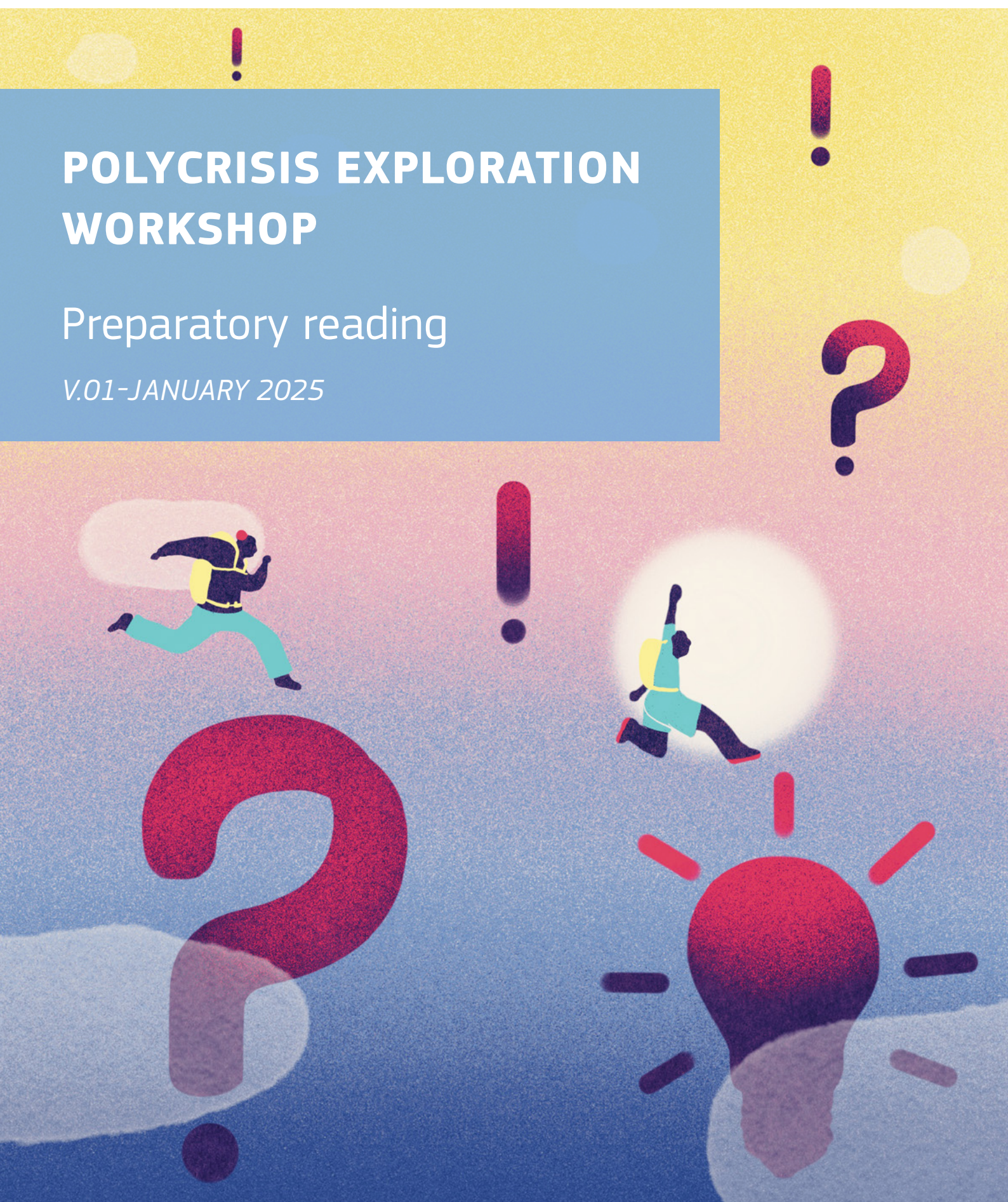


# POLYCRISIS EXPLORATION WORKSHOP

Preparatory reading

*V.01-JANUARY 2025*





## **ACCESS THE WORKSHOP ONLINE**

Scan:



Or : [https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight/topic/polycrisis-exploration-workshop\\_en](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight/topic/polycrisis-exploration-workshop_en)

# PREPARATORY READING FOR THE POLYCRISIS EXPLORATION WORKSHOP

## INTRODUCTION

This document summarises the **40 risks** identified in the JRC foresight study “Risks on the Horizon”<sup>1</sup>. They are categorised under the ten risk clusters from the report. This document is preparatory reading material for a workshop that aims to engage policy makers in **discussions about future risks, polycrises, and their potential consequences**. Reading this in advance of your workshop will enrich your discussions and enhance the objectives of the three activities of this workshop (see below).

We define the risks briefly, state why they are risks for the EU, and present a simplified outlook.

**We define risk as: the possibility of an undesired effect associated with an event, should it happen for the purposes of this work<sup>2,3</sup>.** The impact of any risk event, disaster, or crisis depends on its context, exposure, vulnerability, and resilience factors.

The goal of this collective intelligence exercise is to explore complex future risks and find novel ways to try and avoid negative outcomes as part of early disaster preparedness planning efforts. In doing this, you can steer towards opportunities and protect policy goals. Participatory exercises such as this help build coherent impactful strategies and build resilience. Similar to all foresight work, it aims to support decision making today, for a better future. Specifically, you can use this risk engagement tool to :

**Activity 1:** Enhance risk awareness by exploring the broad spectrum of risks.



**Activity 2:** Map future potential polycrises and explore interconnected (cascading) impacts.

**Activity 3:** Identify policy interventions to mitigate disasters and support policy goals.

<sup>1</sup> This set of risks was identified through the study: Muench, S., Whyte, J., Hauer, G., De Maleville, A. and Asikainen, T., 2024. [Risks on the horizon](#)

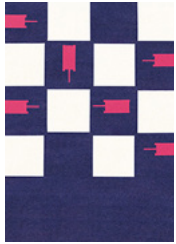
<sup>2</sup> Renn, O., 2008. Concepts of Risk: An Interdisciplinary Review Part 1: Disciplinary Risk Concepts, GAIA - Ecological Perspectives for Science and Society 17, 50–66

<sup>3</sup> The authors recognise the many nuanced definitions of risks. We are interested in future risks and threats for the EU (emerging, current, and future, systemic, extreme threats and so on). While there is a range of levels of knowledge about them and uncertainty as how they could develop, each could have a significant negative impact should it occur, and even worse should several occur at the same time.

 <p>BREAK-DOWN OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION</p>	 <p>DECLINE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S ECONOMY</p>	 <p>DECREASE OF WELL-BEING</p>	 <p>DISRUPTED CRITICAL SUPPLY CHAINS</p>	 <p>END OF DOMINANCE OF HUMANS</p>
 <p>ARMED CONFLICTS</p>	 <p>ECONOMIC CONTRACTION</p>	 <p>DISCRIMINATION</p>	 <p>CRITICAL RAW MATERIALS DEPENDENCY</p>	 <p>LOSS OF POWER BY HUMANS</p>
 <p>DISSOLUTION OF MULTILATERALISM</p>	 <p>FINANCIAL BUBBLES</p>	 <p>LOSS OF PRIVACY</p>	 <p>FAILURE OF CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE</p>	 <p>INEFFICIENT DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES</p>
 <p>ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES BETWEEN COUNTRIES</p>	 <p>POVERTY</p>	 <p>PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH ISSUES</p>	 <p>INTERRUPTION OF FOOD SUPPLY</p>	 <p>SLOW TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION PACE</p>
 <p>TERRORISM</p>	 <p>UNEMPLOYMENT</p>	 <p>PHYSICAL HEALTH ISSUES</p>	 <p>TECHNOLOGY DEPENDENCY BETWEEN COUNTRIES</p>	
 <p>EROSION OF DEMOCRACY</p>	 <p>FAILURE OF THE GREEN TRANSITION</p>	 <p>LAWLESS SOCIETY</p>	 <p>SOCIAL DIVISION</p>	 <p>WEAKENED EUROPEAN UNION</p>
 <p>AUTHORITARIANISM</p>	 <p>ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION</p>	 <p>CORRUPTION</p>	 <p>ECONOMIC POLARISATION</p>	 <p>CIVIL WARS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION</p>
 <p>COLLAPSE OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENTS</p>	 <p>ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS</p>	 <p>CYBERCRIME</p>	 <p>LACK OF EQUALITY</p>	 <p>DOMINANCE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN POLICY MAKING</p>
 <p>INADEQUATE REGULATION OF EMERGING ISSUES</p>	 <p>LOSS OF EUROPEAN UNION (GREEN) TECHNOLOGY LEADERSHIP</p>	 <p>FIXING OF MARKET PRICES BY CARTELS</p>	 <p>INABILITY TO REACH CONSENSUS IN SOCIETY</p>	 <p>FOREIGN INTERFERENCE</p>
 <p>LOSS OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES</p>		 <p>ILLEGAL PARALLEL ECONOMY</p>	 <p>MIGRATION</p>	 <p>POWERLESS EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS</p>
 <p>LOSS OF TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS</p>				 <p>SOCIAL UNREST</p>



