

Mapping Global and Regional Inequalities Through the SDGs

Inequality remains one of the most persistent barriers to achieving sustainable development, manifesting not only within countries but also across regions and at the global level. While the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide one of the most comprehensive frameworks for monitoring development progress, their potential to illuminate structural inequalities across countries and world regions remains underexplored. This paper maps global and macro-regional inequalities through the lens of the SDG indicator framework, examining how disparities in performance cluster across economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability.

Drawing on harmonized SDG data, the study analyzes patterns of divergence and convergence across world regions, highlighting how inequality is embedded in multidimensional development trajectories. Beyond assessing average performance, the paper investigates distributional spreads, cross-regional gaps, and interlinkages among goals to identify systemic imbalances and structural constraints.

Methodologically, the analysis combines descriptive mapping with inequality metrics and comparative regional profiling. By situating SDG performance within a broader inequality perspective, the study moves beyond aggregate rankings to reveal uneven progress, regional clusters of deprivation and advancement, and persistent structural divides. The findings demonstrate that global development under the SDG framework is characterized not merely by varying speeds of progress, but by qualitatively distinct regional pathways shaped by historical, economic, and environmental asymmetries.

The paper argues that understanding sustainable development requires explicit attention to its spatial and distributional dimensions. Mapping inequalities through the SDGs thus provides critical insights for more targeted, region-sensitive policy strategies and for strengthening the equity-oriented ambitions of “leaving no one behind” implied in the UN 2030 Agenda.