

Cross-National Inequality Data and Research, 1983-2026: The View From Inside LIS

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The Atkinson Conference
on Economic and Social Inequality
10–11 September 2026
Nuffield College, Oxford



Today's talk – a story in five acts

- I. LIS: 1983-1989
- II. LIS: 1990-1991
- III. Interlude: Tony Atkinson, a crucial partner to LIS, 1985-2017
- IV LIS: 1992-2026
- V. Early 1990s to today: LIS and the world beyond

LIS: 1983 - 1989

THE LUXEMBOURG INCOME STUDY

The Early Years

Play [K]



0:13 / 32:44

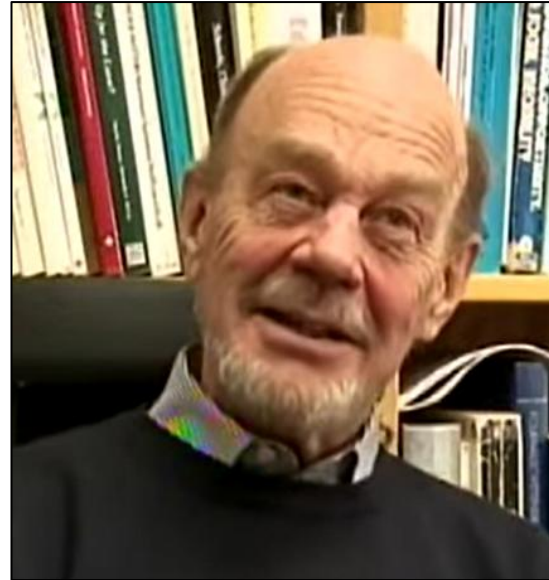


Note: The origins of LIS are told in a 32-minute oral history video, made in 2010, and available on the LIS Website. <https://www.lisdatacenter.org/about-lis/>

Lee Rainwater



Robert Erikson



Tim Smeeding



Serge Allegrezza



Marc Cigrang



John Coder





In the late 1970s, the American sociologist **Lee Rainwater** became acquainted with **Gaston Schaber**, a Luxembourgish psychologist who was studying child poverty. Gaston directed a research institute in Luxembourg known as CEPS. He also held a faculty position at **Clark University in Worcester**, Massachusetts, in the United States.

LIS' first home: The Walferdange Castle



Brief history - 1983 to 1989 - the data

One foundational idea: harmonize the *microdata* into a common database.

- 1983 Tim Smeeding arrived and designed the first cross-national template (the first variable list); harmonization of the first wave of datasets began.
- 1984 LIS made available harmonized data from seven countries, at one time point: Canada, Israel, (West) Germany, Norway, Sweden, UK, US.
- By 1989 LIS grew to fourteen countries, mostly with two time points, with addition of: Australia, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland.

Brief history - 1983 to 1989 - the technology

Second foundational idea: make harmonized microdata as widely available as possible.

- 1984-1987 The LIS data, original and harmonized, were stored on a Luxembourg Government mainframe; data runs were carried out overnight. Requests for data runs were relayed to LIS by mail or telephone and *keyed in manually*; results were returned to researchers via postal mail. (Note: LIS relied on the Luxembourg Government mainframe until 1991).
- 1986-1987 Cigrang and Coder built and launched “LISSY”, the remote-execution system. In 1987, after traveling to Brussels to secure an agreement with the EARN-BITNET telecommunications system (precursor to today’s internet), the first remote runs were executed.
- 1988 Article: “The Luxembourg Income Study: The Use of Telecommunications in the Social Sciences”, Rainwater and Smeeding, was published in *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*.
- 1989 LISSY cited as “an ideal organizational mechanism for other international efforts” by the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA).

Despite the skeletal infrastructure, research based on the LIS data *flourished*.

- 1985 *LIS Working Paper Series* launched; by 1989, 40 research papers completed and posted.
- 1988 Edited volume, *The Vulnerable*. John Palmer, Timothy Smeeding, Barbara Boyle Torrey (eds.), Urban Institute Press.
- 1988 Article, “Poor Children in Rich Countries”, Timothy Smeeding and Barbara Boyle Torrey, *Science* (vol. 242)
- 1988 First *LIS Summer Workshop* held, designed to train researchers in use of the data and cross-national methods.
- 1990 Edited volume, *Poverty, Inequality and the Distribution of Income in an International Context: Initial Research from the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS)*. Timothy Smeeding, Michael O'Higgins, Lee Rainwater (eds.), Urban Institute Press.

Characterizing the early years of LIS-based research

LIS Working Papers - #1 (1985) through #40 (1989):

(47 unique authors)

- Country-year coverage

- 14 countries included
- One time point (wave I, 1980), with one exception (two waves of Australian data)

- Content

- Focus was almost exclusively on households.
- Only three assessed person-level outcomes, specifically earnings. (Person-level data were limited until later in LIS' life cycle.)
- Several compared outcomes across vulnerable populations, mainly households with children, single parents, older persons.
- Several papers utilized the “pre” versus “post” analytic approach.
- Taxes and transfers were almost never disaggregated.

- Methods

- The papers were overwhelmingly “descriptive”.
- Methods utilized were basic, in contemporary terms, mostly cross-tabulated poverty rates, quintile shares, Gini coefficients.
- Six included sensitivity analysis (e.g., equivalence scales, income definitions).
- Six employed regression analysis.
- Four presented decompositions.

1988 LIS Summer Workshop



The data landscape as of 1989: LIS was nearly alone.

Data LSMS data (survey data from low- and middle-income countries) were in place since early 1980s, but none of these existed before 1990:

CNEF	Cross-National Equivalent File
ECHP	European Community Household Panel (ECHP) data
EUROMOD	European Union Tax-Benefit Microsimulation Model
OECD IDD	Income Distribution Database
IPUMS-I	Integrated Public Use Microdata Series – International
WB	PovcalNet
WIID	World Income Inequality Database
SEDLAC	Socio-Economic Database for Latin America and the Caribbean
SILC	EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC)
SWIID	Standardized World Income Inequality Database
CEQ	Commitment to Equity Project
HFCS	Household Finance and Consumption Survey
WTID	World Top Income Database
WID	World Inequality Database
OECD	Wealth Distribution Database

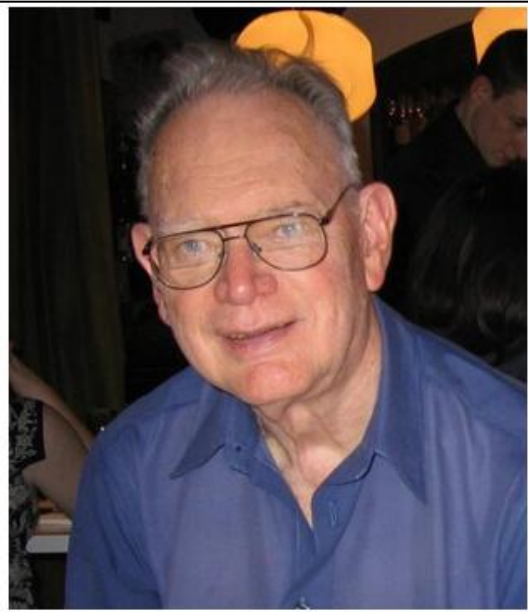
And much of the inequality research infrastructure that we have today did not yet exist.

In 1989, we had ...

- no *ECINEQ*
- no *ESPANET*
- no *SASE*
- no *Journal of Economic Inequality*
- no *Journal of Income Distribution*
- no *Journal of European Social Policy*
- no *Paris School of Economics*
- no *University of Luxembourg*
- no R
- no laptops
- no websites
- no social media
- no *ChatGPT* ...

That was the state of cross-national inequality data and research when I first encountered LIS in 1989.

