SOME REMARKS ON THE CONCENTRATION OF WEALTH IN THE CONTEXT OF ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION

Cătălin POSTELNICU
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, 400084, Romania
Faculty of Economics and Business Administration
catalin.postelnicu@econ.ubbcluj.ro

Abstract
The income and wealth distribution are fundamental variables on understanding social and economic inequality. This article analyses causes we consider relevant of the increase in economic inequality and world wealth concentration. It approaches the impact of economic globalization, in the context of trade and financial integration, and effects of technological change and evolutions in the field of labor market. If globalization and technological change were long considered crucial drivers of inequality trends in different countries, over different decades, for economic inequality many studies are now documenting the importance of changes in various markets. Also, the author tries to examine the interplay of these factors on distribution and creating gaps on wealth between countries.

Key words: *income inequality, wealth inequality, world wealth concentration, top incomes.*

JEL Classification: *F6, D6, P46, D31*

I. INTRODUCTION

Wealth distribution is one of the most debated issues in the specialized literature. For a long time, researchers (Targetti Lenti, 2016) have observed that the dynamics of capital accumulation inevitably led to an increasingly strong concentration of the wealth of nations in the hands of a small group of individuals. The market, through its competitive mechanisms, has failed, over the years, to prevent the growth of disparities in the distribution of low incomes in the most advanced economies. Opinions on this phenomenon continue to be divided. According to some specialists (United Nations, 2020), inequalities will deepen, with historical and comparative data from past periods confirming this. Others (Bourguignon, 2018: 22-24), however, believe that we are currently witnessing the creation of the premises for a reduction of the gaps, so embarrassing for political and economic decision-makers, through the redistribution of resources, on the scale of income size, in favor of disadvantaged sections of the population. For this reason, any administrative intervention would be superfluous, which would risk disrupting this trend. We are, therefore, in the presence of a dilemma of the present times, which puts us in front of hard lessons aimed at the near future.

This article starts from the finding that we do not yet have a thorough knowledge of the causes underlying the emergence of economic inequalities and even less of the determinants that continuously fuel the concentration of wealth. Therefore, in the first part of this study, the analysis focuses on highlighting several factors considered decisive in the emergence and perpetuation of economic inequalities, and in the second part, the focus will be on the actual concentration of wealth and the emergence of an elite of super-renters in different states and geographical areas, in contrast to an enormous number of people condemned to extreme poverty.

Despite the technological progress registered in the last decades, the gap between those at the top of the income pyramid and those at its base has not narrowed but, on the contrary, has increased (see also Credit Suisse, 2021). The explanation can be only one, namely: inequalities have simply translated upwards, the phenomenon of wealth concentration having the ability to self-amplify. Unfortunately, the analysis undertaken in the present study had to focus mainly on the experience of developed countries, the data available for the rest of the countries, especially those in development, being extremely limited and especially discontinuous. As these countries also improve their statistical records systems, it will be possible to better understand the existing inequalities on a global scale and it will be possible to follow the great diversity of evolutions specific to each model and stage of development. Until then, there will be many difficult situations to explain, at a time when the world economy is shaken by such strong turbulences. For now, it is clear that as long as the rate of profit of large companies will be higher than the rate of economic growth, the elite of the rich will get considerably higher annual incomes than the majority of the population (see also Keeley, 2015). Given that the former represents a minority and the latter the majority, it follows that a large part of the global wealth will become the property of the shared minority. In this way, there is a polarization not only of income, but also of wealth, which tends to capitalize much faster.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on income concentration and wealth are not new in the economic literature. It is enough to remember Adam Smith's work entitled "The Wealth of Nations", published in 1776, to realize the deep roots of these concerns. The literature focused on this topic has a long history and has grown rapidly over the years. In the last decades alone, the number of representative studies of this kind has risen to several hundred. Practically, it is impossible to compile a complete list of all these works, without the risk of leaving out the significant contribution of well-known authors and researchers.

Before mentioning significant publications in this field, we would like to focus on some more general aspects that characterize the economic literature dedicated to this topic. First of all, we must note that a good part of the researchers focused their attention on the statistical highlighting of the richest people, using sources and indicators through which we can identify them. Hence the second problem, namely the terminology used. Not infrequently the terminological diversity and the multitude of given definitions have led to heated debates and different results, sometimes even opposite in relation to the actual reality. Indeed, can the great rich of the world be identified in terms of annual income, turnover, wealth, or on the basis of other indicators and parameters not necessarily of a purely economic nature? So far, there is no consensus among economists on the elements that make up the internal structure of national wealth and those that are part of the property of big billionaires. Sometimes, income is put on the same plane as wealth. It is understood that a rigorous comparison is only possible if definitions and data sources are harmonized internationally (Medeiros&Ferreira de Souza, 2014). This is all the more so as the group of the very rich and ultra-rich is extremely heterogeneous.

