

Prospects for children in 2022

A GLOBAL OUTLOOK



About

In 2021, the **Office of Global Insight and Policy** produced a medium-term analysis of global trends in support of UNICEF's preparation of a new Strategic Plan. The report '[Prospects for children: a global outlook through 2025](#)' examined the nature and consequences of a potential exit from the COVID-19 pandemic and explored the trajectory of longer-term trends identified as being critical in shaping the world and children's lives over the next five years. These were: (i) weakened support for multilateralism; (ii) slowing globalization; (iii) global warming; (iv) evolving rules and norms governing the online world; and (v) the decline of democratization and civic space.

As a follow-up to this exercise, the Global Insight team intends to produce an outlook assessment with a 12-month time horizon at the start of each year. Our aim is twofold: to draw the attention of the global community to the effects of global trends and events on child rights and well-being; and to support UNICEF staff and offices in interpreting and engaging in a rapidly changing world.

Our 2022 outlook draws on the reflections and analysis of staff from UNICEF's Global Insight team, supported by the Atlantic Council and the Pardee Center for International Futures, two organizations with long track records and formidable reputations in risk analysis and foresight. Jointly, we revisited the longer-term trends examined in 'Prospects for children', identified those that we considered to be most relevant for children in 2022, and highlighted new trends or events to be brought to the attention of our readership. Our initial findings were debated and refined during a virtual consultation held with 18 experts, leaders and young activists from around the world on 16 November 2021.

The resulting analysis is organized around ten trends (Figure 1). Annual trends, such as the ten highlighted in this report, are inevitably highly interconnected. They emerge, in part, from megatrends such as demographics, climate change, biodiversity loss and rapid technological changes, which will shape the world in which children live over the course of the next 30 to 50 years.



Longer-term trends identified in our 2021–2025 outlook as critical in shaping children's lives:

- Weakened support for multilateralism
 - Slowing globalization
 - Global warming
 - Evolving rules and norms governing the online world
 - The decline of democratization and civic space
-

FIGURE 1: ANTICIPATED DURATION OF TRENDS



These six trends are discussed in 'Prospects for children: a global outlook through 2025'

We have not examined these megatrends in detail in this report, but they remain key to any account of the evolving global context. Many of the trends we have identified in this report will be important not just in the coming 12 months, but well beyond that timeframe. At the same time, unexpected events or emerging trends – so-called black and white swans, tipping points and weak signals – may well derail the trends identified here in both positive and negative ways. The trends and events highlighted here should be interpreted in this context.

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Summary



Summary

Two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, the harm that been done to children is increasingly evident: a record rise in child poverty, setbacks to hard-won progress on routine vaccinations, and disruption to education for an entire generation of children. That harm has emerged as **an unintended side-effect of the world's efforts to manage the crisis.**

2021 started with a sense of hope with the unveiling of a suite of vaccines, pointing to a potential exit from the pandemic. Yet twelve months later, we instead face the reality of an unequal vaccine roll-out and the emergence of the Omicron variant. **The question is not how soon the virus will be eradicated, but how soon we will be able to mitigate its effects sufficiently that it will no longer disrupt lives. As 2022 begins, we are not there yet and the losses for children continue to accumulate.**

"In 2022, we will come to terms with what COVID really meant. So far, we have been firefighting the pandemic, but the impact will be seen for years to come."

Ms. Priti Patnaik, Founding Editor, Geneva Health Files

What next for the world's children in the year ahead? As in the past two years, **prospects for children will continue to hinge foremost on the pandemic and how it is managed.** Furthermore, **our ambivalence regarding the pandemic's trajectory reinforces the sense that we are in a period of uncertainty.**

Until now, the pandemic response has been characterized by short-termism and lack of cooperation. Myopic thinking has led to school closures being seen as a largely benign and efficient measure to stem the spread of an infectious disease. Yet as we look ahead to 2022 and beyond, the consequences of such steps will increasingly be counted: learning losses that are worse than originally anticipated, school dropouts, negative coping strategies including child labour and child marriage. Without remedial steps, we will continue to count their effects in the years ahead in terms of lost productivity and lower wages. The unwillingness of the global community to truly come together in fighting a common challenge, as it did 15 years ago against the global financial crisis, has resulted in repeated missteps: the difficulty in funding the pandemic response in poor countries, G20 dose pledges not being honoured, and the flouting of the authority of global institutions. **In 2022, the same lack of cooperation puts at risk the G20 target to vaccinate at least 70 per cent of the population in every country by mid-year, ultimately increasing the odds of further escape variants and delaying the virus's eventual containment.** Again, the longer the delay, the more the costs for children accumulate.