Lee Rainwater



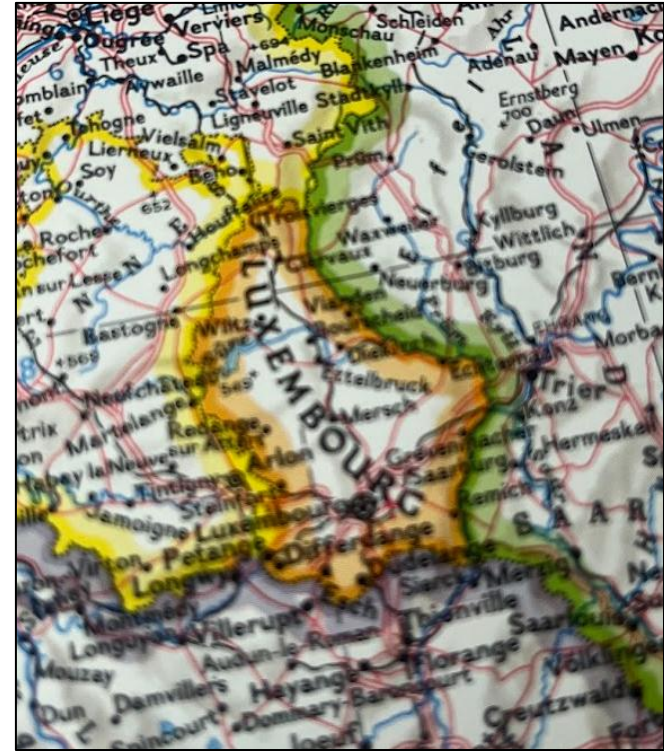
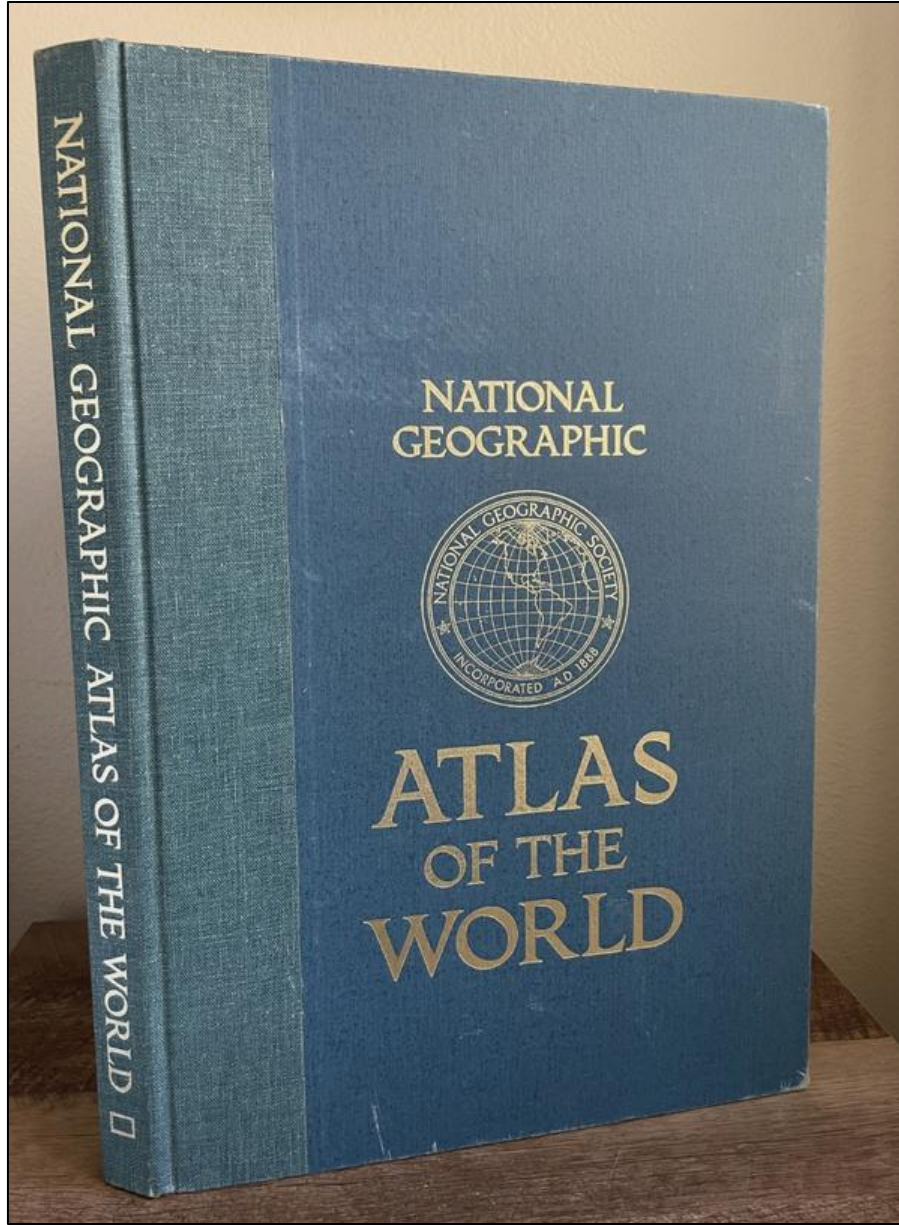
the
review
of **income and wealth**

**EQUIVALENCE SCALES, WELL-BEING, INEQUALITY, AND
POVERTY: SENSITIVITY ESTIMATES ACROSS TEN COUNTRIES
USING THE LUXEMBOURG INCOME STUDY (LIS) DATABASE**

[Brigitte Buhmann](#), [Lee Rainwater](#), [Guenther Schmaus](#), [Timothy M. Smeeding](#)

Lee explained that the LIS leadership decided that LIS needed an Institutional Database, one that would contain standardized national-level policy data corresponding to the LIS microdata – specifically the tax and transfer variables.

They were looking for someone to go to Luxembourg for one year to design and populate this database.



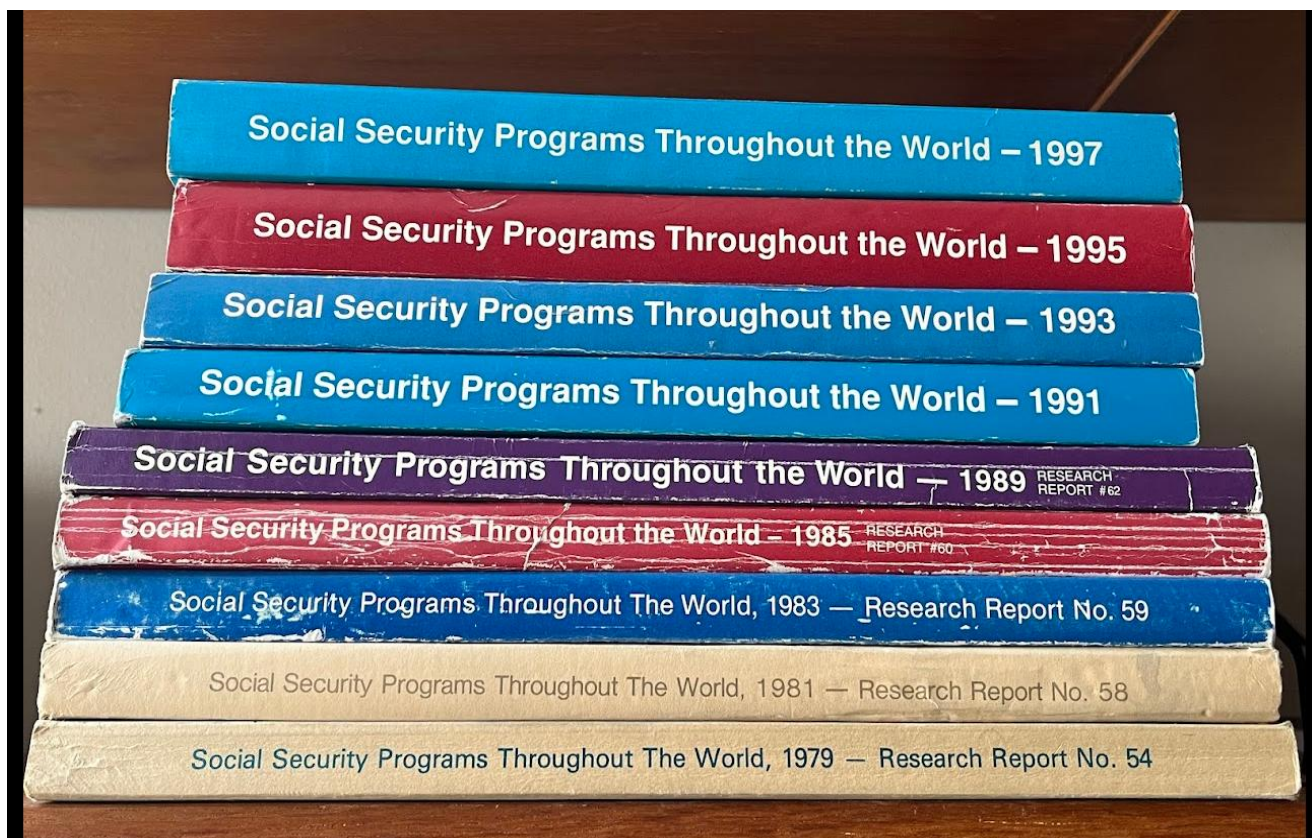
LIS: 1990 - 1991

June 1990 – first day of work: orientation session



I ordered cross-national compilations of social welfare program rules.