Secondly, much research, especially in recent decades, has succeeded in elucidating some of the causes and factors that have played a dominant role in concentrating world wealth in possession of a small number of people, but they only partially manage to answer one of the most important questions, namely: why are some national economies rich and others poor? From the same point of view: what role did the interventionist government factor play in the accumulation of wealth?

Beyond these inaccuracies, however, towards the end of the last century and the beginning of the 21st century, a series of works appeared that contributed, at least in part, to elucidating the questions posed before, constituting, from this point of view, an important scientific segment. We consider among others Siegfried, John, J. and Alison, Roberts (Siegfied&Alison, 1991), who explored the causes of capital accumulation and wealth in the UK, Kennickell, Arthur, B. (Kennickell, 2003), who refers to the great billionaires of the United States of America and many others.

More recently, the profile literature has established a series of new authors whose works represent true points of reference in completing the picture of the concentration of wealth at the beginning of the 21st century. In this regard, it is worth noting the volumes signed by Martin Gilens (Gilens, 2012), which analyzes in detail the relationship between economic inequality and political power in the US, then the contribution of Edward Wolff (Wolff, 2012) related to the wealth of the middle class, the fundamental work of Nobel Laureate Joseph E. Stiglitz (Stiglitz, 2012) on the price of inequality and how it can divide today's society, Facundo Alvaredo (Alvaredo et al., 2013), where we are offered an interesting perspective on the structure of the top of the richest people in the world. We should also mention Janet Gornick and Markus Janti (Gornick&Jäntti, 2013), who present a well-argued correlation between the economic disparities accumulated recently and the wealth of the middle class, Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez (Piketty&Saez, 2013), on recent revenue developments in the context of the impact of the Great Recession, Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zuckman (Saez&Zucman, 2014), which addresses the distribution of wealth in the US over a long period of time, respectively from 1913. We also mention Lisa Keister and Lee Hang Young (Keister&Lee, 2014), who compose a clear picture of the income-wealth ratio and how wealth created by that 1% of the world's adult population is appropriated. Anthony Atkinson (Atkinson, 2015) is concerned with the ways in which economic inequality can be reduced, in a particularly clear and detailed analysis. To elucidate the causes that increase the concentration of wealth in the world, a special contribution was made every year by the World

Bank, through its publications World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2021) and OECD (OECD, 2021 & for example, OECD, 2008), through studies on income distribution and poverty in the Member States of the organization. Of all the authors mentioned above, the French economist Thomas Piketty stands out, who, through his recent book (Piketty, 2014), presents a broad evolution of global economic inequality and its main social consequences. Unlike other economists, who have dealt with optimistic scenarios of economic growth, Thomas Piketty (Piketty, 2014: 106-218) is more cautious on estimating the magnitude of inequalities, emphasizing the long-term fragility of the development – inequality ratio. Indeed, the intensity with which various factors have acted on this report has changed over the years, with the wealth of the few growing faster than the average growth rates of the global economy, which is difficult to assimilate scientifically.

III. ECONOMIC INEQUALITY - THE MAIN VECTOR OF WEALTH CONCENTRATION

Economic inequality - seen as an economic gap between the rich and the poor - is viewed by economists on multiple levels, the best known being the disparities in the distribution of economic wealth, more precisely the wealth that a society has at one time (see also Scheve&Stasavage, 2017 and Davis&Shorrocks, 1999). By extrapolation, one can also speak of an economic inequality between different states. From an etymological point of view, the problem of economic inequality is related to the idea of equity and equality in terms of opportunities offered by the economic environment of different categories of individuals that make up the population of a country (Bourguignon, 2015). Of course, as expected, over the years, discordant opinions have emerged among economists about the moral acceptability of economic inequality, as well as its usefulness (Robilliard & Lawson, 2017). Broadly speaking, the views expressed focused on the following question: how necessary is a certain degree of economic inequality and how tolerable can it be (Macchia et al., 2019)? In this context, some voices may be reported from well-known authors, according to which economic inequality is necessary and useful "because it provides a stimulus for growth and development, in the sense that it generates a beneficial competition, individually and collectively, between economic agents" (Stiglitz, 2013: 28 and Garretti, 2010). It is true that the authors mentioned above make the validity of this process conditional on the presence of a free market, in which operators are not restricted in any way by the intervention of the administrative factor. Theoretically, we can admit such a situation, but practically, however, it is rare to find such an operational framework, a situation in which it is known that, in the modern economy, dominant is imperfect competition.

