

Understanding the Global North and the Global South

The Environmental Impact of the Relatively Wealthy

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The terms “Global North” (or simply “North”) and “Global South” (or simply “South”) are not strictly geographic terms. Some of the Global North countries—such as Australia and New Zealand—are in the Southern Hemisphere, and many of the Global South countries are located in the Northern Hemisphere. In fact, the population of the Global South countries in the Northern Hemisphere, which include India, Indonesia, and China, exceeds the population of Global South countries in the Southern Hemisphere.

Another reason that the terms are not geographical is that Global North is used to refer to relatively wealthy people wherever they are located who are members of the global consumer class, and Global South is used to refer to relatively poor people wherever they are located who are not members of the global consumer class. Thus, in Global North countries, such as the United States, there are people (homeless people, migrant workers, old and disabled people, abused people, and other employed and non-employed poor) who are part of the Global South. And in Global South countries, such as India, there are people who are part of the Global North (people who are part of the global consumer class and are privileged).

Other problematic terms are “rich” and “poor.” These are usually thought of in economic terms. We of CES mean by the poor those who are oppressed, abandoned, dismissed, considered less, or have insufficient means to feed, clothe, or house themselves or obtain healthcare, and the rich are the opposite. We do not consider as poor the people in subsistence economies who are living well.

There are some very striking statistics concerning the environmental impact of the relatively wealthy. According to Oxfam Briefing Paper #210, “[An Economy for the 1%](#),” the average environmental impact of individuals in the wealthiest 1% of the world could be as much as 175 times that of the poorest 10%. Thus, assuming, a global population of 8 billion, if this were true then the top 1% (80 million people) would have an environmental impact of 14 billion people living at the level of the poorest 10% (which is comprised of 800 million people and has, by this measure, the environmental impact of only 800 million people). What may also be shocking for those who live in the Global North is that according to Branko Milanovic in *Global Inequality* (Harvard University Press, 2016), if a household has an income of \$34,000 per person (adjusted for inflation in 2022, \$40,800) it is in the top 1.0% of income on a global basis, and according to Credit Suisse, [Global Wealth Report 2021](#), an adult with a net worth of \$1 million is in the top 1.1% of wealth on a global basis.

The ecological crisis is primarily a problem of wealth and its use, not poverty or population. This is not to say that poverty and population are not of concern. They are.