My bible



Available as
of late 1990



I took the train to Geneva, where I retrieved country-specific documents from the ISSA Library.



International Social Security Review



1990 - Volume 43, International Social Security Review



Volume 43, Issue 4

Pages: 387-507

October 1990

I traveled to Stockholm and Florence to visit two other comparative social policy data projects.

Social Citizenship Indicator Program (SCIP)

Launched in early 1980s

Led/developed by Walter Korpi, Gøsta Esping-Anderson,
Joakim Palme

Swedish Institute for Social Research

Welfare State Entry and Exit Project (WEEP)

Launched in 1985

Led/developed by Gøsta Esping-Anderson, Martin Rein,
Jon Eivind Kolberg, Lee Rainwater

Science Center in Berlin and EUI

Aside: The job came with a flat in the Castle and car named Gertrude.



Tony Atkinson:
a crucial partner to LIS,
1985 to 2017

1985: Tony attended the first LIS conference

Tim Smeeding (in “Tony Atkinson and His Legacy”, *Review of Income and Wealth*, 2017):
“Tony attended the first Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) conference – the one at which LIS’ founders held their breath, because, depending on what Tony and others said, the project would grow or die. Tony quickly became a strong supporter of LIS, helping the project in countless ways.”

1988: Tony lectured at the first LIS Summer Workshop



1989: Tony authored one of the earliest LIS WPs.

1990: He wrote the Introduction to the LIS book, *Poverty, Inequality, and Income Distribution*.

Luxembourg Income Study Working Paper Series

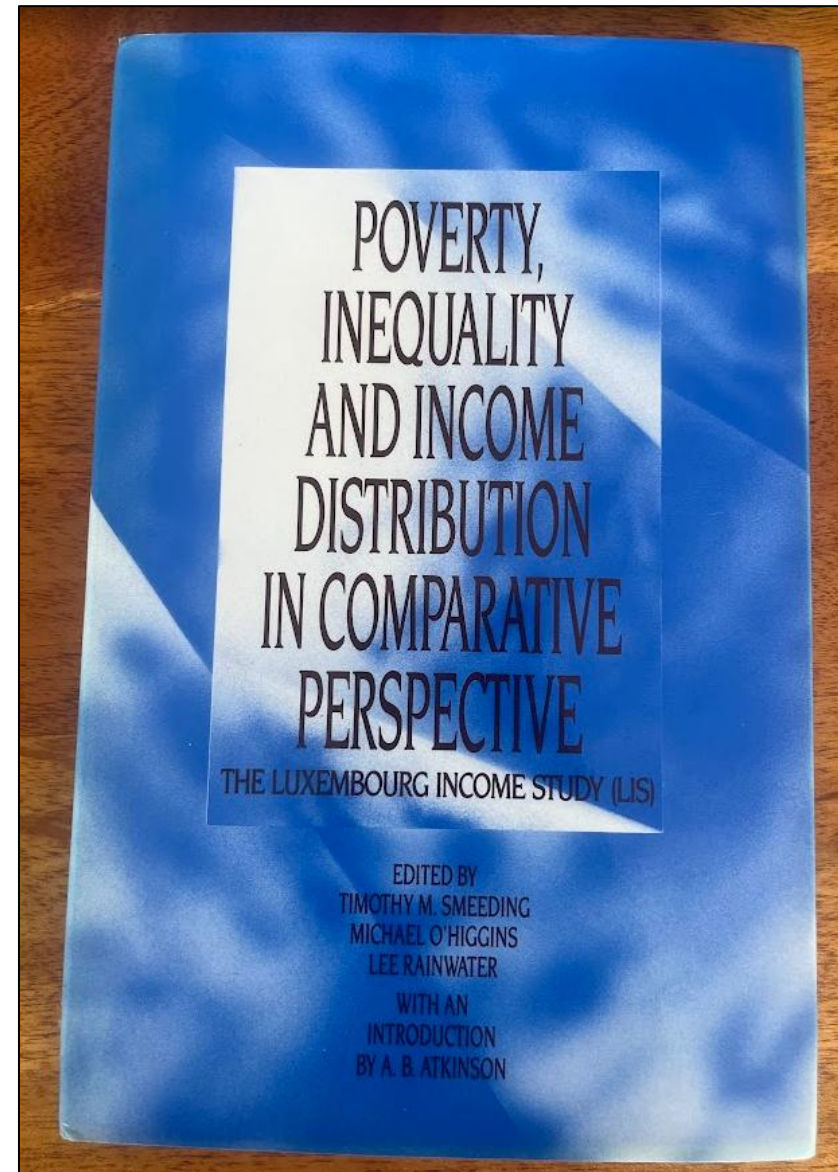
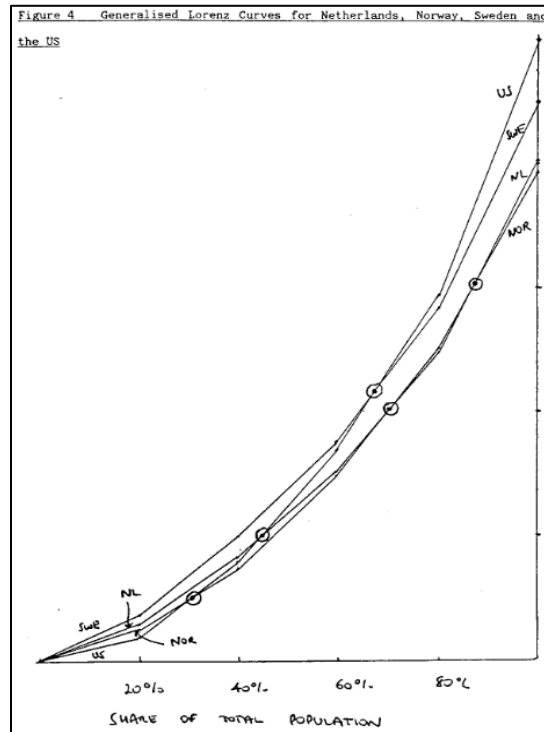
Working Paper No. 27

MEASURING INEQUALITY AND DIFFERING SOCIAL JUDGMENTS.

by

Dr. Anthony Atkinson
St/CERD
London School of Economics
Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE
Great Britain

