EoF Academic Conference 2027

Is Poverty to Be Fought, Loved, or Both?

Contemporary research and the prophecy of St. Francis of Assisi

21–23 October 2027 – Assisi, Italy

Conference Rationale

For many decades, social scientists have studied poverty, exploring its definition, measurement, solutions, eradication strategies, differentiation from misery and deprivation, and its connection to inequality (Sen, 1976; Atkinson, 1987; Stiglitz et al., 2009; Alkire & Foster, 2011). This research is valuable and extends beyond academic circles. Today, we understand that simply increasing GDP or the availability of primary goods is insufficient to reduce poverty (Sen, 1999; Stiglitz et al., 2009; Sachs, 2015), as also reflected in international measures such as the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) (UNDP, 2025a, 2025b); capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000) and freedom (Sen, 1999) are crucial; top-down, broad measures may not effectively lift people out of poverty, highlighting the need for more local, empirical, bottom-up approaches (Banerjee & Duflo, 2011); and relationships and capital also influence the living conditions of those experiencing poverty (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 1993). These insights also challenge the myth of limitless growth embedded in capitalist ideology (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971; Latouche, 2009; Jackson, 2017; Raworth, 2017). Advocates working to reduce poverty often propose alternatives, including expanding welfare, slowing down extractive industries, or embracing degrowth (Latouche, 2009; Atkinson, 2015; Kallis, 2018).

St. Francis of Assisi seems a natural ally in this endeavor. It is common among Franciscan scholars to describe Francis's choice of voluntary poverty, his marriage to *Madonna Povertà*, as a way of bringing attention to people for whom poverty was not a choice but a condition with no way out (Thompson, 2012; Cusato, 2023). And yet, Francis's prophecy might go beyond that. In a profound way that is difficult for contemporary minds to grasp, he deeply *loved* poverty and wanted to live that form of life, perhaps even before seeking to free others from it. He lived among the marginalized, the excluded, and the forgotten, to experience what they experienced, because that was how he

experienced the Gospel. In a nutshell, while today we fight (and perhaps even hate) poverty, as reflected in the verbs associated with it, such as eradicating, extirpating, fighting, alleviating, in order to help people experiencing poverty, Francis's life challenges us to consider whether there is a way to love and embrace poverty (intellectually, experientially, spiritually) as a means of rethinking our economies and economic theories.

This conference invites scholars from the social sciences and humanities working on poverty with two aims: 1) to take stock of decades of research and practice on the topic; 2) to take Francis's prophecy seriously and explore whether an economy based on frugality, limits, degrowth (Latouche, 2009; Kallis, 2018), care, relationships, or humility (or other elements) can serve the noble pursuit of addressing poverty in our societies (Burr, 2001; Todeschini, 2009; Agamben, 2013; Bruni, 2024).

Confirmed Speakers

Luigino Bruni
Sabina Alkire

Additional speakers will be announced in due course.

Conference Themes

We welcome contributions addressing, but not limited to, the following topics:

- Rethinking poverty: Definitions, meanings, and distinctions between poverty, deprivation, misery, and voluntary simplicity.
- Measuring poverty and well-being: Beyond GDP, multidimensional poverty, capabilities, human development, and alternative indicators of prosperity.
- Poverty, freedom, and human flourishing: The capability approach, human dignity, agency, and the conditions for a good life.
- Poverty reduction and development policies: Welfare, redistribution, grassroots initiatives, and bottom-up approaches to overcoming poverty.
- Poverty, inequality, and social exclusion: Structural inequalities, marginalization, vulnerability, and the role of social relationships and communities.
- Franciscan poverty and economic thought: The economic significance of Franciscan spirituality, voluntary poverty, the use of goods, and the relationship between poverty and wealth.
- Poverty and organizational studies: Is poverty present in organizations such as companies or civic associations? If so, how does it affect the organization's work and relationships?