Other opinions are recorded in the economic literature that consider that inequality is a “native” element, "common and necessary" to any economic system (see also Keeley, 2015). The problem is complicated when economic disparities exceed a certain degree of "intensity", taking on serious social connotations (Wilkinson&Pickett, 2009: 352).

Although economic inequality is usually seen as a common element of all economic systems, it should be noted that it differed from one society to another and in different historical periods, due to the causes that generated it. In the modern era, we can mention: the way the labor market works, the characteristics of the fiscal system (taxation), the effects generated by technological innovation, various stages (phases) of the globalization process, the development model adopted, the mobility of production factors and, last but not least, state intervention in the economy.

With regard to the labor market, it is clear that here inequality is closely linked to the relationship between supply and demand for various types of labor. As it is known, in a market economy the salary works as a price of labor, being differentiated according to professional competence. As such, inequality is determined, according to the law of supply and demand, precisely by this price which takes the form of salary. As a result, competition will certainly benefit the best highly qualified workers. In the same time, the fiscal system must be seen as one of the determining causes of economic inequality. Thus, a very high level of taxation will have a direct impact on inequality. The highlighting of this influence has so far been done mainly with the help of Gini indices, although the distribution of income before and after taxation has caused many controversies among some economists (Dabla-Norris et al., 2015). In this regard, the opinion of Nobel laureate in economics Paul Krugman is also of interest, who considers that changes in tax rates over the years in the US "[…] have strongly favored the very rich" (Krugman, 2011). Paul Krugman is also concerned with estimating an "optimal tax rate" on high and very high incomes. He draws attention to the fact that this practice “has nothing to do with the desire to punish the rich”, but such a measure is in line with better social equity (Krugman, 2013). From this point of view, Paul Krugman does not agree with the opinion of some politicians who believe that the taxation of high incomes would paralyze economic growth. In fact, Krugman points out, "in the twentieth century many leading politicians warned of the danger of extreme concentration of wealth and called for fiscal policy to be used to limit the growth of large fortunes," citing the well-known economist Irving Fisher who, in his works, recalled the detrimental effect of “an undemocratic distribution of wealth” (Krugman, 2014).

Economists Emmanuel Saez and Thomas Piketty (Saez&Piketty, 2003) are on the same line, who, after extensive statistical analysis over a fairly wide range of time, come to the conclusion that, especially after the Second World War, US fiscal policy has led to increasing income inequality between the rich and the poor (Saez&Piketty, 2003). Similar conclusions can be found in other works signed by Emmanuel Saez (Saez, 2015). Also, many of the studies conducted under the auspices of the OECD largely support the same ideas of the injustice of extreme economic inequality, generating serious social unrest (OECD, 2011).

Another factor that has decisively contributed to the rise of economic inequality throughout the twentieth century and ushered in the twenty-first century with a transformative force unprecedented in the past is undoubtedly technological innovation. If in the beginning the electro-mechanical devices produced radical changes in the way of using the labor force, nowadays the electronic machines, computers, robots and, especially, the cyber-physical systems are on the way to revolutionize absolutely all the production processes. This fundamental transformation has considerably increased the demand for highly skilled workers, able to use the new means of production, thus contributing to the widening of the wage gap between the various categories of employees, on the one hand, and between them and managers, on the other hand. Consequently, those who can no longer afford adequate training for the new professional requirements are forced to accept lower and lower incomes (see also Ford, 2016).

It is particularly difficult to quantify the influence of the globalization process on the concentration of global wealth. Various economic analysts have repeatedly pointed out that “market liberalization has led to the transfer of economic inequality from the global to the national level” (The Economist, 2008). This transfer was possible, primarily, due to the increasing intensity of international trade and the increase in global financial flows, both trends being reflected in numerous specialized papers (see also OECD, 2005). Debates on the impact of globalization on increasing economic inequality and, consequently, on the concentration of global wealth have intensified recently, once again polarizing researchers into two groups, namely: on the one hand, those who consider that the process of globalization is inextricably linked to growing inequality and, on the other hand, those who do not agree with this view. Researchers in the first group consider that a process of such magnitude as economic globalization is impossible not to result in “winners and losers” (Milanovic, 2005). In contrast, the second group argues that globalization, by widely promoting economic integration, has managed to lift millions out of poverty, ie to reduce economic gaps (Dollar&Kraay, 2002). Of course, in such a situation the following question can be asked: which of the two points of view is the correct one? Why do different authors reach divergent results? According to other researchers (Mills, 2009), the main cause of significant adverse results is methodological in nature, ie the calculations are strongly influenced by how inequality is measured, in particular the validity and quality of the data used, such as and exchange rates in which revenues are expressed. Due to the influence of these factors, different predictions have been reached not only about the proportions of economic inequality, but also about its trends.