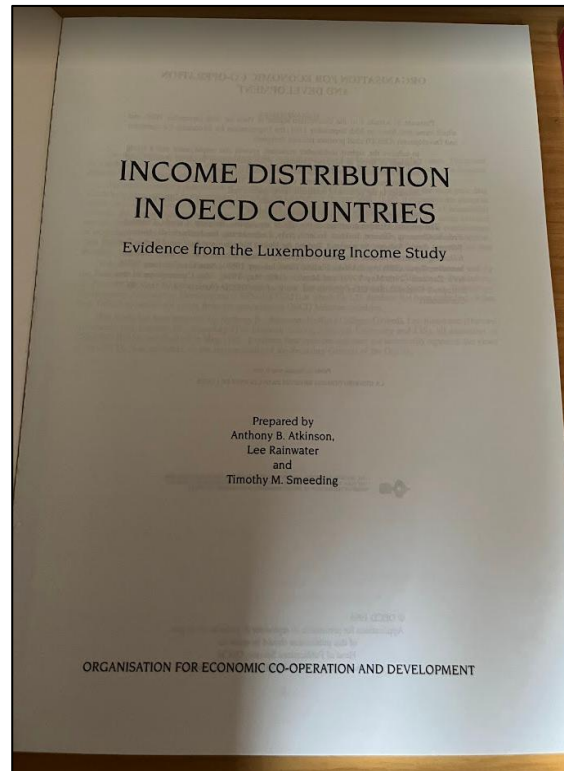
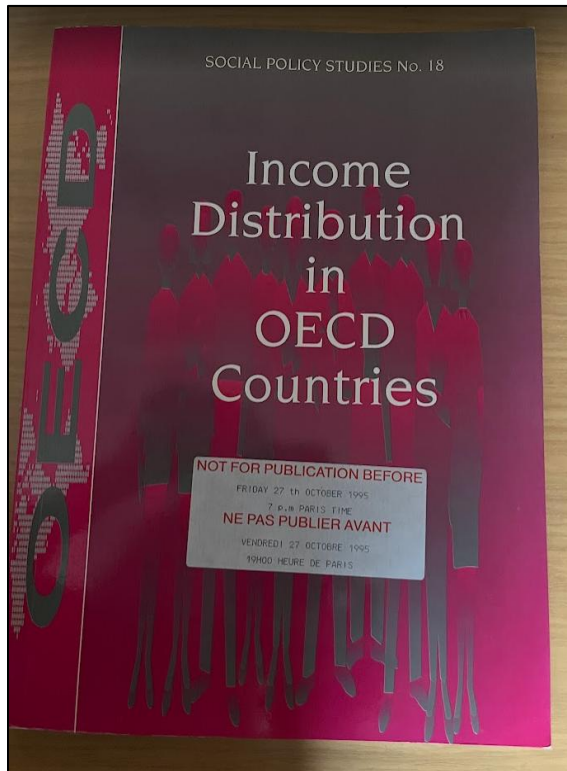
February, 1989



1995: Tony was lead author on the flagship OECD volume *Income Distribution in OECD Countries*.

This report was an update of the 1976 OECD “Sawyer Report”. It was much more positively received due to the far higher level of comparability of the data.

The report is often cited as a catalyst for the Canberra Group Report (2001), and as the effective beginning of the OECD Income Distribution Database.



2003-2004: Tony delivered keynote at “Twenty Years of Research” conference at LIS (2003); his remarks were published in the conference volume (*SER*, 2004).

*Twenty Years of Research on Income Inequality, Poverty and Fiscal Redistribution in the Developed World:
What have we learned and what are the future challenges?*

LE GOUVERNEMENT
du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg

cospponsored with

fonds national de la
recherche

9:00 – 9:30 The “Work Hard” Part Welcoming Remarks

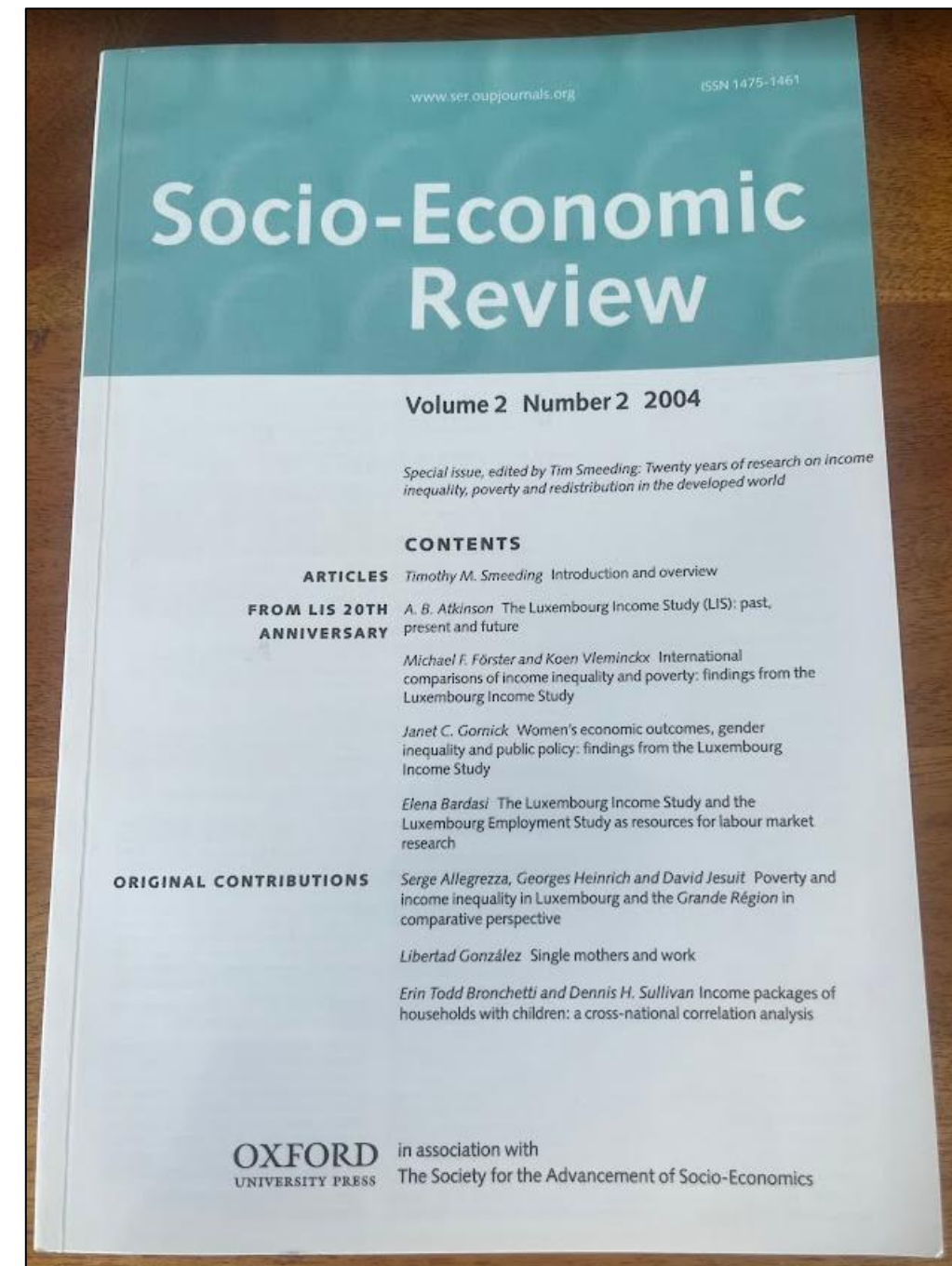
Madame Erna Hennicot-Schoepges, Minister of Culture, Higher Education and Research (Invited)

9:30 – 10:45 The Long Term Impact of LIS: Past, Present, and Future

Tony Atkinson, The Warden, Nuffield College, Oxford University, UK.
Response: Richard Hauser, Wissenschaft College, Berlin, Germany.

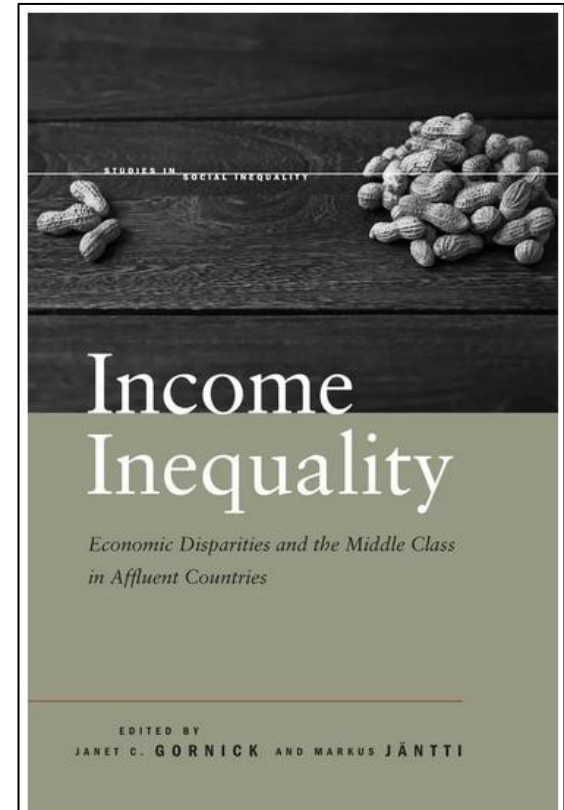
Tony introduced our retrospectives: “The contribution of LIS over the past 20 years can be seen from the fact that there is now a broadly agreed picture of the differences in income inequality across OECD countries... Looking to the future, it is argued that LIS will continue to be crucial.”

