

kiron

Study Guide

SW_Soc

Introduction to Sociology



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Foreword

Purpose and Structure

This document is called Study Guide. It is a written script to walk you through the topics within a study unit, called Module, in your Kiron studies. It introduces the subjects in the module and links to the relevant parts in the online courses that you have to take in order to complete the module. It provides video lectures, written pieces, other kinds of enriching materials and suggested exercises from additional open educational resources to elaborate on the topics.

The purpose of this document is to accompany you while you are studying the online courses in the module. It is not a replacement of any course or content within the modules, thus completing this material only helps you progressing in an easier way in your module.

While you can share your thoughts and report errors on this material, your feedback and questions regarding the external contents should be addressed to the producers and owners of those materials. **Kiron uses third-party content and thus the opinions presented do not necessarily represent those of Kiron Open Higher Education.**

Iconography

Below are the meanings of the icons that are used in this document:



General hints, suggestions and other things to check



Video lesson or tutorial resource



Book, web page or other written material resource



Exercise or assessment resource



Discussion point in Kiron Forum, Google Classroom or Google Hangouts



Reference to the Kiron Campus or to a MOOC

Table of Contents

Introduction to Sociology	0
Foreword	1
Purpose and Structure	1
Iconography	1
Table of Contents	2
Introduction	4
Learning Outcomes	4
Courses	4
Additional Resources	4
Chapter 1 - Sociology	5
The Sociological Imagination	5
Inequality in the 21st Century: Local and Global Stratification	6
Social Structures	7
From the Concrete to the Elastic	7
Chapter 2 - Classical Sociological Theory	9
An Introduction	9
Bernard Mandeville and Adam Smith	9
Auguste Comte	10
Alexis de Tocqueville	11
Karl Marx	12
Émile Durkheim	13
Max Weber	13
Norbert Elias	14
Chapter 3 - Social Norms, Social Change I	16
Interdependent & Independent Actions and Empirical Expectations	16
Normative Expectations and Personal Normative Beliefs	17
Conditional Preferences and Social Norms	17
Pluralistic Ignorance and Measuring Norms	18
Chapter 4 - Social Norms, Social Change II	20
Scripts and Schemas	20
Norm Creation	21
Norm Abandonment	22
Trendsetters and Social Change	22
Chapter 5 - Social Welfare Policy and Services	24
What is Social Welfare Policy?	24
Approaches to Policy: Critical Questions, Themes & Values, Models	25

Structures in Policy: Understanding How Policy is Made in the United States	25
The History of Social Work and Social Welfare Policy	26
Poverty and Income Inequality	27
Issues of Access	28
Policies and Services for Children and Families	29
Policy in Practice	30
Chapter 6 - The Lottery of Birth	32
Lottery of Birth	32
Giving Birth	33
Being Born	34
Lottery of Birth in the 21st Century	35
Sources	36

Introduction

Welcome to Introduction to Sociology, your first module in the Social Work study track at Kiron!

The purpose of this Study Guide is to support you as you work through the MOOCs and tutorials in this module. This is your ultimate guide to all things political theory and you should use it to further your understanding of the topics covered in your courses.

Learning Outcomes

Once you have completed this module, you will be able to:

- outline the major sociological concepts shaping human behaviour and attitude
- summarise the history of sociology as a discipline by recollecting key classical social theories
- differentiate norms, values and belief systems within diverse cultures
- describe essential components and various levels of social organization and its influence on social interactions and on individuals
- define key social inequalities and intervention strategies to enact social change through national and global response mechanisms
- explain current social welfare policies and provision

Courses

This module is made up of **6 MOOCs**:

- 1) **Sociology** (4 weeks)
- 2) **Classical Sociological Theory** (8 weeks)
- 3) **Social Norms, Social Change I** (4 weeks)
- 4) **Social Norms, Social Change II** (4 weeks)
- 5) **Social Welfare Policy and Services** (8 weeks)
- 6) **The Lottery of Birth** (4 weeks)

Additional Resources

In this Study Guide, we will have links to additional video and text materials to enhance your understanding. Here is a list of the resources that we often refer to in this Study Guide:

- Sociology Central (<http://www.sociology.org.uk/rload.htm>)
- Glossary of Sociological terms (<http://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/savvy/introtosociology/Documents/Glossary.html>)

Chapter 1 - Sociology

Sociology examines individuals in their social contexts and provides insights into factors such as class, gender and age shape societies at the individual and institutional levels. [This introductory course](#) introduces you to key concepts and theories used in examination of and for understanding social action, social institutions, social structure and social change.

The Sociological Imagination

In the first part of this course you will discover the thoughts and concepts developed by the American sociologist C. Wright Mills (1916-1962), focussing predominantly on his notion of “The Sociological Imagination”. Mills thought that sociology can show us that society – not our own mistakes and failings – is responsible for many of our problems. He argued that one of the **main tasks of sociology was to transform personal problems into public and political issues**. Mills defined **sociological imagination** as “**the vivid awareness of the relationship between experience and the wider society**”.¹

Mills’ main point is that **many of the problems people are faced with in society have social roots and are shared by many others**. These roots are often related to the structure of the society and the changes happening within it. Hence, it is important that sociologists, and other social scientists, **demonstrate why these problems have sociological causes**, enabling the individual to understand how his or her biography is linked to the structure and history of society. This may hopefully help to **empower individuals to transform personal unease into public issues in order to facilitate social change**.²

The concept of social structure versus social agency is also discussed in this section. “**Structures**” are said to be the **objective complexes of social institutions within which people live and act**. “**Agents**” are said to be **human deliberators and choosers** who navigate their life plans in an environment of constraints.³ So the main question sociologists ask in this regard is “**How much are individuals able to act independently from the structure of their society?**”



Now watch the all the videos of [“Module 1: The Social Imagination”](#).



Try and work through some of the “**Further Reading**” and the short “**pop quiz**” at the end of each Topic. Remember to complete the **end of module assessment** too!



[This](#) is a good video introduction to C. Wright Mills’ main arguments.

¹ Joachim Vogt Isaksen, ‘The Sociological Imagination: Thinking Outside the Box’, <http://www.popularsocialscience.com/2013/04/29/the-sociological-imagination-thinking-outside-the-box/>

² Isaksen, ‘The Sociological Imagination: Thinking Outside the Box’.

³ Daniel Little, ‘New ideas about structure and agency’, <https://understandingsociety.blogspot.com/2011/03/new-ideas-about-structure-and-agency.html>

Inequality in the 21st Century: Local and Global Stratification

Social stratification refers to a society's categorization of its people into **rankings of socioeconomic tiers based on factors like wealth, income, race, education, and power**. Society's layers are made of people, and society's resources are distributed unevenly throughout the layers. The people who have more resources represent the top layer of the social structure of stratification. Other groups of people, with progressively fewer and fewer resources, represent the lower layers of our society.⁴

Sociologists recognize that social **stratification is a society-wide system that makes inequalities apparent**. While there are always inequalities between individuals, sociologists are interested in larger social patterns. **Stratification is not about individual inequalities, but about systematic inequalities based on group membership, classes, and the like**. No individual, rich or poor, can be blamed for social inequalities. The structure of society affects a person's social standing. **Although individuals may support or fight inequalities, social stratification is created and supported by society as a whole**.⁵

Social mobility refers to the movement of individuals, families, or groups **through a system of social hierarchy or stratification**. If such mobility involves a change in position, especially in occupation, but no change in social class, it is called **"horizontal mobility"**. An example would be a person who moves from a managerial position in one company to a similar position in another. If, however, the move involves a change in social class, it is called **"vertical mobility"** and involves either "upward mobility" or "downward mobility." An industrial worker who becomes a wealthy businessperson moves upwards in the class system; a landed aristocrat who loses everything in a revolution moves downwards in the system.⁶



Now watch all the videos in ["Module 2: Inequality in the 21st Century: Local and Global Stratification"](#).