- Poverty and care: Does poverty affect care at all levels, from day-to-day care to the institutional level? What does it mean to experience poverty in the realm of care? How are poverty and disability related?
- The AI impact on poverty and poverty research.
- Poverty as a form of life: Franciscan perspectives on freedom, detachment, simplicity, and the possibility of embracing poverty beyond material deprivation.
- Frugality, limits, and degrowth: Rethinking economic growth, consumption, sufficiency, and prosperity within social and ecological boundaries.
- Relational economies and the common good: Reciprocity, solidarity, fraternity, social capital, and alternative forms of economic organization.
- Poverty, ecology, and sustainability: Environmental justice, extractivism, ecological transition, and the relationships between poverty and the natural world.
- Spirituality, ethics, and economic transformation: Religious and philosophical perspectives on wealth, poverty, humility, and the meaning of economic life.
- The Economy of Francesco and contemporary economic alternatives: The relevance of Franciscan thought for new economic paradigms, institutions, practices, and ways of living.

We also warmly encourage participation by practitioners, entrepreneurs, and changemakers who are actively experimenting with new ways to organize economic life and address poverty. Alongside academic discussions, the conference will feature dedicated entrepreneurial moments that create opportunities to share experiences, explore concrete initiatives, and foster dialogue between research and practice. These moments will provide space to reflect on how the ideas and questions raised during the conference can inspire new entrepreneurial approaches, economic practices, and forms of collective action.

MORE INFO: https://francescoeconomy.org/eof-academic-conference-2027-is-poverty-to-be-fought-loved-or-both/

References

Agamben, G. (2013). The highest poverty: Monastic rules and form-of-life (A. Kotsko, Trans.). Stanford University Press.

Alkire, S., & Foster, J. (2011). Counting and multidimensional poverty measurement. Journal of Public Economics, 95(7–8), 476–487. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2010.11.006

Atkinson, A. B. (1987). On the measurement of poverty. Econometrica, 55(4), 749–764. https://doi.org/10.2307/1911028

Atkinson, A. B. (2015). Inequality: What can be done? Harvard University Press.

Banerjee, A. V., & Duflo, E. (2011). Poor economics: A radical rethinking of the way to fight global poverty. PublicAffairs.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education (pp. 241–258). Greenwood Press.

Bruni, L. (2024). Capitalism and Christianity: Origins, spirit and betrayal of the market economy. Routledge.

Burr, D. (2001). The spiritual Franciscans: From protest to persecution in the century after Saint Francis. Pennsylvania State University Press.

Cusato, M. F. (2023). Francis of Assisi: His life, vision and companions. Reaktion Books.

Georgescu-Roegen, N. (1971). The entropy law and the economic process. Harvard University Press.

Jackson, T. (2017). Prosperity without growth: Foundations for the economy of tomorrow (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Kallis, G. (2018). Degrowth. Agenda Publishing.

Latouche, S. (2009). Farewell to growth. Polity Press.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2000). Women and human development: The capabilities approach. Cambridge University Press.

Putnam, R. D. (1993). Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy. Princeton University Press.

Raworth, K. (2017). *Doughnut economics: Seven ways to think like a 21st-century economist*. Random House Business Books.

Sachs, J. D. (2015). The age of sustainable development. Columbia University Press.

Sen, A. (1976). Poverty: An ordinal approach to measurement. Econometrica, 44(2), 219–231. https://doi.org/10.2307/1912718

Sen, A. (1999). Development as freedom. Oxford University Press.

Stiglitz, J. E., Sen, A., & Fitoussi, J.-P. (2009). Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress. Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress.

Thompson, A. (2012). Francis of Assisi: A new biography. Cornell University Press.

Todeschini, G. (2009). Franciscan wealth: From voluntary poverty to market society. Franciscan Institute Publications.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2025a). Human Development Report 2025: A matter of choice—People and possibilities in the age of AI. https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2025

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2025b). 2025 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI): Overlapping hardships—Poverty and climate hazards. https://hdr.undp.org/content/2025-global-multidimensional-poverty-index-mpi