COVID-19 has been a uniquely disequalizing crisis. 2021 may be remembered most for the unequal access to vaccines, but inequity has played out in other dimensions: recorded learning losses have been by far the greatest among the poorest children in each country; and job losses have been disproportionately borne by women and youth. **In 2022, inequities are set to take new forms. The supply constraint for COVID-19 vaccines to poor countries will lift, but access to mRNA doses will remain restricted, and access to life-saving treatments like Paxlovid will be even more exclusive.** By the end of the year, rich countries are expected to regain their pre-pandemic economic trajectory, whereas income in low-income countries is forecast to remain 6.7 per cent below trend. Exacerbating this difference is the premature withdrawal of policy support to alleviate the pandemic's economic impact anticipated in many countries – most notably those bound by fiscal constraints. **This puts at risk expanded social protection measures that serve as a lifeline to many families, as well as other public services for children.**

While children living in rich countries can expect to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis earlier than those in poor countries, children living in humanitarian situations face a more permanent crisis. **Record humanitarian needs are forecast in 2022**, reflecting both long-standing conflicts as well as rapidly escalating emergencies from Afghanistan to Ethiopia to Myanmar. **As climate change grows in severity each year, it will trigger new disasters, fuel instability, and exacerbate communities' existing vulnerabilities** in health, nutrition, sanitation and their susceptibility to displacement and violence. If the global response to COVID-19 reveals the ill-health of multilateralism, conflict and climate change serve as a reminder that **the deterioration of multilateralism has occurred when it is needed more keenly than ever.**



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Other sources of instability are likely to arise in 2022 with consequences for children. **The proliferation of armed drones and their unregulated use is poised to dramatically alter the nature of warfare**, while the increased frequency and intensity of cyberattacks pose a threat to various institutions on which children's livelihoods depend, including schools, other public infrastructure, and banks. **Global inflationary pressures threaten the purchasing power of households, especially in energy and food markets:** the latter is especially concerning in low-income countries where 50 per cent of consumer spending is devoted to food, and in economies disproportionately dependent on global food markets, such as the Middle East which imports 50 per cent of its food. Rising prices have historically often served as a tinder box for social unrest.

The scenario described above paints a bleak outlook for children, especially the most vulnerable. What can be done to improve children's fortunes?

In 2022, the global community needs to recast its COVID-19 strategy: to focus not only on mitigating the virus but mitigating its effect on society – particularly children. In practical terms, that means committing to keep schools open, and providing schools and families with the resources they need to keep children safely in school and learning. It means placing them and their families and the goods and services on which they depend at the centre of recovery packages and protecting them from the fiscal adjustments that are expected to follow. It means **investing in restoring losses from the pandemic:** in learning, non-COVID-19 health programmes, nutrition and children's mental health. And it means doubling down on health system strengthening and expanding access to primary health care.

This task will be made easier with renewed cooperation between countries. Such cooperation will not only strengthen the response to the pandemic, but is critical to tackle conflict, climate and other emerging challenges that shape children's lives. Here we must heed the call of children and young people, who are more likely to **identify as global citizens and express greater belief in international cooperation** as a means of tackling global threats.

Children and young people also express greater optimism that, for all its challenges, the world is becoming a better place over time. 2022 will present opportunities to prove them right. For instance, **some of the technology and infrastructure developed to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic can be put to new uses to drive the next revolution in child survival.** The first mRNA vaccine candidates for tuberculosis, malaria and HIV are expected to enter clinical trials in 2022 and 2023, around the time when the recombinant protein-based malaria vaccine (RTS,S) begins to be rolled out in sub-Saharan Africa. Elsewhere, 2022 should see the emergence of green investment as a major growth engine. Electric vehicle sales are expected to more than double in 2022 while renewables are expected to account for 95 per cent of new power generation over the next five years, driving climate mitigation and providing countless new jobs for young people entering the labour market. In addition, emergency policies rolled out in response to the pandemic, including expansions of childcare and mental health services, and more generous and universal social protection programmes, provide a chance to **institutionalize stronger child protections and support**, and in doing so strengthen trust between governments and citizens.

"If we expect more youth migration, we should also expect more unaccompanied youth... There is a huge gap between pledges to accommodate unaccompanied youth and actually accommodating unaccompanied youth in practice."