Try and work through some of the **"Further Reading"** and the short **"pop quiz"** at the end of each Topic. Remember to complete the **end of module assessment** too!



[This](#) is an interesting look at social stratification with a focus on the US.



[Here](#) is a video introduction to social stratification and [this](#) video questions why it occurs.

⁴ 'What is Social Stratification?', <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/sociology/chapter/what-is-social-stratification/>

⁵ 'What is Social Stratification?'

⁶ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 'Social mobility', <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-mobility>

Social Structures

In sociology, **macrostructures** correspond to the **overall organization of society, described at a rather large-scale level, featuring for instance social groups, organizations, institutions, nation-states** and their respective properties and relations. In this case, societal macrostructures are distinguished from societal microstructures consisting of the situated social interaction of social actors, often described in terms of agency. This distinction in sociology has given rise to the well-known **macro-micro debate**, in which microsociologists claim the primacy of interaction as the constituents of societal structures, and macro-sociologists the primacy of given social structure as a general constraint on interaction. One example of an important macro-structure is **patriarchy**, the traditional system of economic and political inequality between women and men in most societies.⁷

Microstructures, on the other hand, refer to the **social relationships between individuals**. For example, the interaction you have with family, friends and colleagues all comes under “microstructures”. Sociologists who study the microstructures in society look for the way our relationships with individuals **influence our behaviour and attitudes** on an individual scale.



Now watch all of the videos in [“Module 3: Social Structures”](#).



Try and work through some of the **“Further Reading”** and the short **“pop quiz”** at the end of each Topic. Remember to complete the **end of module assessment** too!



[Here](#) is a useful revision section with quizzes and flashcard definitions.

From the Concrete to the Elastic

In this section, you will discuss the ways sociologists look at and attempt to tackle social change. Society is changing rapidly and that can, for some individuals and communities, create significant anxiety and stress. Sociologists see it as their mission to find a way to lessen the effects of social change on the most vulnerable in society.

Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) was particularly interested in this. He developed a theory of **mechanical solidarity** versus **organic solidarity**. Mechanical solidarity is the **social integration of members of a society who have common values and beliefs**. These common values and beliefs constitute a “collective conscience” that works internally in individual members to cause them to cooperate. Because, in Durkheim’s view, the forces causing members of society to cooperate were much like the internal energies causing the molecules to cohere in a solid, he drew upon the terminology of physical science in coining the term mechanical solidarity.

⁷ ‘Macrostructure (sociology)’, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macrostructure_\(sociology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macrostructure_(sociology))

In contrast to mechanical solidarity, organic solidarity is **social integration that arises out of the need of individuals for one another's services**. In a society characterized by organic solidarity, there is relatively greater division of labour, with individuals functioning much like the interdependent but differentiated organs of a living body. Society relies less on imposing uniform rules on everyone and more on regulating the relations between different groups and persons, often through the greater use of contracts and laws. Most contemporary societies work on the basis of organic solidarity.⁸



Now watch all the videos of [“Module 3: From Concrete to the Elastic”](#).



Try and work through some of the **“Further Reading”** and the short **“pop quiz”** at the end of each Topic. Remember to complete the **end of module assessment** too!



[This](#) is a good summary of the concept of ‘social change’.



[Here](#) is a great video description of the idea of ‘risk society’.

⁸ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, ‘Mechanical and Organic Society’, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/mechanical-and-organic-solidarity>

Chapter 2 - Classical Sociological Theory

You're probably wondering why a Sociology course is in a Political Science module. Well, there is a lot of overlap between politics and sociology, and this MOOC provides a fantastic overview of important sociological thinkers and their main ideas. From Mandeville to Weber, this course provides you with a comprehensive foundation in sociological theory to help support your Political Science studies. It is also a feature in most universities' Political Science courses so it is worth completing!

An Introduction

This course begins with an overview of sociological theory. Dr. van Heerikhuizen notes that classical sociologists focused not only on human societies but also on the fundamental social change that occurred as a result of the Industrial Revolution in Europe. The main interest of sociologists during this time and in the aftermath of industrialisation was the transition from traditional to modern societies: the growing influence of modern sciences, the modern metropolis, the process of secularisation and the development of new political systems. This course discusses a range of approaches to these social and political changes, beginning in the 18th century.



Make sure you have joined the Coursera MOOC '[Classical Sociological Theory](#)' and complete "[Week 1: An Introduction](#)".



Complete the **practice quiz** at the end of this session to get a feel for what is expected in the graded quizzes.



[Here](#) is a short introductory video to Sociology.

Bernard Mandeville and Adam Smith

Mandeville (1670-1733) is predominantly known for his ideas on morality and economic theory. Controversially, Mandeville argued that many of the actions 'commonly thought to be virtuous were, instead, self-interested at their core and therefore vicious'.⁹ In his most famous publication, *The Fable of the Bees*, Mandeville explains why human societies cannot prosper without a certain degree of undesirable behaviour: 'private vices, public benefits'. A prominent example of this 'private vice, public benefit paradox' is as follows:

'pride is a vice, and yet **without pride there would be no fashion industry**, as individuals would **lack the motivation to buy new and expensive clothes** with which to try and impress their peers. If pride were eradicated tomorrow, the result would leave hundreds of companies bankrupt, **prompt mass unemployment**, risk the

⁹ 'Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733)', <http://www.iep.utm.edu/mandevil/>

collapse of industry, and in turn **devastate both the economic security and with it the military power of the British commercial state**'.¹⁰

In short, Mandeville contends that a healthy social and economic life can not be sustained without a degree of illegality.

Smith (1723-1790) was influenced by some of Mandeville's work. He expands upon Mandeville's notion of **private actions contributing to a public outcome**. For example, Smith argues that the selfish act of protecting and furthering your own interests has, in one way or another, a positive knock-on effect for the whole of society. A family must feed themselves, so they will buy food from a supermarket, in turn helping the profits of the supermarket which in turn helps boost the economy.

Smith's most influential publication is the book *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776). In this book, Smith discusses the benefits of division of labour in the context of the Industrial Revolution that was well underway in Western Europe. His observations of effective divisions of labour would significantly increase the rate of production, which would subsequently benefit economic growth.



Now complete [“Week 2: Bernard Mandeville and Adam Smith”](#).



What period and context is Smith writing in? Why is this significant?



Remember to complete the **graded quiz** at the end of this section.



[Here](#) is a brief video about Adam Smith and his main contributions to sociological thought.

Auguste Comte

Despite growing up in a strict Catholic family in France, Comte (1798-1857) became committed to building a Republican country based on science rather than religion; he was heavily influenced by the Enlightenment thinkers of the 18th century. Unlike many other rationalist philosophers, Comte tried to understand how scientific knowledge was related to and borne out of pre-existing religious knowledge. He attempted to **reconcile religion with the Enlightenment, science-based era**. This makes him an important thinker to study.

