and Work, 2) Democracy and Civil Society, 3) Disaster and Crises.

Most of the strategic key elements focus, primarily, on longer-term development cooperation interventions in the first two domains. Nonetheless, the framework also offers orientation for Solidar´s Humanitarian Action; in this case, it should be combined with a Nexus approach that clearly links short-term humanitarian action (emergency or early recovery) to mid- and longer-term interventions (recovery, reconstruction and phase-over to development cooperation).

Problem Statement: Inequality Landscape

A multidimensional concept

Inequality, together with climate change, is one of the most important challenges for mankind to promote social justice and secure a more equitable, democratic, sustainable life on planet earth in the present and future. The climate crisis and inequality crisis are mutually reinforcing: one crisis exacerbates the other.

Inequality is a multidimensional concept. Mostly, it refers to the distribution of income and wealth among population groups in a given country (within-country inequality), between countries (between-country inequality) or globally (global inequality). But it also refers to the inequality of opportunities, of access and of capabilities, like the access to public services (education, health, water, housing, etc.) or the possibility to influence political decision-making. Access to a safe, sustainable environment is becoming increasingly important in a world of accelerated climate change, while the share of polluting GHG emissions as well as possibilities to protect against climate-change related losses and damages are highly unequally distributed among countries and population groups. Gender inequality looks at the discrimination between genders, may that be economic (gender pay gap) or in terms of access (for example, to basic schooling or the job market).

Inequalities have to do with identities, too, and discrimination based on class, ethnicity, origin, religious or sexual orientation. It is this intersectionality of discrimination that makes vulnerable groups more vulnerable: indigenous people, migrants or LGBTQI+, for example, are prone to suffer inequalities in multiple dimensions.

Common tools to measure economic inequality are the Gini coefficient or the income and wealth shares (top 1% or top 10% vs. bottom 50%), or the Palma ratio (which refers to the ratio between the income top 10% to the income of the lower 40%). The World Bank has developed indicators to measure the influence of ethnicity, parents´ education, place of birth and other factors on life chances. The Gender Development Index – as part of the UNDP Human Development Index – measures gender disparities.

Facts and Figures, in a nutshell

At present, based on the World Inequality Report 2026, "inequality remains extreme and persistent; it manifests across multiple dimensions that intersect and reinforce one another; and it reshapes democracies, fragmenting coalitions and eroding political consensus. The top 10% of the global population's income-earners earn more than the remaining 90%, while the poorest half of the global population captures less than 10% of the total global income. Wealth is even more concentrated: the top 10% own three-quarters of global wealth, while the bottom half holds only 2%".[1]

Economic inequality in its different dimensions, i.e. within countries, between countries and globally, has risen to an unprecedented high. The pandemic has played a pivotal role in this, reversing or exacerbating trends since the start of the millennium. "The pandemic exacerbated global inequality, which compares the incomes of every person on earth. According to the World Bank, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the largest single-year increase in global income inequality since World War II, with the Gini coefficient rising from 0.620 in 2019 to 0.626 in 2020, reversing a constant decline between 2000 and 2019. (...) Looking at inequality between countries (average or median incomes in each country), before the pandemic the world had been reducing the gap, via a "great convergence". This was driven by income growth in countries in East Asia, most importantly China. The pandemic has reversed this trend. Between-country inequality has risen due to slower recovery from COVID in G77 member states, wiping out any gains in between-country inequality made since 2015."[2] At the other hand, looking at within-country inequality, i.e. the gap between the top 10% and the bottom 50%, this indeed has steadily increased since the 1980s.

1 World Inequality Report 2026, page 12, https://wir2026.wid.world/

2 DFI / Oxfam / Pathfinders (2023): A call to action https://www.development-finance.org/files/SDG10_policy_brief_English.pdf

In synthesis, in spite of a certain economic convergence between countries – which nonetheless was driven basically by growth in some emerging economies – , within-country inequality has increased consistently. A global elite of the top 10% or top 1% has been able to monopolize economic benefits – income and wealth – while the vast majority of people on earth have progressed little or nothing in the last decades.

With regards to the climate crisis, the richest 10% of the global population account for the vast bulk of GHG emissions, in consumption (47%) as well as related to production and private capital ownership (77%). It is the countries of the Global South where the vast majority of the poor live, on the other hand, that are facing the most extreme consequences of climate-change disasters.

In terms of gender inequality, women are not able to exercise the same rights as men although laws formally may guarantee equal rights (not everywhere though). Women work more but earn less than men do; a big part of women´s workload is unpaid care work. Women suffer domestic violence, are less represented in politics and political institutions and are discriminated in multiple forms in everyday life.