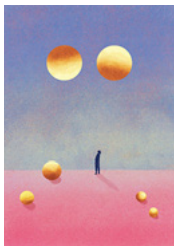
## BREAK-DOWN OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION



### ARMED CONFLICT

**Armed conflict, or war, refers to a conflict between opposing forces or political groups, characterised by the use of military tactics and an uncertain outcome.**

It involves the displacement of people, death and destruction, and hostilities of considerable duration and magnitude. The ongoing war in Ukraine, the conflict in the Middle East, increasingly martial rhetoric between countries (e.g. China and Taiwan), and signs of reduced international cooperation could escalate further, even to a global scale.



### DISSOLUTION OF MULTILATERALISM

**Multilateralism in international relations is a process of organising relations between at least three states, generally comprising principles that shape the character of the arrangement, aiming to achieve common goals.**

Current multilateral institutions are endangered because consensus-building in an increasingly complex and multi-polar world is becoming even more difficult. We can already observe a shift from multilateral towards more bilateral relationships at a time when humanity faces challenges that can only be solved at a global level.



### ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES BETWEEN COUNTRIES

**Economic inequality refers to the significant disparity of income between groups or countries.**

This inequality translates to different opportunities for governments, and it could hinder international collaboration. While income inequality between countries has declined, it remains high – the average income in the European Union is eleven times higher than in sub-Saharan Africa. The outcome of economic policies aiming to address inequalities remain uncertain, and long-term trends, such as the impacts of climate change, threaten to further deepen inequalities between countries.



### TERRORISM

**Terrorism is the threat, or unlawful use of violence (usually) by non-state actors, to generate fear in society to achieve certain political or ideological goals.**

It is a unique form of violence because of its unpredictability. It leads to significant emotional and psychological impacts, which can in turn lead to significant social and geopolitical repercussions. In 2023, global deaths caused by terrorism increased to the highest level since 2017. As tensions continue to mount globally, some form of related terrorist activity in Europe remains a distinct possibility.



## DECLINE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S ECONOMY

### ECONOMIC CONTRACTION

**Economic contraction, also known as a recession, is a decline in a country's economic activity.**

The European Union and its Member States have experienced several economic setbacks recently, such as recessions triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. There can be significant consequences for people, businesses, and governments, including reduced sales, unemployment, debt, and reduced social programs. While economies inevitably experience cycles, experience has shown that European businesses recover from contraction periods slower than US companies, widening the productivity gap between these two regions.

### FINANCIAL BUBBLES

**A financial bubble is an economic cycle characterised by an overvaluation of an asset to unsustainable levels, with a subsequent 'burst' or contraction of the asset value.**

Financial bubbles bursting may lead to severe economic down-turns, resulting in widespread financial instability, recession, and an increase of unemployment, amongst others. It is likely that they will continue to be a part of future financial markets, influenced by varied and uncertain factors, such as underestimation of the effects of climate change, geopolitical tensions, or how overvalued companies could implode.