Indeed, most studies focusing on the relationship between globalization and inequality (Oladipo, 2016) have focused on the appreciation of the latter only in terms of income, often measured using Gini indices. Although the literature has provided other methods of econometric measurement, the Gini coefficient remained the dominant choice. Or, inequality is by definition a multidimensional concept, not being able to be summarized only in income, as the wealth of a nation cannot be assessed by means of a single parameter. If the use of the Gini coefficient seems satisfactory for measuring income-based economic inequality within a single country, when we try to determine the gaps between countries and, in particular, to provide a picture of the distribution of world wealth concentration, the problem becomes more complicated as we move on to international comparisons, - an aspect noticed by other authors as well (Ravallion, 2003).

Globalization has often been portrayed as a force influencing all nations in a similar way. In reality, however, the world's economies have had very different starting points, being in various stages of development and, most importantly, different possibilities to accept or resist the rising demands of globalization. That is why, in a globalized world, assessing the role of globalization in the evolution of economic inequality is a difficult step, precisely because of the difficulties encountered in separating the influence of the factors that contribute to filling the current international gaps. In this regard, the research undertaken so far does not provide us with sufficient arguments to explain why in some countries economic inequality has fallen to unpredictable levels until recently (the example of China), and in others, on the contrary, has increased. Can these reductions be attributed to the impact of globalization, or are they actually the result of the specific development model they practice?

Simon Kuznets (1901-1985), winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1971, tried to answer these questions in his papers. He argued that economic inequality is largely the result of the stage of development of a particular nation. Thus, nations with a low level of development show an approximately equal distribution of wealth. The accumulation of capital gives its holders the opportunity to have higher and higher incomes, and therefore wealth, in relation to other inhabitants, which is manifested, in the end, in increasing economic inequality. Subsequently, once a higher stage of development is reached, economically advanced states, through “welfare” redistribution mechanisms, return to slightly lower levels of inequality. In this way, Simon Kuznets imagined this relationship in the form of an inverted "U" curve, known today in the literature as the Kuznets curve (Kuznets, 1955).

Subsequently, a series of tests based on broader statistics only partially confirmed Simon Kuznets' theory, because even in some highly developed countries, such as the United States, periods of declining economic inequality have emerged over the years, followed by periods of growth. This does not necessarily imply invalidating Kuznets' theory, despite his criticisms (Deininger&Squire, 1998; Fields, 2001). It seems that, lately, we are dealing with several Kuznets-type cycles, which are manifested against the background of the transition from the manufacturing economy to the service-based, cybernetized economy. In the 1950s, Simon Kuznets did not have the opportunity to capture all the transformations that were to come, although he expressed some reservations about the "fragility of the data used" at the time (Fogel, 1987). However, Simon Kuznets was the first to identify economic growth as the determining cause of the long-term changes in income distribution as a result of the company's transition from the pre-industrial stage to the industrial stage itself. Examining this problem has created some difficulties for Kuznets because, as we know, the series of statistical data is more and more difficult to reproduce as we go down the time scale.

IV. PROPORTIONS OF GLOBAL WEALTH CONCENTRATION

The entire global economic wealth was estimated in 2014 at about \$ 263 trillion (Credit Suisse, 2014: 4), which would have corresponded to an average of about \$ 56,000 per person. In comparison, these values were, at the end of 2020, 418.3 trillion dollars (Credit Suisse, 2021: 7), with an average value per person of 79952 dollars. However, the regional distribution of this huge wealth is extremely unequal, with the largest share at the end of 2020 still being held by North America (32.52%), followed by Europe (24.67%) and Asia-Pacific (17.99%), excluding China and India (Credit Suisse, 2021: 7). The discrepancies stand out even more if we follow the distribution of wealth in terms of value in the main geographical regions of the world.