Later in his troubled life, Comte developed his own religion: the 'Religion of Humanity'. This "religion" was arguably the culmination of his **appreciation and his criticisms** of religion. Crucially, Comte respected religion's ability to provide moral guidance for its followers. Thus,

¹⁰ 'Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733)'.

the 'Religion of Humanity' would educate its disciples on the morally correct ways to conduct oneself in public and private life.¹¹



Now complete [“Week 3: Auguste Comte”](#).



What are the main points in Comte's 'Law of the Three Stages of the Human Mind'?



Remember to complete the **graded quiz** at the end of this section.



[Here](#) is a video summarising Comte's key arguments.

Alexis de Tocqueville

Tocqueville (1805-1859) is most known for his book *Democracy in America* that he completed after a trip around America in the early 1800s. He identified **five main areas of concern**:

- “Democracy breeds materialism” → money was the only achievement on which Americans judged success.
- “Democracy breeds envy and shame” → inequality is more stark in democratic society and therefore the greatest inequalities go unnoticed.
- “The tyranny of the majority” → democracy undermines free thought and limits debate.
- “Democracy turns us against authority” → democracy is ‘fatally biased towards mediocrity’ and thus rejects expertise.
- “Democracy undermines freedom of mind” → Americans had given up on critical thinking; falling into the grips of commercialisation had led to a fear of alienating potential customers by stepping out of line.¹²

Despite this negative outlook, Tocqueville was in fact an advocate of democracy. He just insisted upon expectation management of what democracy could achieve.



Now complete [“Week 4: Alexis de Tocqueville”](#).



In what ways does Tocqueville draw comparisons between the American and French revolutions?

¹¹ The School of Life, 'SOCIOLOGY - Auguste Comte', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhVamhT4Q3s>

¹² The School of Life, 'SOCIOLOGY - Alexis de Tocqueville', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rzr3A0tFA8o>



Remember to complete the **graded quiz** at the end of this section.



[Here](#) is a video with more information on the points above.

Karl Marx

Marx (1818-1883) is perhaps one of the most well-known of the thinkers covered in this module. His writing on class struggle and inequality have influenced thinkers and politicians alike, and continues to do so today. However, his vision of a socialist utopia has influenced a number of leaders to commit atrocities against their own populations, such as in the Soviet Union and some parts of Central America during the Cold War era.

Marx's ideas themselves, though, do not lend themselves to violence and authoritarianism. His work, instead, generally revolves around his **critique of capitalism**. The capitalist system began to emerge during the Industrial Revolution in Europe in the late 1700s. Marx's theory was developed on the basis of his view that all changes in the society, political institutions and in history itself, are '**driven by a process of collective struggle on the part of groups of people with similar economic situations** in order to realize their material or economic interests'.¹³

Marx's concept of **alienation** is linked to his criticism of capitalism. 'The first of these critiques maintains that **capitalism is essentially alienating**. The second of these critiques maintains that **capitalism is essentially exploitative**.'¹⁴ Marx divides the population of capitalist society into two categories: those who own the means of production (eg. factory owners) are the **bourgeoisie**, and the workers are the **proletariat**. Marx calls for an end to such inequality and predicts that the workers will rise up and create a socialist society.



Now complete ["Week 5: Karl Marx"](#).



What are the underlying causes of class struggle, in Marx's opinion?



Remember to complete the **graded quiz** at the end of this section.



[Here](#) is a video overview of Marx's life and work. [This](#) is an interesting video about his ongoing significance today.

¹³ 'The Manifesto of the Communist Party: Summary', <http://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/marx/section2/>

¹⁴ Dan Lowe, 'Karl Marx's Conception of Alienation', <https://1000wordphilosophy.com/2015/05/13/karl-marxs-conception-of-alienation/>

Émile Durkheim

Durkheim (1858-1917) devised an approach to social science that used Adam Smith's notion of **division of labour to explain changes in societal cohesion**. Durkheim refers to the cohesive, undifferentiated societies of the pre-Industrial Revolution era as **mechanical**, while the societies differentiated by complex divisions of labour are **organic**.

Durkheim argues that in mechanical societies, people have similar interests and values and will therefore forge a '**collective conscience that works internally in individual members to cause them to cooperate**'.¹⁵ On the other hand, in organic societies '**social integration arises out of the need of individuals for one another's services**'.¹⁶ In organic society, contracts and laws are more common because there is greater attention paid to 'regulating the relations between different groups and persons'.



Now complete "[Week 6: Émile Durkheim](#)".



What is the main difference between organic and mechanic solidarity?



Remember to complete the **graded quiz** at the end of this section.



[Here](#) is an overview of Durkheim's ideas. [This](#) is an introductory video to his notion of egoistic and altruistic suicide.

Max Weber

Weber (1864-1920) developed the idea of social action. He argues that there are four types of ideal social action:

1. **Traditional Social Action:** actions controlled by traditions, "the way it has always been done".
2. **Affective Social Action:** actions determined by one's specific affections and emotional state, you do not think about the consequences.
3. **Value Rational Social Action:** actions that are determined by a conscious belief in the inherent value of a type of behavior (ex: religion).
4. **Instrumental-Rational Social Action:** actions that are carried out to achieve a certain goal, you do something because it leads to a result.

¹⁵ 'Mechanical and Organic Solidarity', <https://www.britannica.com/topic/mechanical-and-organic-solidarity>

¹⁶ 'Mechanical and Organic Solidarity'.

Weber contends that modern societies encourage instrumental-rational social action, for example 'we are encouraged to do things in the most efficient way (e.g. driving to work) rather than thinking about whether driving to work is the right thing to do (which would be value-rational action)'.¹⁷

His critique of modern society focussed on what he regarded as an **obsession with efficiency**. The constant desire to modernise and "getting things done" was detrimental to society's ability to acknowledge and discuss questions of ethics, values and traditions. Weber claimed that this was having a terrible effect on the collective health of society and would eventually lead to serious social problems.



Now complete ["Week 7: Max Weber"](#).



What does Weber say about what effect 'goal-rational social action' has on individuals?



Remember to complete the **graded quiz** at the end of this section.



[This](#) is a good summary of Weber's thoughts



[Here](#) is a video about his ideas.

Norbert Elias

Elias (1897-1990) focused predominantly on the concept of civilisation. Elias examines changes in etiquette and manners to chart the significant changes in society from Medieval Europe to the 20th century. What this looks like is 'an **increasing centralisation of authority in the state** (moving away from a feudal system wherein individual lords and barons would fight over territory within the state), moving conflicts from within states to between states. It looks like a consolidation of power on the part of the state, such that it forms a **monopoly on legitimate violence**. This essentially means that it became unacceptable for people to use force as a matter of course in their everyday lives, with functions like policing and military action increasingly becoming the exclusive responsibility of specialised agents of the state'.¹⁸

¹⁷ 'Max Weber's Social Action Theory', <https://revisesociology.com/2017/01/26/max-webers-social-action-theory/>

¹⁸ Tim Squirrell, 'Understand Norbert Elias' "The Civilising Process"', <https://www.timsquirrell.com/blog/2018/2/20/understanding-norbert-elias-the-civilizing-process>

Put simply, Elias tried to understand three main things:

1. The **relationship between state formation and changing attitudes towards behaviours** like sex, nudity, hygiene and violence in Western Europe.
2. He wanted to look at changes in **division of labour** as a result of **urbanisation, monetization and marketisation**.
3. The **transformations of personalities** as people became **more interconnected with one another**.¹⁹



Now complete [“Week 8: Norbert Elias”](#).



How has the ‘civilising process’ changed humankind and society?



Remember to complete the **graded quiz** at the end of this section.



[This](#) is a useful summary of Elias’ views on civilisation.