Consequences

Inequality is multifaceted and multidimensional, touching many aspects of people´s lives. But it is especially economic inequality which translates into political inequality: top income and wealth groups do have preferred access to the political system (parties, parliament, government) and the political decision-making process, undermining interpersonal trust as well as trust in democratic processes and the fundamental democratic principle of equal rights for all. Consequences of this are oligarchic or plutocratic forms of government (i.e. the government of the rich) with clear signs of authoritarianism.[3] Extreme forms of inequality as seen contemporarily are also bad for the economy as it decreases mass economic demand and growth perspectives. It is highly pernicious for the climate as the top income and wealth groups are the biggest polluters consuming most of the remaining CO2 budget.

In consequence, extreme forms of inequality are prejudicial for social cohesion, for democracy, for the economy and for the climate.

Strategy to Reduce Inequality: Seven key elements

Solidar Suisse´s strategy to reduce inequality in its multiple dimensions consists of seven key elements. These may be applied individually or in a combined way depending on the context and program / project intervention. Some of these strategies are domain-specific (i.e. focusing on the Domain Democracy and Civil Society), others are transversal (i.e. gender equity, strengthening of CBOs).

Six of the seven elements refer to interventions in partner countries in the Global South, one of them to interventions in Switzerland and the Global North.

1 Strengthen the voice and political participation of marginalized, vulnerable groups of the population

Inequality is not a given, it is not inevitable. It is a consequence of political action – or of political omission. Therefore, changing the landscape of inequality is possible and necessary. Solidar is committed to democratize political decision-making processes and to make them inclusive[4]. Interventions focus on:

- Strengthening the capacity of membership-based CBOs to organize and represent vulnerable population groups, and to aggregate, represent and negotiate the demands of their constituency in particular, and the population within their reach of influence. Project interventions will not turn a blind eye on the socioeconomic preconditions of participation, also on community level, thus striving to especially promote the participation of the most vulnerable to raise their voice.

3 Oxfam (2026), Resisting the Rule of the Rich

4 For evidence regarding the link between political participation and reduction of inequality see UN Women (2020), Women's Political Participation and Leadership; UNDP (2016), Human Development Report: Human Development for Everyone; OECD (2019), Civic Space and Citizen Participation; World Bank (2017), World Development Report: Governance and the Law

- Strengthening the role of CBOs as watchdogs for transparency and accountability of governments, and as advocates for democratic governance and progressive social justice policies.
- Strengthening partners in Global South countries which promote basic democratic, civic and human rights, like freedom of expression, assembly and association as cornerstones of democracy and the rule of law.
- Solidar Suisse envisages to grant organizational core contributions to strategic partners in the Global South based on shared core values, goals, objectives and strategies where this appears feasible.

2 Promote universal and equal access to quality public services

Fighting exclusion and reducing political inequality will be combined by interventions seeking to grant better access to quality public services for all. The universal access to public services is a key pre-condition to reduce socio-economic inequality[5].

- Solidar Suisse supports partners that advocate for universal and equal access to public services like education, healthcare, drinking water, housing, and others, especially for the most vulnerable.
- This advocacy calls for responsibility of state structures to guarantee access to public services and is not replacing or undermining state responsibility with non-governmental actors´ responsibility. Public services have to stay public; their privatization is not an option.
- In principle, co-financing of public services by Solidar Suisse projects is possible, but has to be seen as a temporary and exceptional measure.
- Promote responsiveness, accountability and transparency of state actors, public institutions, national as well as sub-national governments.

3 Promote labour rights and strengthen workers' organizations

Trade Unions and, more general, workers´ organizations historically have been decisive players in successfully fighting inequalities[6]. Fighting for, defending and enhancing rights at the workplace (like better payment, occupational health and safety, etc.) as well as establishing collective bargaining agreements on the shopfloor and on branch / sector level are essential strategies to advance social justice. Trade Unions and workers´ organizations are global justice key players in Global North as well as Global South societies. Solidar Suisse program and project interventions aim at:

- Strengthening Trade Unions and workers´ organizations to empower and enable them to demand compliance with basic labour rights; ILO Core Conventions are considered as bottom line. Starting point is demanding compliance with statutory minimum wages, to be enhanced to guaranteeing living wages for the working class population, as well as closing gender pay gaps.
- Solidar Suisse will not focus exclusively on support for established Trade Unions, but for a wide range of workers´ (self) organization, as new and experimental they may be, as well as Labour Support Organizations (LSOs like research institutes, TU-linked NGOs, etc.) in the Global South.
- Solidar commits to support alliance building, networking and campaigning of trade unions, workers´ organizations and LSOs beyond borders. In a globalized and interdependent world, the fight for better working conditions cannot limit itself to national borders.