Tony emphasized his hope that LIS would be able to provide annual data for the participating countries.



2010-2013: Tony attended the authors' conference and delivered a keynote (2010), then wrote the Introduction to *Income Inequality* (Gornick and Jäntti, eds., 2013).

In Introduction, Tony wrote: “We should be looking ahead to future needs and be planning infrastructural investments”; he made a plea for support for household surveys; and he again expressed his hope that LIS would be able to provide annual data. He also co-authored a chapter “On the Identification of the Middle Class” (Atkinson and Brandolini).



2012 through 2016: Tony served as President of LIS' Board. During those years, he actively advised the LIS team and planned and chaired five annual board meetings.

Janet Gornick (in "Tony Atkinson and His Legacy", *Review of Income and Wealth*, 2017):

"When Tony agreed to become LIS' President, the LIS team and I were grateful. We knew that we were fortunate to have such an esteemed scholar at the helm. What we did not know (but, in retrospect, should have) was that he would serve as a deeply involved, entirely hands-on, active President – making himself available for counsel on countless decisions, large and small."

Janet Gornick (at Nuffield Memorial, February 2018):

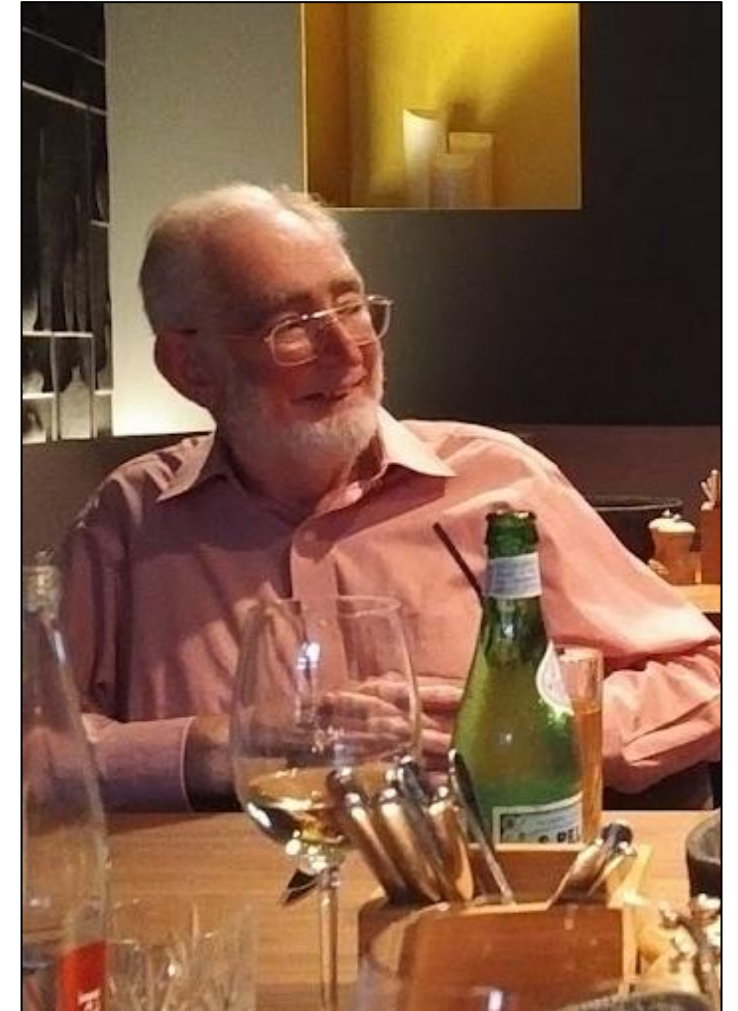
"It's nearly impossible to convey how generous Tony was to LIS – with his time, his knowledge, and his painstaking attention to hundreds of crucial details. And, while he shepherded *us* at LIS, he did the same for other institutions and projects spread across Europe and beyond. He sat on countless Advisory Boards, commissions, and search committees – carrying out the unsung work that made scores of research centers and data infrastructures develop and prosper."

2013: Tony travelled to New York City, with Judith, where he spent a week supporting the US LIS Satellite Office and advising the CUNY Graduate Center's leadership regarding strategies for building institutional strength in inequality studies.

He conversed onstage with Paul Krugman about "inequality and economic growth" (May 20) and delivered a lecture at a dinner event for NYC academics and philanthropists (May 21).



2016 LIS Executive Committee Meeting:
Tony set us up for the future.



LIS: 1992 - 2026

LIS milestones and accomplishments (highly selective list)

Microdatabases

- **LES:** *Luxembourg Employment Study Database* came and went (1994- early 2000s) (22 LES Working Papers, 1996-2002)
- **LWS:** *Luxembourg Wealth Study Database* planned (2003-2007) and launched (2007) (55 LWS Working Papers, 2006 to now)
- **LIS:** *Luxembourg Income Study Database* series annualized (starting in 2020) (926 LIS Working Papers, 1985 to now)
- **LCS:** *Luxembourg Consumption Study Database* coming soon; Beta version expected next week

Products, users, and services

- LISSY services about 1000 users per year, running about 80,000 jobs.
- LIS Summer Workshop grew into major training venue, with approximately 800 attendees over 34 workshops.
- LIS added tools enabling access without coding: Key Figures, DART, OWID.