### POVERTY

**Poverty refers to the state of lacking necessities to live, such as food, energy, or shelter, due to a lack of resources.**

Poverty negatively impacts quality of life, health, well-being, and engagement with society, with repercussions on the social stability of a community, the economy, democracy, and the stability of a nation. In the EU 22%, of the population faced the risk of poverty in 2022. Risk is highest for unemployed, single-earning households, and those with low work intensity. A decrease in EU economic growth, demographic changes and an unjust transition towards a green economy could cause poverty and disparities among Member States to increase.

### UNEMPLOYMENT

**Unemployment refers to individuals who are employable but not in employment, often despite actively seeking a job.**

It is linked with low or a lack of income and therefore disadvantaged life conditions for individuals and can lead to a further lack of employment opportunities. It can result in the development of psychological health issues, isolation, and it can have a negative impact on society: lack of income results in less spending and increased need for welfare. A lack of employment can trigger brain drain. Due to competition for government spending, new technologies (e.g. AI or automation), and the rise of new economic sectors, we may see rising unemployment in traditional economic sectors in the future.



## DECREASE OF WELL-BEING



### DISCRIMINATION

**Discrimination is the unfair prejudicial treatment of persons or groups based on characteristics such as their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, or disability. It leads to disadvantages and can be a violation of human rights.**

Discrimination reduces productivity and wastes resources. For victims, discrimination not only affects well-being, but their sense of belonging to society, significantly affecting societal glue. Continuous discrimination is associated with a degradation of mental and physical health. Discrimination can be rooted in unconscious bias. Biased tech applications, increasingly isolated niche thinking, and a more individualistic, fragmented society could negatively impact social consensus on rights and obligations, and even democracy.



### LOSS OF PRIVACY

**Loss of privacy occurs whenever undisclosed private information is made public without consent.**

Losing control over one's personal information can have broad impacts, including endangering one's professional and private life, as well as psychological health, or finances. With the digital transformation, increasing online data collection, enhancing surveillance capabilities due to AI, coupled with pressure to share personal information (e.g. when paying for goods), data security and privacy could become even more important in the future.



### MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

**Mental health refers to an individual's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Poor mental health can result in physical health issues, bad relationships, a lower quality of life, and premature mortality.**

Mental health issues are widely common. Depression and anxiety are leading causes of disability and younger people are increasingly at risk. The number of people with dementia is rapidly rising (also as people age), and neurological disorders, such as autism, result in impaired brain functioning. Long-term stress, eco-anxiety, and war trauma are on the rise in Europe. As the stigma about mental health issues decreases, and awareness for the need for support increases, challenges related to access to care remain significant.



### PHYSICAL HEALTH ISSUES

**Physical health refers to the overall state of a person's body, including their fitness, mental and social well-being. Poor physical health can lead to chronic diseases, mental health issues, reduced quality of life, reduced life expectancy, impaired mobility, cognitive decline, and social isolation.**

Humans are living longer, healthier lives, but physical health issues exist for many reasons, including genetics, unhealthy environments, and lifestyles. Risks include healthcare costs, pain, suffering, and premature mortality. Health innovations are positive, but ageing populations and environmental challenges are also increasing. Obesity, cancer, and heart disease for example continue to be diagnosed at increasingly younger ages.





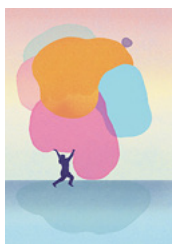
## DISRUPTED CRITICAL SUPPLY CHAINS



### CRITICAL RAW MATERIALS DEPENDENCY

**Critical raw materials are resources of high economic importance (e.g. rare earth elements, lithium, cobalt) that have a high risk of supply disruption – due to vulnerabilities such as the concentration of sources, a lack of suitable, affordable substitutes, and market fluctuations.**

They are important for the production of many strategically important goods, technologies, and sectors, such as electronics, space and defence, climate, energy, and environmental technologies. Geopolitical tensions with suppliers of critical raw materials can result in supply vulnerabilities. The EU's demand for critical raw materials is set to increase exponentially as it divests from fossil fuels, for e.g. because of increasing demand for base metals and battery materials.



