

AUGUST 2025

G20 FACTSHEET #1: WHAT IS THE G20?



The G20 in South Africa 2025

Introduction

The IEJ is pleased to present the G20 factsheet series. In this series, we aim to broaden your understanding of the G20 and its approach to addressing key issues, including international taxation, sovereign debt, food security, climate financing, green industrial policy, the phaseout of fossil fuels, universal social floors, and women's empowerment. In this factsheet, we outline the aims and composition of the G20, what hosting the G20 entails, and, most importantly, how civil society can contribute to the G20's deliberations.

What is the G20?

In 2025, for the first time, South Africa will host the G20 group of nations: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, the European Union (EU), and the African Union.

Founded in 1999, the Group of 20 (G20) countries produce 85% of global gross domestic product (GDP), are responsible for over 75% of global trade, cover 60% of the world's land area, and are home to nearly two-thirds of the world's population. South Africa is the only member country from Africa in the grouping, and the African Union was only admitted in 2023.

G20 deliberations also include representatives of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), the Finance Stability Board (FSB), the United Nations, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), together with a number of 'guest' nations and organisations that are invited by the host country every year. Spain is the only permanent guest nation.

The G20 was established in 1999 in response to a series of major financial crises, including those in Mexico (1994), Asia (1997), and Russia (1998), as a forum for finance ministers and central bank governors to address global financial crises. The major Western powers – the United States, Canada, France,



THIS FACTSHEET IS PART OF OUR SERIES ON THE 2025 G20

1. What is the G20?
2. International taxation
3. African debt crisis
4. Food security
5. Fossil fuel phase-out
6. Climate financing
7. Green industrialisation
8. Universal social floors
9. Women empowerment

iej.org.za

FACTSHEET #1



Scan to read the online version



G20

SOUTH AFRICA 2025



G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors meet in South Africa in 2025. Photo: UNDP.org

the United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, and Germany (known as the G7) – realised that future financial crises required swift containment. Globalisation and the international integration of production and exchange meant that a crisis in one country could very quickly spread to engulf the world. The rapid emergence of economies such as China, India, and Brazil, along with the declining influence of the G7 countries in the global economy, has significantly weakened the G7 countries' ability to address systemic crises independently. A wider platform of influence and coordination was required. This gave rise to the G20.

It is significant to note that despite G20 countries producing the majority of global GDP, dominating world trade, and representing the majority of the world's population, the group has no international mandate and does not make binding decisions. The initial meetings of the G20 only included finance ministers and central bank governors, whose primary goal was to ensure compliance with the codes and standards established by the IMF and the World Bank. It was only after the 2008 financial crisis that participation was expanded beyond finance ministers and central bank governors.

G20 governance

The G20 is not an official international organisation but a mechanism for dialogue. It has no secretariat, head office, charter, or binding votes to dictate the group's rules, unlike the UN, IMF, or World Bank. Instead, it has a rotating presidency, which changes every year. In 2024, Brazil held the chair. In 2025, it is South Africa's turn, and in 2026, it will be that of the United States. The presidents of these three countries will form the

G20 presidencies

2024



Brazil

2025



South Africa

2026



United States
of America

2025 'troika' that tries to ensure a smooth handover. The host country is responsible for setting the agenda for the proceedings and the summit, which is scheduled to take place this year on November 22-23, 2025. Unlike the UN General Assembly, where decisions are made through voting by member countries, the G20 is a consensus-seeking space. All G20 countries need to agree to the declarations and recommendations of a specific G20 Presidency.

How the G20 operates

The G20 is not a single event – it is a year-long series of engagements by a range of different role players, culminating in a summit at the end of each presidency.

The G20 organises its activities along two tracks: the **Finance Track** and the **Sherpa Track**. Finance ministers and central bank governors run the Finance Track. The Sherpa track is run by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the G20 countries and led by representatives of the G20 leaders.

The **Finance Track** focuses on economic and financial issues, currently comprising seven working groups. These technical groups encompass issues related to the finance sector, international financial architecture, the global economy, sustainable finance, financial inclusion, and infrastructure.

The **Political or Sherpa track** is led by senior diplomats and/or high-ranking government officials from the G20 countries. Negotiations, agreements, and preparation for the G20 summits are the responsibility of this track. This track is named for the Sherpa people of Nepal, who are skilled mountaineers and provide guidance to climbers in their efforts to reach mountain summits in the Himalayas.

The Sherpa track is organised into fifteen working groups: Agriculture; Anti-Corruption; Culture; Digital Economy; Disaster Risk Reduction; Development; Education; Employment; Environment and Climate Sustainability; Energy Transitions; Health; Trade and Investment; Tourism; Research and Innovation; and Women's Empowerment.

In addition to working groups in the finance and sherpa tracks, task forces can be established annually based on the most pressing issues of the day that the host country wishes to address. This year, South Africa established three task forces, which include:

- **TASK FORCE 1** on Inclusive Economic Growth, Industrialisation, Employment and Reduced Inequality;
- **TASK FORCE 2** on Food Security; and
- **TASK FORCE 3** on Artificial Intelligence, Data Governance and Innovation for Sustainable Development.

Civil Society Participation in the G20

Previously, some civil society organisations have participated in the G20 advocacy through engaging in the formal engagement groups discussed below. In contrast, other groups have done so through protests and mass demonstrations. The IEJ does not prescribe how civil society organisations should participate in the G20 process, but it aims to inform them about the available platforms they can utilise.