5 Regarding the link between universal access to public services and reduction of inequality see Cibrario, D. & Weghmann, V. (2021), Access to quality local public services for all: a precondition to beat inequality; UNESCO (2025), The Power of the Public: Rebuilding trust through quality and resilient public services for social development; UN (2021), Tackling inequalities in public service coverage to build forward better for the rural poor (Policy Brief); UNDP (2019), Human Development Report: Beyond Income, Beyond Averages, Beyond Today; World Bank (2006), World Development Report: Equity and Development. For OECD countries see OECD (2011), Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising.

6 There is a wide range of evidence for this, see Montebello, R., Spiteri, J., & von Brockdorff, P. (2023), Trade unions and income inequality: Evidence from a panel of European countries. International Labour Review; Chao, C.-C. & Ee, M.S. (2024), Does unionization reduce wage inequality? New evidence from business dynamism. International Review of Economics & Finance; Farber, H., Herbst, D., Kuziemko, I., & Naidu, S. (2021), Unions and Inequality Over the Twentieth Century: New Evidence from Survey Data; ILO (2018), World Employment and Social Outlook: Greening with Jobs; OECD (2018), Good Jobs for All in a Changing World of Work; Jaumotte, F. & Osorio Buitron, C. (2015), Power from the People: The Decline of Unions Has Hurt Workers and Boosted Top Incomes. IMF Staff Discussion Note

4 Promote just transition processes

A socially and ecologically just transition from fossil energy to sustainable energy sources is a key challenge, for Global North as well as Global South countries. In this transition process, the rights of nature as well as those of workers must not be vulnerated or neglected. Solidar Suisse commits to:

- Strengthen the voice of trade unions, workers´ organizations and civil society organizations, bridging and enhancing their knowledge to empower them to bring in their voice, their perspectives and their visions of a socially, economically and ecologically sustainable future, in their respective countries, regions and beyond.
- Promote Vocational Education and Training (VET) that brings young people into employment and facilitates integration into the labour market while at the same time promoting economic activities that respect the boundaries of nature and generate income for young adults and their families.

5 Promote gender equity, everywhere[7]

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6 Support organizing, alliance building and networking of social justice organizations, regionally and globally

To successfully reduce inequality in its different dimensions, efforts to fight it on different levels have to be articulated – locally, nationally, regionally and globally. In an interdependent world, isolated wins will not prosper and will not last in time. Solidar Suisse commits to strengthen the social justice movement in its different expressions, facilitating organizing, alliance building, networking and campaigning beyond borders.

- Playing the role of an enabler, Solidar Suisse facilitates the exchange, networking and strategizing between partner organizations for them being able to articulate their voice and demands in supranational institutions and governance entities.
- Solidar Suisse cooperates and coordinates with like-minded national and international NGOs, trade unions, civil society platforms and campaign organizations, not to seek own protagonism but to empower civil society organizations, especially from Global South countries, to raise their voice and influence supra-national decision-making processes.

7 Campaign for social justice globally

While the six strategies mentioned above basically focus on Solidar Suisse interventions together with partner organizations in Global South countries, the seventh strategy points at campaigning in Switzerland and the Global North more generally. The fight for social justice cannot be advanced without addressing policy decisions in Global North countries.

- Together with like-minded civil society organizations in the Global North, campaign for changes in the global political, financial and economic architecture, aiming at an equal representation Global South players in global and international governance bodies (i.e. in the International Finance Institutions).

7 Regarding gender and inequality see UN Women & UN DESA (2025). Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2025; Nelson, M. & Goel, R. (2021), Does Gender Equality Translate into Economic Equality? Evidence from about 150 Nations; Gonzales, C et.al. (2015), Catalyst for Change: Empowering Women and Tackling Income Inequality (IMF Staff Discussion Notes); World Bank (2012), World Development Report: Gender Equality and Development

- Advocate for global tax justice, progressive taxation and the closure of tax loopholes which cause a continued resource drain from the Global South to the Global North.
- Advocate for sustained, enhanced and sufficiently resourced programs of development cooperation and humanitarian action, focusing on progressive localization of these cooperation programs.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Solidar Suisse COOFs in the respective countries and regions, in coordination with Desk Officers at Solidar HQ are responsible for implementing these guidelines in Global South countries. On the other hand, the Solidar HQ takes responsibility for Swiss-based and global campaigns and advocacy. In Solidar Suisse´s MEAL system, globally as well as locally, inequality-specific indicators will be progressively introduced and reported upon.

The management board at Solidar HQ is responsible for commanding periodic reviews and updates of this Policy framework.

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Cover Image: Spinas Civil Voices