¹⁹ Squirrell, ‘Understand Norbert Elias’ “The Civilising Process”.

Chapter 3 - Social Norms, Social Change I

[This is a course on social norms](#), the rules that glue societies together. It teaches how to diagnose social norms, and how to distinguish them from other social constructs, like customs or conventions. These distinctions are crucial for effective policy interventions aimed to create new, beneficial norms or eliminate harmful ones. The course demonstrates how to measure social norms and the expectations that support them, and how to decide whether they cause specific behaviors. You will discover many examples of norms that sustain behaviors like child marriage, gender violence and sanitation practices. You will also cover all the basic concepts and definitions, such as social expectations and conditional preferences, that help us distinguish between different types of social practices like customs, descriptive norms and social norms

Interdependent & Independent Actions and Empirical Expectations

This section explores how **interdependence is the action in relation to other individuals**, groups, and institutions upon whom we are dependent to a certain degree. **Independent behavior** include habits, social customs, and moral injunctions regardless of what others do or expect us to do. Interdependence includes what is expected of people or what they think is appropriate or inappropriate which applies in a reference, centralized, or dispersed network.

A **custom** is a pattern of behavior such that individuals (unconditionally) prefer to conform to it because it meets their need. We may discover better alternative to satisfy our needs, but the external conditions producing these needs can change. **While collective custom is a pattern of independent actions, changing it entails interdependencies.**

Empirical expectations are expectations about what people that matter to us do and how they act based on their past behavior. A case of unilateral empirical expectation is through social proof or imitation. With coordination motive, expectations are instead multilateral and stem from a desire to harmonize our actions with those of others so that each of our individual goals can be reached. A descriptive norm is a pattern of behavior such that individuals prefer to conform to it on condition that they believe that most people in their reference network conform to it (empirical expectation). Their preference for conformity is conditional upon observing how others act.²⁰



Now complete [“Week 1: Interdependent & Independent Actions + Empirical Expectations”](#).



Remember to complete the **graded quiz** and respond to the **discussion question**.

²⁰ Cristina Bicchieri, 'Interdependent and Independent Actions', in 'Social Norms, Social Change I MOOC', <https://www.coursera.org/learn/norms/home/week/1>



[Here](#) is a great video introduction to 'empirical expectations' in sociology.

Normative Expectations and Personal Normative Beliefs

This week focuses on **normative (social) expectations which is what we expect people in our reference network to think we should do, or beliefs about other people's personal normative beliefs** (i.e., they are second-order beliefs). This expectation presupposes some continuity between what was approved/disapproved in the past and future. It's also accompanied by an expectation of a positive or negative sanction: in a society in which cooperation or reciprocation with strangers is perceived to be difficult to obtain, an honest cooperator is praised, and a non-reciprocator will acquire a bad reputation. Since empirical and normative behavior involve a reference network that influence others, we should think about the motives for actions and respective influence on behavior.

Personal Normative Beliefs are not belief about what other people think I should do, but are beliefs about what I think I should do or what I think people in general should do. This process of moralization happens at an individual level too, but is not uniform in its spread. When we say that a norm has been internalized we often refer to **the development of moral beliefs that correspond to societal standards**. These beliefs become an independent motivation to conform, as deviations are often accompanied by guilt. Personal normative beliefs may or may not coincide with one's normative expectations which presupposes once again, some continuity between what was approved/disapproved in the past and future. It is also included in attitudes that express a person's positive or negative evaluation of particular behaviors.²¹



Now complete "[Week 2: Normative Expectations + Personal Normative Beliefs](#)".



Remember to complete the **2 quizzes** and **2 discussion questions** in this section.



[Here](#) is a short video and quiz about social expectations.

Conditional Preferences and Social Norms

This session looks at **conditional preferences: choices influenced by what other people do or endorse**. If preferences are conditional, it means that my preference for doing something

²¹ Cristina Bicchieri, 'Normative Expectations and Personal Normative Beliefs', in 'Social Norms, Social Change I MOOC', <https://www.coursera.org/learn/norms/home/week/2>

may be very different from my endorsing that practice. Because preference for a behavior could also be socially unconditional, one could have social expectation but have no effect on a choice. If one instead chooses an action based on expectations about what others do or believe should be done, then such preferences are **conditional**.

Attitudes thus include personal normative beliefs that express a person's positive or negative evaluation of particular behaviors. Such beliefs can have a "moral" motivation. It is important to recognize consistency between social expectations and behavior, that correlation is not causation. **A social norm is a rule of behavior such that people have a conditional preference, based on their empirical and normative expectations, for following it.** Social norms tell us that particular behavioral responses are warranted in situations that are sufficiently similar to each other. Social norms are often called injunctive norms: what we collectively believe ought to be done, what is socially approved or disapproved of.

What matters here is that every society tends to "moralize" certain behaviors at an individual level while not uniform in its spread. **An internalized norm** often refers to the development of moral beliefs that correspond to societal standards which become independent motivation to conform, as deviations are often accompanied by guilt. Normative expectations are a great motivator for conformity to a **society norm**. Norms are very informal rules and therefore sanctions are also very informal. Legitimacy of normative expectation is fine while there are normative and empirical expectations. The extent of the social reaction to a norm transgression varies, depending on what sort of real or perceived harm disobedience creates. Thus, increasing uncertainty as to the scope of deviations and consequently, the appropriate severity of sanctions.²²



Now complete ["Week 3: Conditional Preferences + Social Norms"](#).



Remember to complete the **2 quizzes** and **2 discussion questions** in this section.



[This](#) is a Stanford Encyclopedia definition of Social Norms.

Pluralistic Ignorance and Measuring Norms

Groups all have norms of attitude and behavior which are shared and which help form the identity of the group. **Adopting these norms, even if you do not agree with them**, is a part of the individual sacrifice that people accept as a price of group membership.

Pluralistic ignorance occurs where the majority of individuals in a group assume that most of their others are different in some way to themselves, whilst the truth is that they are more

²² Cristina Bicchieri, 'Conditional Preferences', in 'Social Norms, Social Change I MOOC', <https://www.coursera.org/learn/norms/lecture/jeSNI/5-1>

similar than they realize. They thus will conform with supposed norms. **When most people do this, the supposed norm becomes the norm.**

These situations typically occur when the norms are older than all members of the group or when one member or a small group is dominant and can force their attitudes on the rest of the group.

Prentice and Miller (1993) knew that there was abnormally high levels of student alcohol consumption at Princeton University, US, through various eating clubs, rituals and parties that had led to a number of deaths and injuries. When they questioned students, they found many had assumed that others wanted to partake when they actually did not. They were **worried about possible consequences but still joined in the celebrations for fear of rejection.**

Tackling the creation and advancement of negative norms is complex and must be conducted with sensitivity. 'Since a social norm is supported by normative expectations, it is **not sufficient to publicly disclose that most individuals dislike the norm** and would like to do something different. The **participants must also be sure that its abandonment will not be followed by negative sanctions.** People face a double credibility problem here: they must believe that the information they **receive about others' true beliefs** and preferences is accurate, and they must also **believe that everyone else is committed to change** their ways'.

23



Now complete [“Week 4: Pluralistic Ignorance and Measuring Norms”](#).



Remember to complete the **3 quizzes** and **2 discussion questions** in this section.



[Here](#) is a great video about social influence in general. How does it relate to pluralistic ignorance?