Engagement Groups

In addition to the Finance and Sherpa tracks, there are the **Engagement Groups**, which are interest groups that organise themselves based on their sector in society (see right). These are groups that generally aim to be independent of governments and undertake activities to influence the governments.



CURRENT G20 ENGAGEMENT GROUPS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- B20** (**BUSINESS 20**) represents the business community.
- L20** (**LABOUR 20**) represents trade unions and workers.
- T20** (**THINK 20**) represents think tanks and research institutions.
- U20** (**URBAN 20**) is focused on cities and city mayors.
- Y20** (**YOUTH 20**) brings together young leaders from G20 countries
- W20** (**WOMEN 20**) is dedicated to promoting the inclusion of women and their rights in global economic debates.

Other Engagement Groups include the **S20** (Science 20, for scientific institutions), **Startup 20** (group of startup companies), **P20** (Parliament 20, the parliamentary speakers' group), **SAI20** (Supreme Audit Institutions 20), **J20** (Justice 20, the group of supreme and constitutional courts), and **O20** (Ocean 20, which is for different interest groups involved in the ocean economy).

C20 (Civil 20) presents organised civil society in a year-long process of activities. The C20 is currently organised into ten working groups (WGs): fair, inclusive, and anti-racist economies; food systems, hunger, and poverty; environment, climate justice, and just energy transition; sustainable and resilient communities and disaster risk reduction; integrated health for everyone; education and culture; digitization and technology; women's rights and gender equality; philanthropy and sustainable development; and democratic governance, civic space, anti-corruption, and access to justice.

The C20 structure is where South African civil society organisations have engaged in the past, with even greater scope for South African activists to become involved in the various activities of C20 as South Africa takes the helm of the G20 Presidency. The main outputs of the C20 are policy briefs, communiqués, public events, and a few official meetings with G20 officials. The C20 in Brazil held its midterm meeting in July 2024 and produced an extensive list of [recommendations](#) and policy briefs, which can be accessed on the C20 [website](#).

The G20 has historically provided a platform for activists to advance human rights advocacy and campaigns, ensuring that the concerns of the poor and marginalised are heard. For example, wide-scale protests against the G20 took place in Toronto (2009), Seoul (2010), Hamburg (2017), and Buenos Aires (2018). Activists have often seized the political moment created by official meetings and used it to organise “counter-summits” in France (2011), Russia (2013), Australia (2014), and Argentina (2018).

The G20, therefore, provides civil society with the opportunity to lobby governments to advance particular proposals, stage demonstrations, and/or try to shape global public opinion.

What is the governance structure of the C20?

C20 PRESIDENT: Responsible for facilitating the C20 process, representing C20, structuring the Secretariat, choosing the C20 Sherpa, making pronouncements and dialogue with other actors involved in G20.

C20 SHERPA AND SOUS-SHERPA: The C20 Sherpa is the main point of contact with external stakeholders (G20 representatives, international organisations, media, and other G20 engagement groups). The ‘deputy’ or ‘vice’ is known as the Sous-Sherpa, and they work closely to support the Sherpa.

C20 WORKING GROUP CO-FACILITATORS: Responsible for facilitating the advocacy activities and outputs of the Working Groups. They are also responsible for representing C20, supporting the secretariat, and participating in the C20 Steering Committee. The IAC usually selects two Co-Facilitators:

the Sherpa and the President, following a formal application process. These Facilitators need to have a regional and gender balance.

C20 SECRETARIAT: Responsible for the administrative, financial and logistical coordination tasks.

INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (IAC): This is akin to the board of the C20, as the IAC's primary roles are to advise the Chair, the Sherpa, and the Steering Committee on strategic decision-making and contribute to disseminating C20 recommendations among key stakeholders. The IAC is composed of former C20 Sherpas and Chairs.

C20 STEERING COMMITTEE (SC): This is the executive body responsible for ensuring that the C20 is an open and diverse space that facilitates a broad range of civil society views of the G20. The G20 Steering Committee comprises the Sherpas, the President, and Working Group Co-Facilitators.

The Sherpas and president are chosen each year by the International Advisory Committee (IAC) and other organisations from the host country that have been involved in the C20 process in the past.

KEY DELIVERABLES OF C20: Working Group Papers, C20 Statements, Joint Statements; C20 Policy Packs compiled from positions drawn up by each Working Group, and a C20 final declaration.

South African Presidency 2025

South Africa's key priorities for its G20 Presidency in 2025 focus on addressing global challenges through solidarity, equality, and sustainability, aiming to reduce inequality, promote inclusive economic growth, ensure food security, harness artificial intelligence for development, manage debt sustainability, mobilize climate finance, and leverage critical minerals for sustainable development, all while fostering global partnerships and emphasizing the interconnectedness of nations.¹

Minister Ronald Lamola also indicated that South Africa is the last of the first cycle of G20 Presidencies and will undertake a review of the G20 to date to ensure adequate implementation of its resolutions². For this reason, this year we will have a G20 @ 20 report.

Co-ordinators

The Sherpa Track is coordinated by Zane Dangor, Director-General of the Ministry of International Relations and Co-operation (DIRCO). In contrast, the Finance Track is coordinated by Tatiana Rosito, Secretary for International Affairs at the Ministry of Finance.

Endnotes

- 1 G20 South Africa. 2024. Concept Note
- 2 Government news. 2024. G20 Troika High Level Address by Minister Ronald Lamola, United Nations