Table no. 1: Value distribution of world wealth by main geographical regions at the end of 2020, compared to 2014

Region	Total wealth (billion dollars) 2014	Total wealth (billion dollars) 2020	Wealth on average per adult (dollars) 2014	Wealth on average per adult (dollars) 2020
Africa	2831	4964	5080	7371
Asia-Pacific	49849	75277	44715	60790
China	21404	74884	21330	67771
Europa	85200	103213	145977	174836
India	3604	12833	4645	14252
America Latină	9113	10872	22997	24301
America de Nord	91240	136316	340340	486930
Total mondial	363241	418342	56016	79952

Source: Davies, James, Liuberes, Rodrigo, Shorrocks, Anthony, *Credit Suisse Global Wealth Databook*, 2014, p. 5 and 2021, p. 7.

Economic disparities must also be analyzed from other points of view. Beyond the regional inequalities mentioned above, which give us a too general picture, they must be looked at in detail. A lot of people live in geographical areas where, due to adverse natural factors, the creation of wealth is severely limited. Consequently, they cannot be convicted of being poor, since they are not guilty of it. On the other hand, at the other end of this spectrum can be found people who have managed to accumulate huge fortunes either through talent, or through hard work or even luck, being favored by the opportunities offered by the favorable environment. Starting from this finding, the differentiation of incomes can be achieved by forming a pyramid of them on different categories of people. Thus, in 2020 it can be seen (Credit Suisse, 2021:17) that, on a global scale, approximately 2.9 billion people (ie 55% of the world's adult population) are at the base of the pyramid, with incomes that fall into poor categories. In contrast, on the other hand, there is a group of about 1.1% of the world's adults who owned almost 46% of the world's wealth. In absolute terms, at that time, it was almost $ 192 trillion (Credit Suisse, 2021:17). The top of the pyramid was occupied by adults whose income exceeds one million dollars, in other words the class of millionaires. Over 65% of them were found in North America and Europe. Regarding the origin of the millionaires who make up the top income, the report emphasizes that, globally, there are "winners" and "loosers" compared to previous years. Winners include countries such as the USA, Germany, Australia, Japan, France, China, Italy and others. Losers include Brazil, India, Russia, Mexico, and others.

Table no. 2: The number of millionaires in US dollars by the main winning countries in 2020 (in thousands)

SUA	21951	Franța	2469
China	5279	Australia	1805
Japonia	3662	Canada	1682
Germania	2953	Italia	1480
UK	2491	The Netherlands	1039

Source: Davies, James, Liuberes, Rodrigo, Shorrocks, Anthony, *Credit Suisse Global Wealth Databook*, 2014, p. 5 and 2021, p. 20.

It is true that the share of people in the top of the mentioned pyramid is increasing compared to previous years, but to this aspect is added an aspect that we consider relevant, namely the fact that the category of millionaires is also differentiated. Billionaires stand out among them. Thus, in April 2021, Forbes magazine (Dolan, 2021) reported a number of 2755 billionaires worldwide, 660 more than in 2020, totaling a fortune of 13.1 trillion USD. This, given that in February 2014 there were 1645, and in 2009 only 793 (Forbes, 2015), a large part of billionaires from the US. Globally, Forbes (Dolan, 2021) reports, by 2021, 724 billionaires in the US, 698 in China, 140 in India, 136 in Germany and 117 in the Russian Federation. It can be noted that some countries, although with a relatively low GDP per capita compared to developed countries, have a relatively high concentration of billionaires, with an unprecedented rise in some Asian countries (Wadhwa, 2021). These figures are proof that economic inequality has taken on extreme connotations and is growing. The fragile economic recovery that followed the pandemic period was diverted in favor of the rich. In many countries, the income-to-wealth ratio has declined (see also Keeley, 2015), which is a worrying signal for the near future, given that, in the experience of previous years, this situation may lead to recession again (see also Darvas, 2021).

Similar conclusions have been reached since the middle of the last decade by the specialists of some international organizations (OXFAM, 2014: 2), even if the issue was debated in a context where the current pandemic is not even manifested, as proof that concerns are not even away from us. Thus, it is found that inequality and concentration of wealth have increased rapidly in most countries. This poses a major risk to human progress, as it prevents hundreds of millions of people from reaping the benefits of their own talent, hard work and entrepreneurial risk. Against this background, the concentration of wealth severely affects the process of economic growth, erodes democratic governance, weakens social cohesion and, more broadly, poses a threat to the stability of the global economy.