²³ Bicchieri, C. (2016). Diagnosing norms. In *Norms in the wild* (1st ed). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, in 'Pluralistic Ignorance and Measuring Norms', <https://www.coursera.org/learn/norms/supplement/Lh4Fn/possibilities-for-tackling-pluralistic-ignorance>

Chapter 4 - Social Norms, Social Change II

[This course](#) covers scripts and schemas, the cognitive structures in which social expectations are embedded, and their relationship with social norms. The course then examines the essentials of norm abandonment, including the relations between personal beliefs and social expectations. We will also evaluate existing intervention strategies, including legal reforms, information campaigns, economic incentives, and group deliberations. Finally, we look at a variety of tools policy makers may use to effect change, highlight the role of trendsetters in social change, and explore the conditions under which they can be successful.

Scripts and Schemas

So as to maintain a consistent understanding of their world, people are driven to keep schemata stable and maintain coherence in their semantic networks. One of the ways by which people maintain this consistency is to infer that ambiguous information is congruent with pre-existing schemata..

The **bookkeeping model** asserts that **schema revision will take place when people encounter an array of moderately schema-discrepant instances** over an extended period of time. For example, imagine a person who originally has a schema for librarians, which features the two core elements of “quiet” and “awkward,” and later gets a new job as a book salesperson. While travelling to various libraries trying to sell books, she meets librarian after **librarian who are both reasonably gregarious and just as loud-spoken as the average person**. Under the bookkeeping model of schema revision, the book salesman will **gradually revise** the elements of “quiet” and “awkward” within her librarian schema.

The **conversion model** of schema change asserts that **the observation of a few, highly schema-discrepant instances can induce a sudden, dramatic revision of the associated schema**. For example, the people that started protesting in Tahrir Square in 2011 were clearly opposed to the silence that was the accepted code of conduct of citizenship.

Finally, the **subtyping model** asserts that people accommodate schema-discrepant observations by **treating them as “exceptions” and casting them into sub-categories**. For example, if one had a schema for “college students” that included the element “selfish,” and one observed a philosophy major handing money to a homeless person, then one might infer that college students in general are still selfish, but perhaps philosophy majors are not as bad as the rest of them. In other words, the single philosophy major was treated as an “exception to the rule”.²⁴



Now complete [“Week 1: Honors Lesson: Scripts and Schemas”](#).



Remember to complete the **quiz** and **discussion prompt** in this section.

²⁴ Bicchieri, C. (2016). Norm Change. In *Norms in the wild* (1st ed., pp.). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, in ‘Honors Lesson: Scripts and Schemas’, <https://www.coursera.org/learn/change/supplement/ICcck/social-norms-arising-from-descriptive-norms>



[This](#) is a useful overview of schema theory and scripts. You can use it to consolidate what you have learnt from the MOOC.



[Here](#) is an interesting video from more of a psychological perspective.

Norm Creation

Sometimes a practice that started as a purely descriptive norm comes to be imbued with meaning. **Such norms may have arisen arbitrarily, but the behavior that gets established may take on a meaning that transcends its original function.** For example, a behavior that comes to signal gender or group identity, status, or power, may become so important that members of the group may come to appreciate or even require said signal. **Take tattoos for example: to some they are merely fashionable, but for others, a tattoo could serve as an important and meaningful signal** of the group or culture to which one belongs (such as in the case of gangs). In the latter example, refusing to get tattooed would represent an offensive rejection of the group as a whole.

Even the **simple act of greeting known passersby may acquire special meaning.** Simmel (1950) tells how greeting acquaintances on the street started as a simple convention, but with time acquired extra meaning: **failing to greet an acquaintance eventually came to signal undesirable indifference, displeasure, or even hostility.** Norbert Elias (1978) illustrates how rules of etiquette arose as a signal of aristocratic sophistication. Thirteenth century writings on table manners uniformly denounced “coarse” manners and promoted standards of good behavior typical of the aristocracy. Because at that time **socialization mostly happened at the table, table manners became an important signal of status, demarcating a “superior” group from “inferior” ones.** Good manners identified the ruling class, and uncouth behavior, coming from one of its members, signaled an offensive rejection of it. Such “uncivilized” behavior would be rebuked, as it could blur the “superior” group’s boundaries. As illustrated in all of these examples, once a descriptive norm or even a custom has acquired an important social meaning, normative expectations are born.²⁵



Now complete [“Week 2: Norm Creation”](#).



Remember to complete the **quiz** and **discussion prompt** in this section.



Can you think of an example of norm creation in your own life recently?

²⁵ Bicchieri, C. (2016). Norm Change. In *Norms in the wild* (1st ed., pp.). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, in ‘Norm Creation’, <https://www.coursera.org/learn/change/supplement/ICckk/social-norms-arising-from-descriptive-norms>

Norm Abandonment

Creating, changing, or completing abandoning a social norm, are all processes with similar requirements. First, there **must be shared reasons for a change to occur**. Reasons may involve receiving new factual information, accompanied by a change of personal normative beliefs, prudential and not. **Having reasons for change is not sufficient for change to occur**. But it is a necessary precondition. Now suppose that we all have good reasons to change or abandon a practice, and that we're even aware of these reasons. We know it would be beneficial to behave differently. Yet, to change behavior, we must be reasonably sure that we are not acting alone. When behaviors are interdependent, acting alone may be dicey. With the social norm it's especially risky to a first mover. The **behavior dictated by the norm is not just normal, it is also collectively approved of**. Or at least it appears to be collectively approved of, as in the case of pluralistic ignorance. Deviating from it unilaterally invites many negative consequences.

When a social norm is abandoned, a new norm may be created. So that the **interplay between the change of empirical expectation and the creation of new normative expectation may happen in overlapping ways**. For example, the successful campaigns for the abandonment of female genital cutting, such as the Saleema campaign. **A change in empirical expectation is a crucial step, because it will weaken pre-existing normative of expectation**. Even if norm abandoned is accompanied by the creation of a new norm, the new normative expectation will not be sufficient to motivate behavior, unless people expect the old ways to change. The new normative expectation will be additional motivators supporting the behavior that people have reason to believe has changed.



Now complete [“Week 3: Norm Abandonment”](#).



Remember to complete the **2 quizzes** and **discussion prompt** in this section.



If you would like a much more in-depth look at norm creation and abandonment, have a look at [this article](#) by the MOOC tutor, Cristina Bicchieri.

Trendsetters and Social Change

What kind of first-mover, or potential trendsetter, would be willing to incur a cost? And how can they be identified? **An example of sit-ins as a tool of norm abandonment is the vital role played by first-movers in spearheading social change** and the characteristics that enable them to take action. Andrews and Biggs (2006) analyzed the forces that contributed to the rise of sit-ins, a vague call for protest. And highlight the type of trendsetter who marshalled the movement into full force. The more autonomous and affluent black adults and black college students that were in the city, the more likely the city was to experience sit-ins. Autonomous black adult populations had a greater capacity to dissent and black college

students likely perceived dissent to be less risky. They could not be fired from a job for staging a sit-in, the same way that a working black adult could be. Here we must also notice **another important element that characterizes trendsetters**, in addition to having good reasons for change and being autonomous. **Risk perception, to act against the norm, one must have a reasonably low perception of the risks one will encounter.**

Even if trendsetters deviate from an established norm, **they will never influence their peer if news of their deviance do not spread.** Thus, it is not surprising that in Andrews and Biggs' analysis, **news coverage was a particularly significant predictor of subsequent nearby sits-ins.** Such coverage reliably signalled that dissent was both possible and already occurring. **Communication within social networks had a similar, yet diminished, effect.** As these networks could not facilitate the spread of information to as many people or as many location as the radio or newspapers could. The failure of previous movements to spark social change shows that even if there are trendsetter presently acting against an established norm their deviance will not necessarily influence their peers.