### FAILURE OF CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

**Critical infrastructures are networks, systems, and assets that are essential for the safety and functioning of society. They are relevant for communication, transportation, health-care, energy, finance, water supply, and waste management.**

If critical infrastructures become non-functional, impacts can be varied and significant with widespread disruption and negative social and economic consequences. Failure can occur due to both natural and manmade causes, and resilience is important to manage risks and potential impacts. Climate change, reliance on technology and deliberate attacks on infrastructure might cause critical disruptions.



### INTERRUPTION OF FOOD SUPPLY

**A disruption in the availability of food resources for consumers can have serious societal, economic, and health implications, ranging from reduced wellbeing, to malnutrition, and famine. Vulnerable populations are most impacted.**

Supply interruption can happen for a variety of reasons, related to food systems and their actors, including production, transport, and distribution. It can be negatively affected by weather, environmental disasters, pests, economic events, or trade problems. Scarcity can increase prices and destabilise governments. While a circular economy aims for sustainability, using biomass and land for non-food production introduces competition with food resources, which could exacerbate supply issues, alongside extreme weather conditions.



### TECHNOLOGY DEPENDENCY

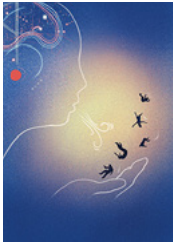
**Technology dependency refers to the (over)reliance on a certain technology, product, or service that needs to be imported.**

This exposes vulnerabilities to supply interruptions by private, or state actors. The EU is technology dependent in several key areas (e.g. communication, medical equipment). Rivalry exists between suppliers and buyers, and some countries have managed to gain dominant positions in some key technologies, giving them a strong geopolitical leverage.





## END OF DOMINANCE OF HUMANS



### LOSS OF POWER BY HUMANS

**Loss of power by humans refers to less human oversight, agency, and control of critical areas such as technology, energy, finance, healthcare, governance, and security. This is coupled with diminished access to land and other resources.**

Impacts could be severe for society. Such a loss could occur for many reasons, including power and wealth shifts due to conflict, or the necessity to restore and protect nature's and animal's rights. The current risks of humans losing agency and power include job displacement, reduced control over automated systems, and biased decision-making. These challenges introduce many new ethical questions. In a darker scenario, AI could begin to autonomously modify its own code, potentially accelerating beyond human oversight and control, creating unprecedented ethical and existential risks for society.



### INEFFICIENT DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

**There are many different models and ways in which people and democratic organisations arrive at decisions for action to be adopted, and their efficiency depends on how well relevant information can be used and analysed.**

Inefficient processes result in wasted time, resources, and missed opportunities, and are a significant hindrance to the productivity and success of society. Decisions must be made with the evidence in hand by leaders. Inefficiencies risk slow and poor decisions and occur in a complex world in which there is an abundance of data and options. In the future, the increasing volume of data could slow processes down, despite the potential for innovation, and the higher quality of the data. The persistent threat of bias and misinformation campaigns could be amplified by AI.



### SLOW TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION PACE

**Technological innovation is linked with profound societal change, development, and progress. The pace has been remarkable in recent decades, driving economies (e.g. in robotics and biotechnology), and bringing new solutions.**

Economic growth is driven by technological innovation, but there is a risk that this could slow down. Reasons include supply disruptions, lack of research and development funds, conflicts of interests, new regulations, and societal change. Slowing innovation could have serious future consequences, even as some push for it to slow down (e.g. AI) so regulation can catch up. Potential adverse impacts include economic stagnation, job losses, and failure of the green transition.



## EROSION OF DEMOCRACY



### AUTHORITARIANISM

**Authoritarianism is a governance system where citizens are not granted civil liberties, or political rights, and where there is no established mechanism for the transfer of executive power.**

Flawed elections, increasing inequalities, and armed conflict contribute to a decline in freedoms, and cause severe human suffering. Digital (mis)information campaigns from authoritarian countries, designed to widen political divisions within democratic countries are increasing this risk and lead to the rise of authoritarian populist leaders who exploit societal division and promise simplistic solutions for complex problems. AI-powered surveillance capabilities could enable new types of dictatorships.