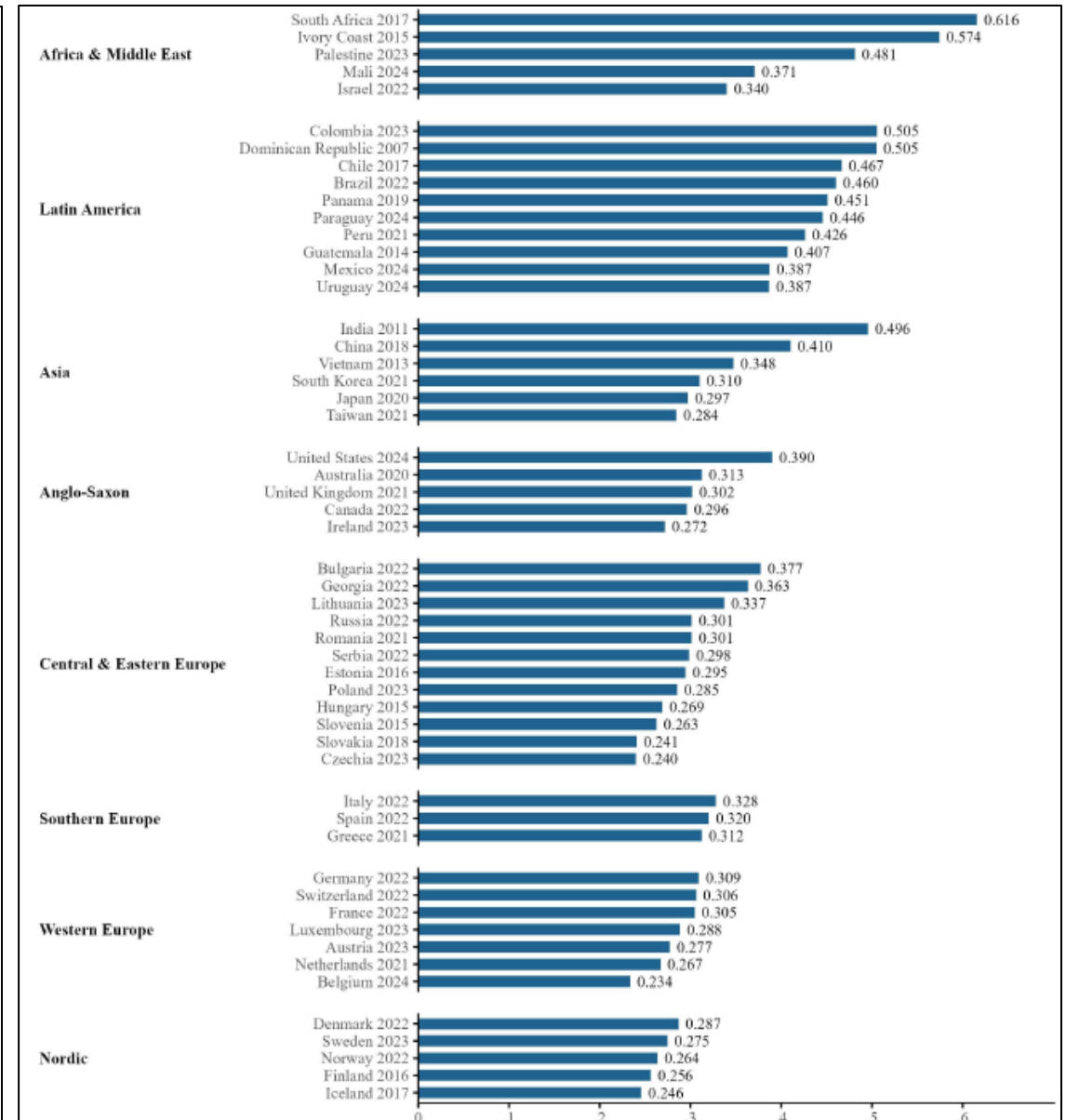
Leadership changes

- 2006 Tim Smeeding stepped down as Director; Lee Rainwater stepped down as Research Director
- 2006-2016 Janet Gornick served as Director; Markus Jäntti as Research Director
- 2016-2021 Daniele Checchi served as Director
- Currently Peter Lanjouw (Director), Philippe Van Kerm (Research Director); Teresa Munzi (Director of Operations); François Bourguignon (President of LIS Board)

LIS' data holdings have expanded enormously.

Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) Database

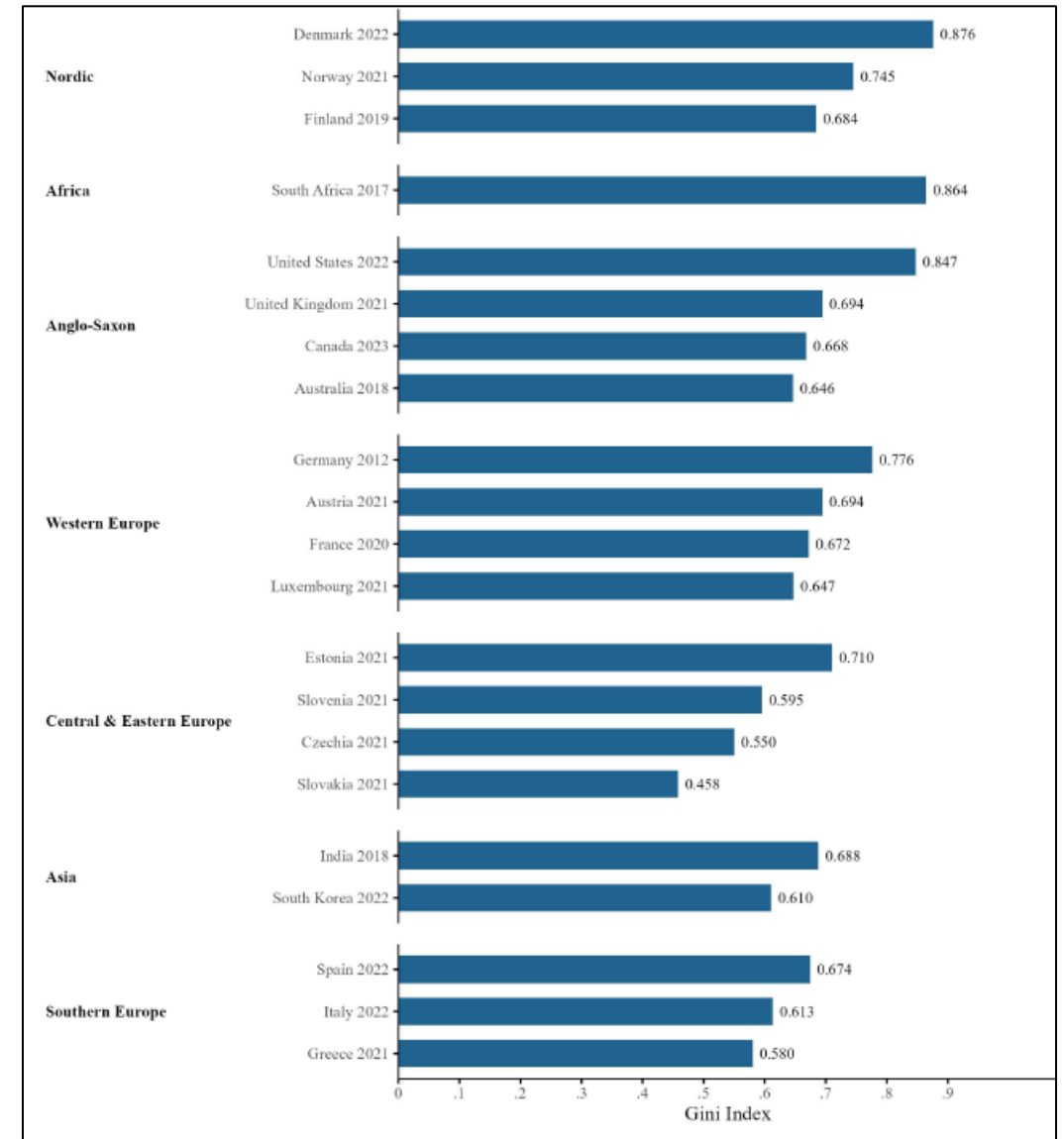
- Now **54 countries** – including many middle-income countries
- Now, more than **1000 datasets**; new datasets added four times a year
- Most series start around 1980 (“wave one”)
 - datasets from 1960s and 1970s added for 7 countries.
 - major advance: annual data now available for nearly all country series.
- The LIS Database is now a core source of data for other data providers, including;
 - Poverty and Inequality Platform
 - World Income Inequality Database
 - OECD IDD, WDD, and Family Database
 - World Inequality Database



LWS Database

Luxembourg Wealth Study (LWS) Database

- Planning began in 2003; data launched in 2007
- Revised in 2016, in coordination with Eurosystem's Household Finance and Consumption Survey (HFCS)
- Now **145 datasets** from **26 countries**; new datasets added four times a year



LCS Database – Beta launch this month

Luxembourg Consumption Study (LCS) Database

- Next major addition to LIS, following years of discussion and assessment.
- First release will include **112 datasets** from **16 countries**: Belgium, Finland, France, Israel, Italy, Laos, Luxembourg, Mali, Mexico, Palestine, Philippines, Poland, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom.
- Adding consumption-only datasets will enable inclusion of many new countries.

Research utilizing the LIS Databases – now compared to the “early days”.

Content/substance

Fair amount of continuity

- primary focus remains poverty and inequality.

Though some clear changes as well

- vast increase in both countries and time points.
- increase in research on labor market outcomes, mainly employment rates and earnings, hours, occupation and industry.
- substantial focus on gender, especially in labor market research, as well as on race, ethnicity, and immigration.
- increased attention to disaggregating distributions, including studies related to equitable growth.
- disentangling taxes and transfers.
- rise of studies on external shocks (GFC, the pandemic).

Measurement/methods

Enormous change

1992-2000:

- still mostly “descriptive” cross-national analyses with use of relatively basic poverty/inequality measures

2000 and later, more use of:

- combining LIS data with external data, mainly:
 - pooled-cross-sectional-time-series models (“macro-macro”)
 - multi-level models (“macro-micro”)

After 2014, more use of:

- larger set of inequality measures
- increasingly complex decompositions
- quantile regression
- simulation-based approaches
- imputations/corrections
- synthetic cohorts
- statistical matching (“micro-micro”)

LIS left the Walferdange Castle and (three offices later) is now settled into Belval – in a modern building, near many colleagues at LISER, University of Luxembourg, and STATEC.