Now complete [“Week 4: Trendsetters and Social Change”](#).



Remember to complete the **2 quizzes** and **discussion prompt** in this section.



[Here](#) is an interesting article about recent social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, that uses theories about trendsetting to explain their creation.



[This](#) short animation summarises social change.

Chapter 5 - Social Welfare Policy and Services

[In this course](#) you will explore a number of current social welfare issues in the context of their history and the underlying rationale and values that support different approaches. You will focus mainly on major fields of social work service such as income maintenance, health care, mental health, child welfare, corrections and elderly services.

What is Social Welfare Policy?

Social welfare refers to **public or private institutions** in modern industrial societies that **promote the well-being** of a community or a society. We also want to remember that social welfare is **influenced by and also reflects the ways in which, as a society, we have framed our priorities**. In terms of both identifying social problems, as well as addressing those problems via social welfare programs or services. Also, we need to consider the way that society has viewed individual and social responsibility.

Social welfare policy speaks to **specific action taken by the government that deals with benefits to vulnerable populations and/or universal services**. Social welfare policy also addresses those needs via the implementation of programs and services that will provide direct benefit. When thinking about social welfare policy, it is important to be mindful of the fact that it's actually **creating frameworks and structures that inform, limit or advance our social work practice** and has implications for the professional goal of social justice.

The **National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics**, a US-based association of social workers revised its code of ethics in 2017. These revisions added significant content related to **advocating for social policy and engaging in social and political action**. These revisions reaffirmed the social work profession's **commitment to influencing policy** and social change. The Code of Ethics also explores the mission of social work, and NASW defines that as to enhance the well-being and to help all people meet their basic needs. In doing so, social workers pay special attention to people that are **vulnerable, oppressed, or living in poverty, and helping to empower them**. Compared to other fields, social work takes a unique perspective to the ways in which the people that we serve **engage with their environment and other macro-level forces, such as policy**. No one exists in a vacuum so it's important to explore how communities, policies, and other large forces affect a person's life.²⁶



Now complete [“Module 1: What is Social Welfare Policy?”](#).



Remember to work through the short **readings** and **quizzes** throughout the Module.



Have a read of [NASW's 'Advocacy' page](#) to find out more about its key concerns.

²⁶ 'What is Social Welfare Policy?', edX MOOC, <https://courses.edx.org/courses/course-v1:MichiganX+SW530x+2T2017/courseware/d7b72e3a8d0c4167b0c44010b134cf27/703eebb1366548848bfa54f7d0e5ad5c/?child=first>

Approaches to Policy: Critical Questions, Themes & Values, Models

It may seem an odd place to start, but anthropologists and social workers see value in defining **who is classified as 'human' in policy**. For example, there is a range of policies where some people are excluded from the policy; they don't count. In terms of that policy, you might say they're not human. A key example of that is the way in which children became human in this US. It is interesting to note that the very **first case that was successfully prosecuted for child abuse couldn't happen under human-based laws, but was taken under the laws for the protection of animals**. It was only through that, that eventually children began to count as human and new laws were passed that agreed that children were human; that they deserved protections because of their humanity, not because of their animalness.

The second critical question that policies must answer is **who deserves services**, or assistance, or support. This is played out in all kinds of different ways. For example, **voting laws in the US right now**, in many states, once you have committed a crime, you've been convicted of a felony, you are **no longer a voting citizen**, no longer considered worthy to vote. So you may be **human, but you are not deserving of certain kinds of services or statuses**.

Once it is decided who is human and who deserves help, it needs to be agreed **who is going to act**. It is crucial to ask to what extent should the government (or whatever stands for the government) play a part and what can they do to help?²⁷



Now complete [“Module 2: Approaches to Policy: Critical Questions, Themes & Values, Models”](#).



Do you think there should be a narrow definition of who deserves support, or a broad definition?



Remember to work through the short **readings** and **quizzes** throughout the Module.

Structures in Policy: Understanding How Policy is Made in the United States

It is helpful to consider the historical context of US social policy. The notion of citizenship carries specific rights and obligations. Individualism, personal liberty, and the rights of persons to pursue activities freely and without excessive governmental intrusion are hallmarks of U.S. political philosophy and they inform policy making. **Political and social**

²⁷ 'What is Social Welfare Policy?', edX MOOC.

conservatives generally support market-oriented, limited government and private activities to promote social well-being or social welfare, whereas liberals, recognizing that social conditions often limit people's ability to access opportunities to become self-sufficient, have supported the use of government authority to achieve social welfare goals (Ginsberg, 2002). The conservative "Tea Party" of the early 21st century and its supporters proclaim government itself to be **regressive and nonresponsive to human needs**. The **radical left** and progressive critics generally reject both conservative and liberal social policy perspectives because they believe that **social inequality and social problems can be resolved most effectively by active social planning and government redistribution of wealth**.

The dominant philosophy of government in the United States in the early 21st century holds that the **market, broadly defined, should be allowed to function with as little interference as possible by governments to provide opportunities for all**. The Republican Party has long held that government should do less regulation of business, for example, to give entrepreneurs freedom to take risks that might create new jobs. To attack massive federal debts, they **encourage cutbacks of government programs and services, including social welfare programs, while reducing taxes on "job creators"**. Democrats argue that the best way to attack national debt is to create a **more progressive tax system that will increase taxes on the wealthiest Americans to help fund critical government social programs**, while offering tax incentives and other supports for businesses.²⁸



Now complete ["Module 3: Structures in Policy: Understanding How Policy is Made in the United States"](#).



Remember to work through the short **readings** and **quizzes** throughout the Module.



[This](#) is a good site for all things Social Policy!



[Here](#) is a great introduction to social policy in the US.

The History of Social Work and Social Welfare Policy

American social welfare, thanks to Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the Social Security Act of 1935, is furthered currently by two major categories of cash support programs: **social insurances and public assistance**. Social insurances are based on the prior earnings and

²⁸ John M. Herrick, 'Social Policy: An Overview', <http://socialwork.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-607>

payroll contributions of an individual, while public assistance, commonly known as “welfare,” is based on the financial need of an individual.²⁹

Throughout the 2000s, there was a rise in focus on the role of global social welfare and globalization. Many scholars state that the economic crisis of the late 2000s was the worst since the Great Depression. New policies to help **regulate banks and to provide funds for new job training, education and debt relief were developed**, but have struggled to be passed and funded. As such, **poverty, unemployment, health care, mental health care, and services to communities remain critical issues** for social work. The increase of the **elderly population** has also created an important focus on poverty and long-term care for elders and a recognition that the systems from the 1930s and 1960s may not be able to support the needs of the "Baby-Boom" elderly in the 2000s.

At the same time, there have been gains in **social movements** and national and local organizing efforts, including Marriage Equality, Black Lives Matter, the Me Too movement, the Women’s March, fights for immigration rights, and most recently, the rise of youth voices around gun violence. This period has also seen a rise in **social workers in elected offices** and engaged in political advocacy and political social work at the national level.³⁰



Now complete [“Module 4: The History of Social Work and Social Welfare Policy”](#).



Can you think of any social movements that have developed in your home country in recent years?



Remember to work through the short **readings** and **quizzes** throughout the Module.