### COLLAPSE OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENTS

**A collapse of government refers to a situation where a government loses its ability to function effectively, often leading to a breakdown in political order and authority.**

Failure of democratic governments to provide economic security and meet the needs and demands of their citizens can reduce voter turnout and lead to the rise of Populist parties. Populists challenge decisions made for long-term benefits, such as environmental protection, and exploit societal fault lines for their own advantage—with the side effect of undermining democratic processes, such as exerting pressure on court rulings. In some cases, populist leaders may weaken democratic institutions by consolidating power and bypassing legal processes.



### INADEQUATE REGULATIONS FOR EMERGING ISSUES

**Inadequate regulation of emerging risks refers to regulatory frameworks that fail to keep pace with new developments, lack adaptability, or are poorly implemented, creating vulnerabilities in critical areas.**

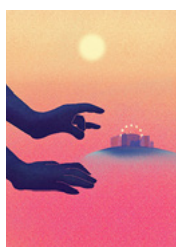
This could lead to several risks if the regulations are poorly designed, poorly implemented, overly burdensome, quickly outdated, or misaligned with current evidence. This gap leaves areas such as new technologies, (e.g. AI, or modern telecommunication technologies), geopolitics, Outer Space, the Arctic and Antarctic to name a few, vulnerable to hazards, including exploitation, environmental damage, security threats, and escalating costs.



### LOSS OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES

**Democratic values refer to the basic principles of freedom, democratic governance, equality, and individual rights.**

Goals such as freedom of speech, fair elections, the rights of minorities, freedom of the press, and the rule of law, are under threat. Democratic values suffer when hate speech flourishes in targeted misinformation and disinformation campaigns, when the principles and institutions that support democracy come under attack, either from within a country or from external forces, or when they are perceived to be rigged in favour of privileged groups. Trends that increase this risk include the decreasing interest of younger generations in politics, and the exploitation of emotions and personal beliefs over critical thinking and facts in the media and in social media algorithms.



### LOSS OF TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

**Elected officials and public institutions are accountable to citizens. Trust in political institutions refers to the confidence that citizens have in the structures and processes that govern society, in the interest of the people.**

Europe's political institutions face declining trust for a variety of reasons including unfulfilled promises, underrepresentation, ineffective governance, lack of transparency, and other perceived and real reasons. If societies become further polarised, deep divisions between different groups of people will make it difficult for governments to find common ground and build consensus, further leading to the erosion of democracy



## FAILURE OF THE GREEN TRANSITION



### ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

**Environmental degradation refers to the deterioration of the natural environment due to human activities and natural processes. Many regions face its impacts, which affect human health, biodiversity, economic stability, and geopolitical conflict.**

The environment (e.g. forests) provide many services and benefits, and its degradation could result in health problems, poverty, famine, weather extremes, species loss, war, and human rights abuses. Less fertile soils make it difficult to feed a growing world population. More and more species are under threat in recent years, and the extinction of one species can trigger cascading impacts, and to the extinction of others.



### ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS

**An environmental disaster is a calamitous event, either natural or human-generated, that results in significant harm. They usually occur suddenly, such as an accidental oil spill, or a hurricane, but developments over time, such as climate change, can increase their frequency and intensity.**

They pose great risk for human life and the natural environment, for private property and public infrastructure. They cause health issues, displacement of populations, and have substantial costs. The outlook is complex and depends on various factors. As global temperatures rise, the frequency and intensity of some (e.g. heatwaves, droughts, wildfires) due to hotter, and drier summers, and heavy rain (leading to floods) are expected to increase. Such events often bring further negative consequences (e.g. injury, famine, loss of life), which can be more disastrous.



### LOSS OF EU GREEN TECHNOLOGY LEADERSHIP

**The EU has established several initiatives (e.g. the Green Deal) to become a leader in green technology and to promote and support sustainability, including investment in research and innovation, and incentives to support green technologies. However, this leadership position is at risk.**

Green technology leadership would drive innovation, create jobs, and contribute to a more sustainable future for citizens and the planet. While Europe has a good track record developing green technology, it struggles to keep up with other regions and market leaders with regards to scaling it up.