2026 LIS Summer Workshop (34th edition)



Early 1990s to today:
LIS and the world beyond

An explosion of data/information

- Data – focused on [socio-economic outcomes](#):

All of these were launched, and are available in varying formats – some micro-level, some aggregated:

CNEF	Cross-National Equivalent File	1991
ECHP	European Community Household Panel (ECHP) data	1994
EUROMOD	European Union Tax-Benefit Microsimulation Model	1996
OECD IDD	Income Distribution Database	late 1990s
IPUMS-I	Integrated Public Use Microdata Series – International	1999
WB	PovcalNet (evolved to PIP)	2001
WIID	World Income Inequality Database	2000
SEDLAC	Socio-Economic Database for Latin America and the Caribbean	2002
SILC	EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) data	2004
SWIID	Standardized World Income Inequality Database	2008
CEQ	Commitment to Equity Project	2008
HFCS	Household Finance and Consumption Survey	2010
WTID	World Top Income Database	2011
WID	World Inequality Database	2015
OECD WDD	Wealth Distribution Database	2015

- Data – focused on [policy provisions/features](#):

All of these were launched (*and many more*):

SOCX	OECD Social Expenditures Database	early 1990s
CWSD	Comparative Welfare States Dataset	early 1990s
CWED	Comparative Welfare Entitlements Dataset	2004
(OECD)	OECD Family Database	2007
SPEED	World Bank Social Protection Expenditure and Evaluation Database	2008
SPIN	Social Policy Indicators Database (post SCIP)	mid-2010s
ASPIRE	World Bank Atlas of Social Protection Indicators of Resilience and Equity	2012
(ILO)	ILO World Social Protection Database	2014

Note: LIS retired our Institutional Database in 2017.

Simultaneously, a dramatic increase in research and pedagogy

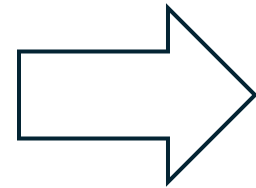
The explosion of data/information is both cause and consequence of:

- The production of a vast amount of new empirical research, with uptick starting around 2010.
- The publication, since 2010, of approximately 3500 books and monographs focused squarely on facets of economic inequality have been published.
- The proliferation of university-based degree programs, certificates, and predoctoral and postdoctoral positions focused on inequality studies.
- The launch of new or expanded centers and institutes, spread across many countries, focused on the study of economic inequalities (including 14 *Stone Centers*, now in the US, Canada, UK, France, Germany, and Hong Kong).

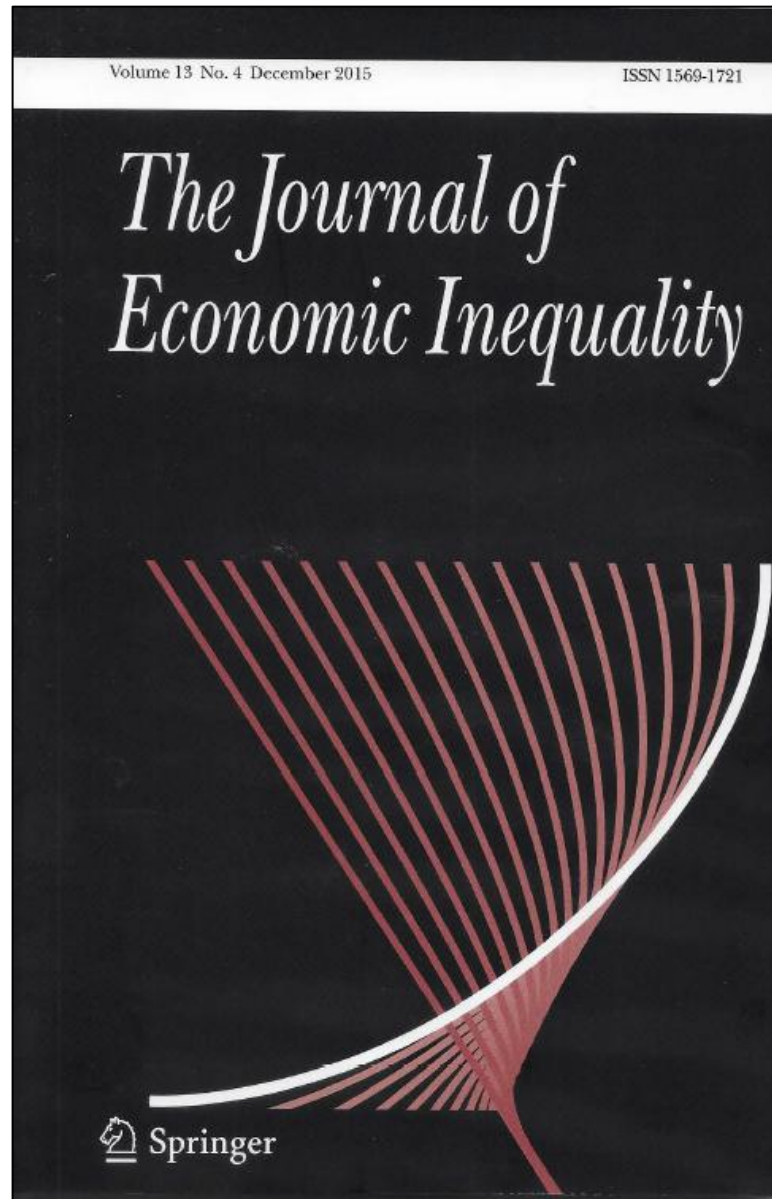
The rise of a new challenge:
comparing, vetting, understanding, litigating, and
disseminating conclusions about this mountain of data and the
diverse methodological developments to which they are linked.

A small but growing number of scholars and
institutions are taking on this challenge, directly.

A few examples:



2015: Special issue of *Journal of Economic Inequality*



The Journal of Economic Inequality

Volume 13 · Number 4 · December 2015

Editorial 2015

S.P. Jenkins 487

Special Issue on “Appraising Cross-National Income Inequality Databases”

Guest Editors: Francisco H.G. Ferreira and Nora Lustig

Appraising cross-national income inequality databases: An introduction

F.H.G. Ferreira · N. Lustig · D. Teles 497

The Luxembourg Income Study

M. Ravallion 527

Luxembourg Income Study – response

J.C. Gormick · M. Jäntti · T. Munzi · T. Kruten 549

Appraising income inequality databases in Latin America

F. Bourguignon 557

A review of the OECD Income Distribution Database

L. Gasparini · L. Tornarolli 579

PovcalNet, WDI and ‘All the Ginis’: a critical review

T. Smeeding · J.P. Latner 603

World income inequality databases: an assessment of WIID and SWIID

S.P. Jenkins 629

Problems with SWIID: the case of South Africa

M. Wittenberg 673

Response to Professor Stephen Jenkins’ comments on the World Income Inequality Database (WIID)