[This website](#) covers the main social welfare challenges throughout US history and each challenge has its own page with a policy history. [Here](#) is a useful summary of the history of the social work profession.



Make sure you watch [this video](#) in the MOOC! Plus [this](#) is a good summary of social welfare during Ronald Reagan’s administration.

Poverty and Income Inequality

Conceptually, poverty can be thought about in a number of ways. Most frequently **poverty is discussed in relation to a very low form of income**. In large part, this is because income is relatively easy to measure.

²⁹ Dr. Jerry Marx, ‘Current Issues and Programs in Social Welfare’, <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/recollections/current-issues-and-programs-in-social-welfare/>

³⁰ ‘The Push and Pull of Individuals, Government, and Society (1980s - Present)’, <https://courses.edx.org/courses/course-v1:MichiganX+SW530x+2T2017/courseware/042a73dd8ab8479d87dfe29a3feebcba/487829dd77cd47438273452015fab8c6/?child=first>

In the US, welfare reform since **1996** has been the source of significant debate amongst politicians and sociologists. Many argue that it has been **a big success, at least as measured by the reduction in welfare caseloads**. The number of families receiving welfare declined by more than 50 percent between 1994 and 2000, and the percentage of families receiving cash assistance is lower than it has been since 1960. In 2000, only 2.1 percent of the U.S. population received cash assistance (through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF] program). Such success, which was helped by a **booming economy**, silenced many early critics of welfare reform. Happily, welfare caseload declines have occurred alongside **reductions in poverty, even among female-headed families with children**. Most of the early predictions that poverty and hardship would increase among the most vulnerable segments of the population have not occurred, at least not yet.

However, when the bill was due for reauthorization in 2002 **many poverty and welfare rights advocates argued that the initial emphasis on reducing caseloads should be balanced by placing a higher priority on reducing poverty**. Indeed, welfare reform comes with an obligation to refocus our attention on those left behind, those remaining at the economic margins of American society. Who are they? Why are they still poor? Why does it matter?³¹



Now complete [“Module 5: Poverty and Income Inequality”](#).



Remember to work through the short **readings** and **quizzes** throughout the Module.



Have a listen to [this great talk](#) about income inequality in the US.

Issues of Access

Medicare and **Medicaid** are two separate, government-run programs that were created in 1965 in response to the inability of older and lower-income Americans to buy private health insurance. They were part of President Lyndon Johnson’s **“Great Society” vision** of a general **social commitment to meeting individual social, economic, and health care needs**. Medicare and Medicaid are social insurance programs that allow the financial burdens of illness to be shared among healthy and sick individuals, and affluent and lower-income families. Medicare and Medicaid are different in several respects: they are run and funded by different parts of the government and primarily serve different groups.

- **Medicare** is a federal program that provides health coverage if you are 65 and older or have a severe disability, no matter your income.
- **Medicaid** is a state and federal program that provides health coverage if you have a very low income.

³¹ Population Reference Bureau, ‘Poverty in America: Beyond Welfare Reform’, <https://www.prb.org/povertyinamericabeyondwelfarereformpdf106mb/>

- If you are eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid (dually eligible individual), you can have both, and they will work together to provide you with health coverage at very low cost to you.³²

In relation to mental health provisions in the US, [The Washington Post](#) newspaper argues that the system is a multibillion-dollar industry but it is still not big enough to serve all those who need it. **Costs are a big barrier** to treatments - but so are **attitudes about mental health**. New laws might change access to mental health, although significant barriers still remain. **The US spends \$113 billion on mental health treatment**. That works out to about 5.6 percent of the national healthcare spending, according to a [2011 paper](#) in the journal Health Affairs.³³



Now complete [“Module 6: Issues of Access”](#).



Remember to work through the short **readings** and **quizzes** throughout the Module.



[This](#) is a good video summarising the healthcare system in the US.



[Here](#) is another interesting opinion piece arguing that the US must urgently reform its healthcare system.

Policies and Services for Children and Families

The **Administration for Children and Families (ACF)** is a division of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The ACF is the main body in the US government dedicated to children and family policy areas and service provision. It has a \$49 billion budget for 60 programs that aim to support children, youth and families. These programs include assistance with **welfare, child support enforcement, adoption assistance, foster care, child care, and child abuse**.

The ACF is responsible for **federal programs that promote the economic and social well-being** of families, children, individuals and communities. ACF programs aim to achieve the following:

³² Medicare Interactive.org, 'Differences between Medicare and Medicaid', <https://www.medicareinteractive.org/get-answers/medicare-basics/medicare-coverage-overview/differences-between-medicare-and-medicaid>

³³ Sarah Kliff, 'Seven facts about America's mental health-care system', <http://content.healthaffairs.org/content/30/2/284.full>

- families and individuals empowered to increase their own economic independence and productivity;
- strong, healthy, supportive communities that have a positive impact on the quality of life and the development of children;
- partnerships with individuals, front-line service providers, communities, American Indian tribes, Native communities, states, and Congress that enable solutions which transcend traditional agency boundaries;
- services planned, reformed, and integrated to improve needed access;
- a strong commitment to working with people with developmental disabilities, refugees, and migrants to address their needs, strengths, and abilities."³⁴



Now complete [“Module 7: Policies and Services for Children and Families”](#).



Remember to work through the short **readings** and **quizzes** throughout the Module.



[Here](#) is a timeline of how the policies and services for children and families have developed in the US.

Policy in Practice

There are many definitions of policy advocacy available from multiple authors and perspectives. At their core are a number of ideas that continually come up, characterizing policy advocacy as follows:

- **a strategy to affect policy change or action** — an advocacy effort or campaign is a structured and sequenced plan of action with the purpose to start, direct, or prevent a specific policy change.
- **a primary audience of decision makers** — the ultimate target of any advocacy effort is to influence those who hold decision-making power. In some cases, advocates can speak directly to these people in their advocacy efforts; in other cases, they need to put pressure on these people by addressing secondary audiences (for example, their advisors, the media, the public).
- **a deliberate process of persuasive communication** — in all activities and communication tools, advocates are trying to get the target audiences to understand, be convinced, and take ownership of the ideas presented. Ultimately, they should feel the urgency to take action based on the arguments presented.
- **a process that normally requires the building of momentum and support behind the proposed policy idea or recommendation.** Trying to make a

³⁴ Wikipedia, ‘Administration for Children and Families’,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Administration_for_Children_and_Families

change in public policy is usually a relatively slow process as changing attitudes and positions requires ongoing engagement, discussion, argument, and negotiation.

- **conducted by groups of organized citizens**—normally advocacy efforts are carried out by organizations, associations, or coalitions represent the interests or positions of certain populations, but an individual may, of course, spearhead the effort.³⁵



Now complete [“Module 8: Policy in Practice”](#).



Is policy advocacy something that might interest you as a potential career?



Remember to complete the **Mini-Quiz** for this section.



[Here](#) is the rest of the article quoted above.

³⁵ ICPA, ‘2.1 Defining policy advocacy’,
<http://advocacyguide.icpolicyadvocacy.org/21-defining-policy-advocacy>

Chapter 6 - The Lottery of Birth

[This course](#) looks at the big picture of the lottery of birth and the smaller, human stories. You will examine key inequalities, such as being born rich or poor, female or male. You will consider how individual countries and global organisations are responding to demographic changes and predictions, and how this plays out in the lives of individual women and men in different parts of the world. The course draws on demography, health studies, sociology, comparative social policy, history, political science and economics, to bring new perspectives and fresh insights.