There would be negative consequences if EU potential was lost, including reduced environmental progress, economic stagnation, and a decline in global influence. Loss of leadership could introduce geopolitical vulnerabilities and mean reduced leverage in global environmental regulations.





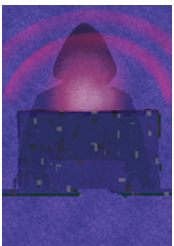
## LAWLESS SOCIETY



### CORRUPTION

**Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power, unethical and unlawful behaviour intended to secure a personal benefit, (e.g. bribes, extortion, nepotism), or the misuse of insider information.**

Corruption can slow economic growth and distort markets. It hurts social cohesion and is getting worse in the EU. The global trend of weakening justice systems is reducing accountability for public officials, which is allowing corruption to thrive. New technologies (blockchain) and public demand for transparency and accountability could drive positive change, but strong political will, legal frameworks and enforcement is needed. Monitoring dispersed future digital market players could be difficult.



### CYBERCRIME

**Cybercrime refers to criminal activities on the internet, using digital technology as an instrument to further illegal ends, such as committing fraud.**

Cybercrimes are broad and range from violating privacy, stealing identities, intellectual property theft, to human trafficking, child sexual abuse imagery, and attacks on infrastructure. Activities include attacks against information systems, phishing, and posting illegal content such as online hatred or incitement to terrorist attacks. Cybercrime is increasingly impacting individuals, businesses, and governments, as digital technologies become more central to our lives.



### FIXING OF MARKET PRICES BY CARTELS

**Price fixing refers to collaboration between independent firms or individuals who agree to raise, fix, or otherwise maintain (high) prices for a commodity. Under EU competition law, almost all such agreements are illegal.**

Price fixing can lead to higher prices for consumers and hinder economic growth and trust. It can create an uneven playing field for businesses, favouring those involved in the collusion and limiting competition. Examples of price collusion between competitors include oil cartels, state building contracts, and food trading cartels. Dominant market players already use their position to their own advantage globally and in the EU. This poses risks for the functioning of the single market of the EU.



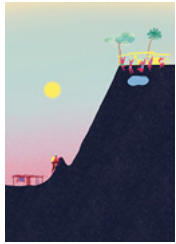
### ILLEGAL PARALLEL ECONOMY

**The illegal parallel economy, often referred to as the black market, involves trading activities that violate existing regulations.**

An illegal parallel economy undermines legitimate businesses, distorts market competition, and leads to significant tax revenue losses for governments. It can finance illegal activities such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, and terrorism, posing serious security threats. It erodes trust in financial institutions and weakens regulatory frameworks, making economic governance challenging. In the coming years, the black market may evolve following digitalisation trends (e.g. cryptocurrencies and the dark web) and changing consumer preferences. As criminals use increasingly sophisticated approaches, the rule of law will need to keep up.



## SOCIAL DIVISION



### ECONOMIC POLARISATION

**Economic polarisation refers to the unequal distribution of economic resources, such as income, wealth, and opportunities, and the phenomenon whereby 'the rich get even richer, and the poor get poorer'.**

This disparity has many causes, including a lack of education, prejudice, and ineffective tax policies. Its consequences include a shrinking middle class, reduced opportunities, political instability, and a divided society with high levels of crime and social unrest, as people lose faith in a system that favours the wealthy. There is a growing divide between different economic groups and the gap between the wealthiest and poorest is widening. Those who face energy poverty are at a heavy disadvantage facing future threats such as climate change, and those who lack digital skills or connectivity, for cybercrime.

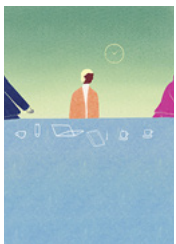


### LACK OF EQUALITY

**Equality represents the state of being equal, and having a uniform treatment and status by those who have influence. It is a key value in democracy to be treated fairly and justly and have equal access to resources and opportunities.**

Gender, age, race, religion, ethnicity, social class, migration status, and location are still shaping access to equal pay, quality education, employment, and healthcare. This inequality is holding economic growth back and threatens democracy, social cohesion, and prosperity in Europe.