N. Badgaiyan · J. Pirttilä · F. Tarp 679

On the assessment and use of cross-national income inequality datasets

F. Solt 683

2015: OECD Working Paper



MAPPING TRENDS AND GAPS IN HOUSEHOLD WEALTH ACROSS OECD COUNTRIES

WORKING PAPER No.37

Carlotta Balestra,
Jakub Caisl,
Luiz Hermida

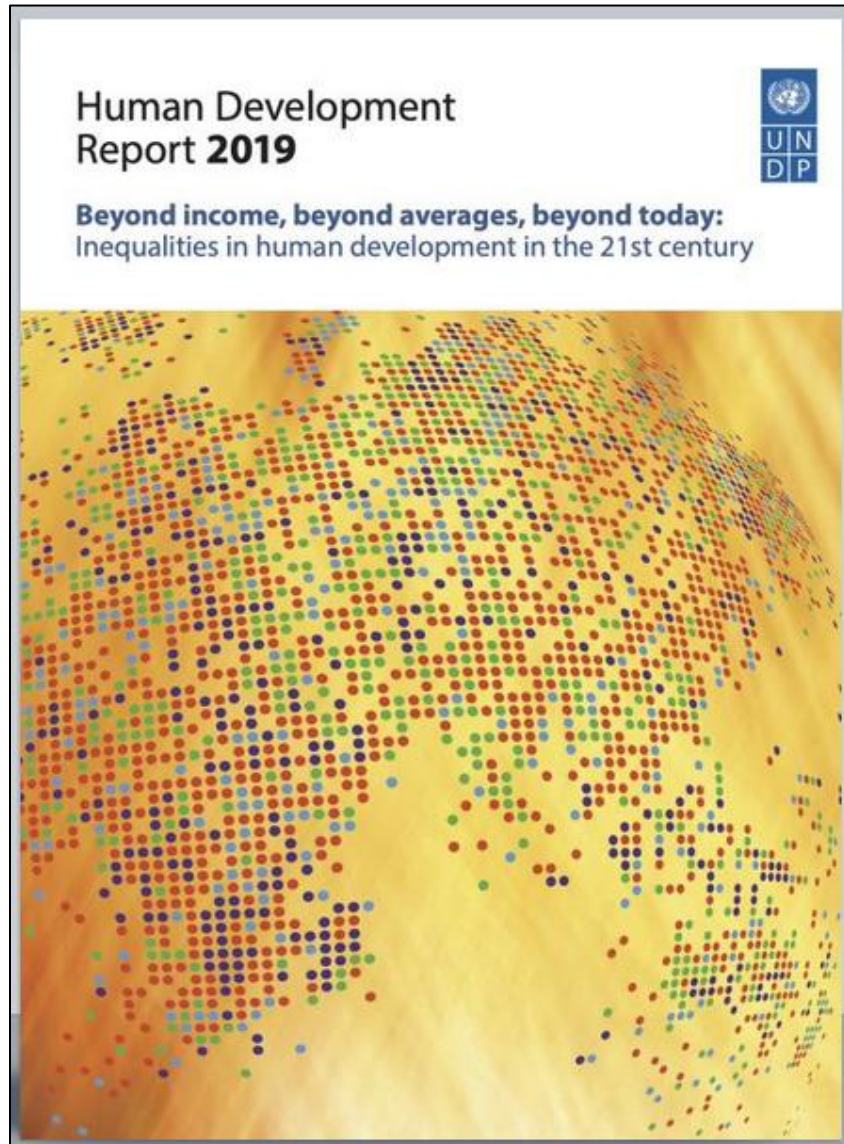
Table A.2. Comparing the OECD WDD, the ECB DWA and the WID

	OECD Wealth Distribution Database	ECB Distributional Wealth Accounts	World Inequality Database
Source	Surveys and administrative registers	Quarterly sector accounts reconciled with the HFCS.	Mixed income capitalisation method, with inputs from surveys, registers and national accounts
Wealth instruments excluded (compared to the OECD WDD)	See Table A.1	Does not include currency, consumer durables and valuables.	Does not include consumer durables and valuables.
Population covered	Typically private households, excluding people living in institutions and homeless people.	Entire resident population.	Entire resident population.
Unit of analysis	Households	Households	Equal-split adults
Frequency	Every 2-3 years	Quarterly	Annual
Time lag between reference period and release	Typically 3 years	Maximum 5 months	Typically 2 years
Detailed methodological information	WDD main concepts	ECB DWA Methodological note	WID Distributional National Accounts Guidelines

The authors compare wealth data sources, including

- OECD Wealth Distribution Database (WDD)
- ECB's Distributional Wealth Accounts (DWA)
- World Inequality Database (WID)
- Luxembourg Wealth Study (LWS)
- Household Finance and Consumption Survey (HFCS)

2019: Human Development Report



CEQ: Commitment to Equity Institute Data Center on Fiscal Redistribution

EGDNA: OECD/Eurostat Expert Group on Disparities in a National Accounts Framework

EUROMOD

IDD: OECD Income Distribution Database.

LIS: LIS Cross-National Data Center

WID.world: World Inequality Database

Spotlight 3.3: Measuring fiscal redistribution: concepts and definitions

TABLE S3.3.1

Comparison of income concepts in databases with fiscal redistribution indicators

Income concept	CEQ		EGDNA	EUROMOD	IDD	LIS	WID.World
Prefiscal	Market income	Market income	Primary income	Market income	Market income	Market income	Pretax income
	Factor income	Factor income	Factor income	Factor income	Factor income	Factor income	Factor income
							PLUS Undistributed profits
	PLUS Old-age pensions from social security schemes						PLUS Old-age pensions and unemployment benefits from social security schemes
	PLUS Transfers received from nonprofit institutions and other households, payments from employment-related pension schemes, imputed value of owner-occupied housing services and consumption of own production	PLUS Transfers received from nonprofit institutions and other households, imputed value of owner-occupied housing services and consumption of own production	PLUS Imputed value of owner-occupied housing services and consumption of own production	PLUS Transfers received from nonprofit institutions and other households	PLUS Transfers received from nonprofit institutions and other households and consumption of own production	PLUS Transfers received from nonprofit institutions and other households and consumption of own production	PLUS Transfers received from nonprofit institutions and other households, payments from employment-related pension schemes, imputed value of owner-occupied housing services and consumption of own production
	MINUS Contributions to old-age pensions in social security schemes						MINUS Contributions to old-age pensions and unemployment in social security schemes

2024: Andrea Brandolini paper, “Comparing Income Inequality: Drowning by Numbers”



 IARIW 2024	IARIW 2024 Thursday, August 22 – Friday, August 30
Comparing Income Inequality: Drowning by Numbers Andrea Brandolini (Bank of Italy)	
Paper prepared for the 38th IARIW General Conference August 26-30, 2024 Session 2D-1, Inequality Time: Tuesday, August 27, 2024 [14:00- 15:30 GMT]	

“The paper examines advancements in the analysis of income inequality over the last thirty years. First, it examines the considerable improvements in the availability and quality of inequality data for cross-country analysis.

(In)consistencies across the most popular compilations of country-level time-series for the Gini coefficient are illustrated by taking the Italian data as a case study.”

2026: Two new papers with intertwined assessments of data heterogeneity with substantive findings (forthcoming, special issue, *Oxford Open Economics*, expected Dec 2026).

Is Income Inequality on the Rise Everywhere?

Authors: Facundo Alvaredo, François Bourguignon, [Francisco H. G. Ferreira](#), Christoph Lakner, and [Nora Lustig](#)

Institution: Stone Center Working Paper Series no. 131

Date: July 2026

Abstract:

This paper reviews the evidence on the levels and trends of income and consumption inequality around the world during 2000–2019. It examines how inequality levels vary across countries, whether inequality has been rising more often than declining, and how conclusions depend on the underlying income concept and data source. The analysis draws on two types of evidence: inequality estimates derived from household surveys and contained in harmonized databases such as WIID, PIP, and LIS, and estimates based on distributional national accounts from WID. The analysis pays particular attention to differences between income- and consumption-based measures, the under-coverage of top incomes in household surveys, and the assumptions underlying distributional national accounts. Two findings emerge. First, inequality levels differ substantially not only across countries, but also across concepts and data sources within countries. Measures based on national income generally show higher inequality than those based on household surveys, while consumption-based measures tend to yield lower inequality than income-based ones. Second, trends prove more robust than levels: across sources, inequality was more often declining or stable than increasing during the two decades preceding the pandemic. There is also some evidence of convergence, with declines more common among initially high-inequality countries and increases more frequent among initially low-inequality countries.

Wealth Inequality Trends Around the World: A First View Leveraging Multiple Data Sources

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Abstract:

Using the novel GC Wealth Project Data Warehouse, this paper shows that wealth inequality has increased since the early 2000s in roughly 60% of the countries in our sample, although trends are not uniform across countries. While the largest gains in wealth shares accrue to the top 10%, relative losses are borne by the bottom 50% and the middle 40% alike. We reveal substantial variation of estimates across data sources and units of analysis, which complicates international comparison of wealth inequality. Yet, core trends at the country level are generally robust. Individual-based series generally report higher inequality than household-based ones. Regional patterns reveal sharp increases in inequality in Latin America, North America, India, and China, while Europe and Asia-Pacific exhibit more stable trends. Incorporating Forbes billionaire data extends coverage to low-income countries and Africa—where, notably, billionaire wealth relative to GDP has remained stable, marking a distinct exception to global patterns.

The GC Wealth Project

<https://wealthproject.gc.cuny.edu>

Onward