Lottery of Birth

The first section of this course looks at how the inequalities that we are born into, and therefore have no control over, affect the trajectory of our lives. It also discusses the ways inequalities occur and how they can, to some extent, be mitigated.

Social mobility, or the lack of it, is a key aspect of inequality. In many countries, the reduction of economic and social inequality is ostensibly a major objective of public policy. The idea that people should succeed if they have the talent and opportunity to do so, is a key element to any consideration of the lottery of birth. If the lack of social mobility is a problem, then it's a problem for pretty much everyone, in developed and developing countries alike. **With social mobility weakened by social inequalities, the poor are unlikely to be upwardly mobile and the wealthy are even less likely to be downwardly mobile** (UN, 2013).³⁶

Educational inequality is another major factor influencing someone's "success" in society. In **developed countries, adults have an average of 12 years of school, compared with 6.5 years of school for those in developing countries**. This shows that these poorer countries still have average levels of education in the 21st century that were achieved in many western countries by the early decades of the 20th century. The developing world is about 100 years behind developed countries. **The gap is somewhat historical as mass schooling only spread across the developing world after the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights**. This came roughly 100 years after the idea that all young people should have an opportunity to be educated had spread across Europe and North America. Despite this, developing countries still lag significantly behind and the gap is not expected to close anytime soon.

Climate change has the potential to damage the lives of many people around the globe: severe droughts, rising sea levels, food insecurity and the increased incidence of extreme weathers pose a threat to millions. However, it's important to also keep in mind that certain regions and groups are more exposed than others. **Climate change, and the consequences thereof, are inequality issues, as they are likely to hit some of the poorest countries in the world the hardest**. Governments will need to play a significant role in reducing the damage of climate change to the poorest, most marginalised and most vulnerable groups within their populations.



³⁶ FutureLearn, 'Week 1: The Lottery of Birth', <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/lottery-of-birth/7/todo/34037>

Now complete all the sections in [“Week 1: The Lottery of Birth”](#).



Remember to consider the **‘thinking points’**.



If you have access to Netflix, try watching the documentary film **‘The Lottery of Birth’**. It has good reviews and it should be really interesting for this course.

Giving Birth

First, some facts about maternal and infant mortality:

- every day, approximately 800 women die from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth
- 99% of all maternal deaths occur in developing countries
- maternal mortality is higher in women living in rural areas and among poorer communities
- young adolescents face a higher risk of complications and death as a result of pregnancy than older women
- skilled care before, during and after childbirth can save the lives of women and newborn babies
- between 1990 and 2013, maternal mortality worldwide dropped by almost 50% (World Health Organisation, 2013).

Reproductive health, reproductive choices and reproductive rights (which have emerged as a goal since the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994) are important to individuals but not everyone gets to choose. Decisions about what people want for themselves and what they want for their children are set within broader contexts. Analysis of reproductive decision making is a particular challenge. Women (and men) consider childlessness, or decide to delay or widely space their children, in relation to **economic factors, housing, employment and career choices, availability and cost of childcare, education, attitudes, individualism, gender roles, partnership history and cultural and societal attitudes and norms** (Haskey, 2013). Some women and men simply don't want children or just don't think they would make good parents.³⁷

Gender imbalance among newborns is a serious demographic problem facing China's 1.3 billion people. For years, China's One-Child Policy has been blamed for the imbalance. The Chinese population policy may have indirectly led to **gender-selection abortion, female infanticide, and/or female infant neglect because parents were forced to have only one child** and wanted strongly to have one son for socioeconomic and cultural reasons. Ironically, it was the **wide availability of ultrasound machines** (spread all over the country to make sure

³⁷ FutureLearn, 'Week 2: Giving Birth', <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/lottery-of-birth/7/todo/34038>

women had their internal birth control in place) that **made gender-selection abortions possible** on such a large scale.



Now complete [“Week 2: Giving Birth”](#).



Remember to consider the **‘thinking points’**.



[This](#) is a short but very interesting TED-Ed talk about so-called population pyramids.

Being Born

The ideal of a safe birth, set within women’s reproductive health choices is endlessly challenged by political, demographic and economic upheavals. Internally too, families are subject to change driven by new ideas, values and beliefs.

Global struggles to combine economic efficiency, social justice and personal liberty, are dogged by the deeply rooted, perennial issues of unequal access to resources (rich countries versus poor countries) and unequal distribution of power and influence. The survival, health and well-being of all childbearing women and their babies still varies hugely.

The lottery of birth is about **inequality, of the circumstances in which we are born and of the circumstances in which we give birth, and the consequences of both of these for our life chances**. We can understand these unequal circumstances and their unequal consequences both at the level of whole populations and in terms of individual experience. Throughout this course, you will have noticed policies, cultures and practices that have a profound influence on gender. For example, a combination of anti-natalist policy and greater use of scanning technology has led to a higher percentage of female foetuses than male foetuses aborted in China with **troubling consequences for Chinese women and men**.

At a global level, **social, economic and political changes affect the construction of gender and gender relations**. While laws and policies can be created to value girls and women, it is also as much about everyday relationships between the sexes and changing attitudes towards girls and women.³⁸



Now complete [“Week 3: Being Born”](#).



Remember to consider the **‘thinking points’**.

³⁸ FutureLearn, ‘Week 3: Being Born’,
<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/lottery-of-birth/7/todo/34039>



[Here](#) is a short animation about the Millenium Development Goals, focussing on infant and maternal mortalities.

Lottery of Birth in the 21st Century

Mortality rates, including child **mortality rates fall and carry on falling**. Improvements to sanitation and agriculture as well as medical care and education drive down rates of human mortality. Women, and men, make the **choice to raise a smaller number of children** whose health and education needs can more easily be met. And as more girls survive and become educated, they too acquire choices other than early marriage and endless childbearing.

The differences between countries at different points on the demographic transition path can be illustrated if we look at two countries with similar population sizes. A comparison of **Germany and Ethiopia** provides a stunning example of the current global demographic divide. They have very similar population sizes but drastically different birth and death rates. On the one hand, persistently **low fertility rates in many developed countries jeopardize the health and financial security of the elderly**, as illustrated in the case of Germany. On the other, less developed countries continue to experience **rapid population growth, which exacerbate poverty and threaten the environment**, as shown by the example of Ethiopia (Kent and Haub 2005).

Nobel prize winner Amartya Sen is highly critical of his home country of India, where not only are income inequalities huge but **rapid economic development has not been accompanied by public policies** to support human welfare. India today, he points out, has a lower literacy rate than China and low gender equality, including girls in education and women in employment, which is much more equal in neighboring Bangladesh. He cites these both as the results of different public policy choices.

Gender justice is, Sen argues, the key issue for our time and is **not only important for women but for the whole development of the economy and society** in general. He argues that a 'just society', a concept discussed since the European enlightenment in the 18th century, is essentially achieved by remedying one injustice at a time.³⁹



Now complete [“Week 4: Lottery of Birth in the 21st Century”](#).



Remember to consider the **‘thinking points’**.



[Here](#) is a very interesting article about Germany’s falling population and government policies to try and mitigate this problem.



[This](#) TedX talk by Yasmine Mustafa asks ‘when does the world stop shaping you and you start shaping the world?’

³⁹ FutureLearn, ‘Week 4: Lottery of Birth in the 21st Century’, <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/lottery-of-birth/7/todo/34040>

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Contributors:

Maria Blöcher

Responsible for Content:

Kiron Open Higher Education gGmbH

Herzbergstraße 82-84

10365 Berlin

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