An uneven distribution of wealth and income, and the adverse effects of climate change around the world is growing. Different types of inequalities in society are persistent, and might even grow.



### INABILITY TO REACH CONSENSUS IN SOCIETY

**Consensus, or a broad agreement between members of society on its values, norms, and goals, allows it to function well. However, achieving consensus can be challenging in modern societies with pluralism of values, social inequality, and cultural changes.**

Decision paralysis risks are broad. Consequences include wasted time, resources, and opportunities. In both a crisis and every day, time is a luxury, time can be money, and decisions must be made for progress. Dividing rhetoric of political leaders who exploit discontent of some social groups drives social polarization further. 'Niche thinking' is growing due to social media and 'information bubbles' and technology's potential to manipulate beliefs exacerbates it. This threatens social cohesion, social order, and stability.



### MIGRATION

**Migration involves individuals or groups relocating, often due to socio-economic, political, or environmental factors.**

Migration is associated with numerous risks to safety and security, especially if a crisis triggers mass movements (for example the recent wars in Syria and Ukraine). Despite the positives of migration, migrants face varying levels of support, and some scepticism within hosting countries. The societal and political significance of migration has increased, and dynamics have become more complex in an interconnected world. Climate change, and more frequent climate disasters, uninhabitable land, or new conflicts could lead to future migration.



## WEAKENED EUROPEAN UNION



### CIVIL WAR IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

**A civil war is a violent conflict within a country between a state and one or more organised non-state actors on the state's territory.**

Civil war can have devastating and far-reaching effects, potentially causing civilian displacement, political instability, and economic turmoil, as well as loss of life and serious regional instability. Several threats could lead to a civil war, even in a stable region such as the European Union. These include ethnic tensions, significant economic disparities, a deterioration of democratic institutions, external interference, and the rise of extremist groups.



### DOMINANCE OF PRIVATE SECTOR IN POLICY MAKING

**Dominance of the private sector in policy making means that private, often corporate, interests exert significant influence over public policy and accountability to the public is not considered.**

Capitalising on the strengths of the private sector is a solution for some problems that the public sector cannot tackle alone. But if the private sector dominates policy and is not transparent, it poses the risk of prioritising corporate interests over public welfare and environmental concerns. This translates to laws shaped to benefit powerful companies, undermining democratic processes and accountability. This weakens laws and reduces trust in democracy. It can exacerbate inequality, and weakens protections for workers, consumers, and the environment.



### FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

**Foreign interference refers to actions by foreign governments or entities aimed at influencing the political, economic, or social affairs of another country, without their consent.**

This includes covert actions, intelligence operations, disinformation, or direct interventions for geopolitical gain. In recent years, the EU has been confronted with more attempts to undermine democratic processes through hybrid threats, blurring the lines between truth and lies, conflict and peace. This evolving threat landscape presents new challenges for defence, security, and society.



### POWERLESS EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS

**Powerless European Union institutions refers to a potential or perceived lack of authority in decision-making processes, or influence and ability to implement policies successfully.**

A resilient peace project, the EU has overcome many barriers, but it could struggle or fail to address challenges that have the potential to weaken its cohesion and effectiveness. Its limited competencies and complex intergovernmental nature could be perceived as a risk. The climate and energy crises, the COVID pandemic, and the Russian war in Ukraine have changed international trade to the EU's detriment. There are challenges to mitigate the negative impacts that current and future global phenomena create for EU citizens for the EU.



### SOCIAL UNREST

**Social unrest is an organised collective action in society in times of peace, such as demonstrations and protests that can escalate to violence.**

The disturbance can come from a widespread dissatisfaction among a population and lead to a breakdown in law and order. Social unrests can impair normal social life routines and are very volatile. They can also have contagious effects. They usually happen in urban places and can lead to injury, death, and destruction. Increased economic inequality in Europe, religious tensions, human rights abuses, perceived unfairness in political systems, or increased state surveillance could lead to social unrests in the future.



# Science for policy

The Joint Research Centre (JRC) provides independent, evidence-based knowledge and science, supporting EU policies to positively impact society



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