

Call for papers | Symposium on inequality

Kuznets at 70 – Inequality and structural transformation

12–13 September 2024, Helsinki, Finland

Background

Seven decades after it was first introduced by Simon Kuznets, what became known as the Kuznets curve still has a hold on development discourse. Its simplest and starkest statement is that, as development proceeds, inequality in a country first increases and then decreases—the famous ‘inverse-U’. The specific hypothesis continues to be subjected to empirical assessment as new data becomes available. But over the years, the analysis and the debate has moved from the observed time path of inequality to the mechanisms that shape the evolution of inequality, including: the structural transformation of an economy from a rural/agricultural base to an urban/industrial future and beyond; technological change as it alters the relative productivity of factors of production; openness and globalization; and the political economy of redistributive forces as society evolves.

There has been much discussion of whether the Kuznets curve is an ‘iron law’ and whether and what sorts of policies influence the trajectory of inequality. At the same time, the Kuznets curve as a metaphor has shaped the discourse beyond national inequality, to the evolution of global inequality and to areas outside inequality, such as the environmental Kuznets curve or gender inequality.

With this rich history and background, it’s time to examine the Kuznets curve literature broadly construed, to take stock of what has been learned, and to identify new and emerging questions, particularly, on how policy can address inequality. UNU-WIDER, Cornell University, and Kings College London propose to hold a Symposium on this topic in Helsinki on 12–13 September 2024. Without constraining the scope of contributions, here are some areas which papers might cover:

- The national Kuznets curve in light of new data
- The global evolution of inequality in a Kuznetsian perspective
- Structural transformation, globalization, and the Kuznets curve
- Political economy and a Kuznetsian evolution of inequality
- The Kuznets metaphor beyond national inequality, in environment, gender, or beyond

The Symposium organizers are Ravi Kanbur, Kunal Sen, and Andy Sumner.

Submission procedure

The organizers invite submissions of completed papers or substantive abstracts (5–10 pages) to sk145@cornell.edu. Submissions from female researchers based in the Global South are especially encouraged. The submission deadline is 15 March 2024. Decisions will be communicated by 1 May 2024. The participation costs of one author per selected paper will be met subject to the guidelines of the sponsoring institutions.

Important dates

15 March 2024	submission deadline
1 May 2024	acceptance/rejection notification
12-13 September 2024	paper presentations at the Symposium