



**United Nations**

Department of  
Economic and  
Social Affairs



**UNU  
WIDER**

Expert Group Meeting

**New research on trust and social cohesion – World Social Report 2025**

UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and UNU-WIDER

Virtual meeting (Zoom)

29 and 30 May 2024, 9:00-12:00 EDT (GMT – 4)

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### *Background and purpose of the meeting*

In 2025, the UN will hold a Second World Summit for Social Development. This is the third in a series of recent summits<sup>1</sup> to address current challenges and ensure that the multilateral system is “fit for the future”. In preparation for the “social summit”, the UN World Social Report 2025 will explore social challenges that currently stand in the way of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Declining trust is one such challenge.

Opinion polls and surveys indicate that many countries are experiencing a crisis of trust. This is a concerning trend. Whether people have confidence in others and whether they deem governing institutions legitimate shapes social, political, and economic behaviors and decision-making— and ultimately affects the strength of the social contract.

People in both poor and rich countries also report that they are feeling increasingly uncertain about the future, despite historically high levels of average material wellbeing. While there are multiple theories on what is driving declines in trust, the premise for the World Social Report 2025 is that those who are or feel insecure are losing trust in institutions. In some instances, they are also losing trust in others—turning inwards and away from those who think or identify differently, prioritizing trust within smaller in-groups. Moreover, new global trends, such as the spread of misinformation made possible by the massive use of digital technologies, are affecting trust dynamics at a fast pace.

Trust has cascading effects on many aspects of social, political and economic life. The World Social Report will hone in on the links between trust and social cohesion. Although trust in other people has been used as a key indicator of social cohesion, the meaning of both trust and social cohesion vary across regions.

This meeting will bring together experts to review recent research on why and how trust matters for well-functioning societies and engage in an open exchange of ideas. The purpose of the meeting is to strengthen the World Social Report’s policy messaging on trust and social cohesion.

The meeting will take place virtually on Zoom during the mornings of 29 and 30 May (2024). The meeting’s four sessions will include short presentations followed by interactive discussions.

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<sup>1</sup> It follows the Sustainable Development Goals Summit in 2023 (aimed at reviewing progress and accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development) and the Summit of the Future, which will take place in September of this year (meant to reinvigorate the multilateral system and ensure that it is “fit for the future”).

## Agenda

### Day 1 – Wednesday, 29 May

- Opening session**      **Welcome** - Wenyan Yang, Branch Chief, DESA and Patricia Justino, Deputy Director, UNU-WIDER
- 09:00 – 09:15 (NY)      Introduction - overview of the EGM  
*Patricia Justino, UNU-WIDER and Marta Roig, DESA*
- Session I**              **Global trends in trust and their measurement**  
*Moderator: Marta Roig, DESA*
- Keynote Presentation**  
Levels and trends of trust  
*Patricia Justino, UNU-WIDER (presentation of draft paper for the World Social Report 2025)*
- 09:15 – 10:15 (NY)      *Interactive discussion*  
Guiding questions: What do values surveys and opinion polls show about levels and trends of trust in institutions and among people? Are there alternative approaches to measuring each type of trust? What are the social effects of declines in trust?
- Discussants: *Carlos Scartascini, IADB and Monica Brezzi, OECD*
- 10 minute break**
- Session II**              **Trust and social cohesion**  
*Moderator: Fernanda Pavez Esbry, DESA*
- Presentations**  
Trust across the globe and across time  
*Eric Uslaner, University of Maryland*
- Operationalizing social cohesion  
*Patrick Barron, World Bank*
- 10:25 – 12:00 (NY)      Measuring social cohesion: evidence from Africa  
*Francesco Burchi, German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS)*
- Interactive discussion*  
Guiding questions: How do we define social cohesion? What indicators have been used to measure it? What is the relationship between trust in others and social cohesion? What do we know about trends in “in-group” trust versus “out-group” trust when it comes to identity-based groups? What are the implications of declining trust and social cohesion for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda?

Session III

**Trust and inequality**

*Moderator: Maren Jimenez, DESA*

**Presentations**

Inequality, its profile and trust toward governing institutions: evidence from international databases

*Flaviana Palmisano, Sapienza University of Rome*

Perceived inequality and trust

*Licia Bobzien, University of Postdam*

08:30 – 10:00 (NY)

Social unrest, trust and inequality: findings from the Panorama of Social Cohesion in Latin America

*Carlos Maldonado, UN ECLAC*

*Interactive discussion*

Guiding questions: How does inequality affect trust in institutions? How about trust in other people? Do different measures of inequality lead to different findings regarding its relationship with trust? What is the evidence of a “trust trap”, where low trust and high inequality are locked in a mutually-reinforcing relationship?

15 minute break

Session IV

**Policies and strategies to rebuild trust and foster social cohesion**

*Moderator: Patricia Justino, UNU-WIDER*

**Presentations**

On the role of trust in collective action and achieving global goals

*Pedro Conceição, UNDP HDRO*

What governments can do to enhance trust: evidence from OECD countries

*Monica Brezzi, OECD*

10:15 – 11:45 (NY)

Rebuilding trust: experience from Latin America and the Caribbean

*Carlos Scartasini, IADB*

*Interactive discussion*

Guiding questions: How do Governments rebuild trust and promote social cohesion? What role do social policies play? How can the international community help rebuild trust? What should be the key building blocks of social contracts based on trust and solidarity?

11:45

**Conclusion and closing – Wenyan Yang, DISD**