

Introduction

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This fourth edition of the Outlook on the Global Agenda features the insights of the Network of Global Agenda Councils, the world's foremost community of thought leaders. It is informed by data from our Survey on the Global Agenda, which polled an extensive sample of Council Members and also incorporates the views of the next generation, the Young Global Leaders and Global Shapers.



The report features an analysis of the Top 10 trends which will preoccupy our experts for the next 12-18 months as well as the key challenges facing the world's regions, an overview of global leadership and governance, and the emerging issues that will define our future.

This year, the global agenda is shaped by a much more strained global geopolitical situation, which is characterized by a new level of volatility and complexity as events in East Asia, Ukraine and the Middle East have shown. Last year's number one trend – Rising Societal Tensions in the Middle East and North Africa – rose to prominence across Gaza, Iraq and Syria to such an extent that we explore it in depth in our Regional challenges chapter. For the first time since the launch of the report in 2010 we also see the growing importance of health in the economy making it to the Top 10 trends, a topic which we explore in more detail in the health trend chapter, with a special focus on the current Ebola crisis.

However, topping the list of concerns are economic woes, especially the rise of income inequality, which has made it to the number one trend after it first emerged as the most underestimated issue in our 2011 edition, as well as the risk of a persistent jobless growth. These two socio-economic trends are creating a dangerous cycle: Stagnant wages and the lack of employment are contributing to rising inequality, as well as holding back consumer spending and therefore growth in advanced economies.

And while we are seeing a much better integration of the economic system worldwide, the global political system is fragmented and becoming increasingly more so. There is an increased backlash against globalization and a retreat to nationalism or regionalism. This disconnect between the economic and political structures is a great concern, as it creates a world that is more and more interconnected, allowing shocks to spread quickly, but also a world where no-one is in charge.

This global leadership crisis is a trend which cuts across all the other issues,

and it is rising sharply, from seventh to third place. The danger is that instead of innovating and collaborating to tackle societal and economic challenges, nations and leaders will continue to retreat into isolationism, further exacerbated by nationalist rhetoric and a reversion to old paradigms of geopolitical power-play. Today's challenges require bold leadership and courage, and progress can only be achieved through enhanced cooperation between business, government, academia and civil society.

This year's report features a Global Leadership Index to examine where trust is lacking in 2015, and what leaders need to do to regain it. Among other interesting findings, we see more than two-and-a-half times the amount of confidence in business leaders compared to religious ones. This shows a massive shake-up of traditional values, which is underlined by civil society emerging as the most trusted stakeholder. Our findings show that communication and collaboration remain vital leadership skills, but they must also be underpinned by a global perspective.

But we are also seeing some positive developments which are influencing our outlook: technology and science continue to innovate. The harvesting of new resource frontiers, including unexplored deep seabeds, will offer economies a new source of energy and minerals. The ability to control the structures of our DNA and new brain research promise exciting new opportunities for the way we live and work.

The Global Agenda Councils will work together in the coming months, producing ideas and recommendations to address some of the aforementioned challenges. The World Economic Forum is committed to integrating the outcomes of their work into its activities, including at the upcoming Annual Meeting 2015 in Davos-Klosters, to ensure that they find their way into global decision-making processes.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all the Members of Global Agenda Councils, and special thanks are due to the main authors of the chapters for their contributions ■