Specialists (OXFAM, 2014) consider, however, that the phenomenon of wealth concentration is not inevitable. The proof is some states that have managed to reduce its proportions in some periods of time. For example, after World War II, for almost three decades in a row, the United States (but also other European countries) reduced inequality by implementing some measures that were in line with progressive taxation, more complex public services, providing redistributive transfers, or providing decent work opportunities especially for women (see also Genevey et al., 2013). However, the same states have failed to avoid the massive concentration of wealth in the hands of a small number of people (Bhatt et al., 2020).

In turn, the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2013) once again confirmed, since those years, the increase in income disparities on a global scale and the tendency to concentrate wealth. In many countries, rising income inequality has been fueled by persistent structural unemployment, particularly among young people, who are largely on the periphery of society. Although the process of globalization has created some employment opportunities, overall, the situation has not improved much (Sánchez-Páramo et al., 2021). India is given as an example where, lately, the number of those in the middle class has increased from 30 million people to about 300 million. The IT sector alone employed about 2.2 million people directly and indirectly another 8 million. However, in a country of over 1.3 billion people, the above data is just a drop in the ocean (WEF, 2013: 14).

As a result of the uncertain state of the global economy, the population of many countries has lost confidence in current economic policies, especially in the post-crisis period. The decline in confidence is attributed to the fact that the economic recovery has usually been too slow and the predictions unrealistic. Added to all this is the austerity measures which, for some countries, have proved to be incredibly traumatic. Surprisingly or not, significant percentages of the population in some developed countries state in their polls that the situation in their country is not good, of course, against the background of the pandemic (Devlin et. Al., 2021). However, there are some optimistic views. For example, the explosion of the middle class in China has meant that since the initiation of market economy-based reforms, hundreds of millions of people have been lifted out of absolute poverty (NCR, 2021). However, the unprecedented growth of the middle class not only in China but also in Southeast Asia in general will put tremendous pressure on global natural resources, which may run counter to principles of sustainability.

Tracking the level of economic inequality in the world and, in close connection with it, the degree of concentration of wealth can be a challenge for researchers. At the level of different states there are different ways of calculating income and especially wealth. In the case of other nations, reliable statistics on these indicators can hardly be identified. In recent years, scientists have created transnational databases for income and wealth, through which efforts have been made to provide greater comparability of indicators of global economic inequality. Important initiatives in this direction were taken by the Luxembourg Income Study Center (LIS, 2021) and the Paris School of Economics (PSE, 2021), which opened a wider window on the distribution and concentration of wealth. Along with this, other research publications have been added to these efforts, such as the Global Wealth Report from Boston Consulting Group (Zakrzewski et al., 2021), or the Global Wealth Report prepared by the German bank Allianz (Alianz, 2021). Beyond these contributions, the most elaborate and ambitious form of this complex picture was presented by Credit Suisse, through the Global Wealth Report (Credit Suisse, 2021) published several years in a row. This report stood out precisely by estimating the net worth of world wealth and its distribution to the main beneficiaries.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Is economic inequality rising or falling worldwide? Is the world more and more unequal? No exact answer has been found so far. Branko Milanovic (Milanovic, 2005), one of the most well-known economists who has undertaken rigorous research on this subject, has finally come to the conclusion that economic inequality, no matter how we look at it, is growing visibly worldwide. Although in some geographical areas there has been a slight downward trend, the author considers this to be illusory, as the available national data tend to underestimate the real incomes of the richest people on the planet, much of which is deposited in tax havens or in banks.

The concentration of wealth can no longer be disputed by anyone, it exists, but it does not mean that it is a controlled, directed phenomenon. What is striking is that this concentration of wealth has acquired an extreme and persistent character, with the ability to self-amplify. Because of this trend, it has the power to destabilize the entire world economy, an issue it has been drawing attention to since 1972 at the Club of Rome (CoR, 2021; Girardet, 2020). Mankind does not yet have a model that allows for a relatively fair distribution of wealth. The latest statistics, which we have already referred to in this article, show that the trend of steady growth in economic inequality has taken place in contrast to the negative effects of the recent pandemic. Consequently, with few exceptions, in almost all national economies inequality in the distribution of wealth has become much higher than income inequality (see also Yonzan et al., 2021). It is also surprising that the pace of wealth concentration has exceeded the average annual rate of world economic growth, - an aspect recently reported by some economists (Piketty, 2014). Globalization has only accelerated this process. Along with globalization, many other factors have affected economic inequality in income and wealth, but unfortunately their impact is not sufficiently known.

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