David Passarelli, Executive Director, UNU Center for Policy



Ten trends —————>

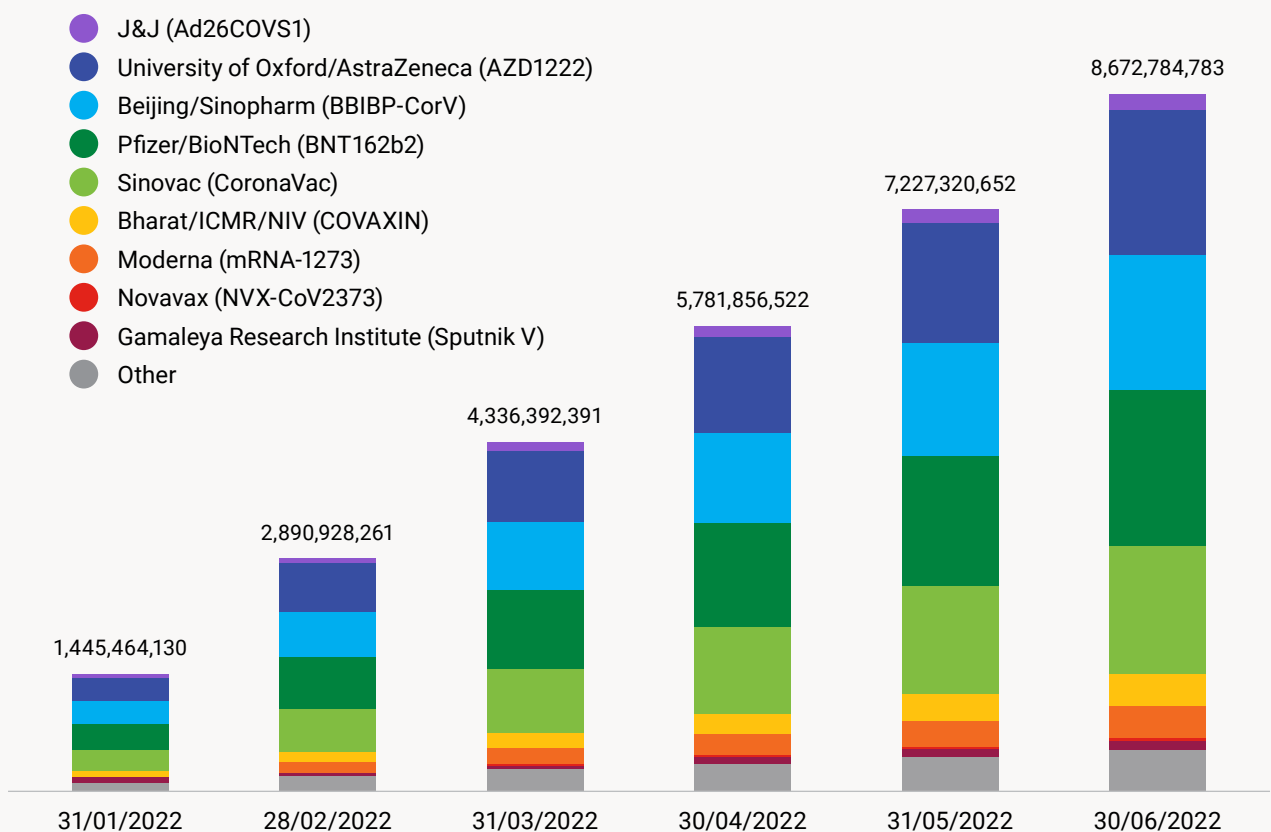
A young girl with dark hair, wearing a pink dress and a purple headband with a white flower, is focused on playing with colorful building blocks. She is sitting on the floor, and a white umbrella with pink floral patterns is visible in the background. The text "Ten trends and their implications for children" is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

Ten trends and
their implications
for children

1. The pandemic's uncertain trajectory — whereby the harmful effects on children continue to accumulate and are treated as a second-order issue

While 2021 started with a sense of optimism as a suite of COVID-19 vaccines was rolled out pointing to a potential exit from the pandemic, the year ended with the spectacle of a grossly inequitable global distribution of vaccines and the emergence of the Omicron variant. It is now understood that COVID-19 will become endemic. The question is not how soon the virus will be eradicated, but how soon we will be able to mitigate its effects sufficiently such that it will no longer disrupt lives. As 2022 begins, we are not there yet.

FIGURE 2: COVID-19 VACCINATION DOSE PRODUCTION FORECASTS FOR 2022



Source: Airfinity, forecast from 16 December 2021

Efforts to control the pandemic have focused on expanding the global vaccine roll-out. With the rise of Omicron, that strategy loses some of its force, with the risk of new variants arising in immuno-compromised populations and animals remaining ever-present. Nevertheless, we are unlikely to see a pivot from this strategy in the near term.

2021's vaccine roll-out was defined by a supply constraint, but that constraint is now lifting – even with the renewed demand for boosters and vaccines for children. More than 8 billion doses are expected to be produced in the first 6 months of 2022. That should, in theory, be sufficient to provide all countries, including the 92 low and lower-middle income countries that rely on subsidized provision via COVAX, enough vaccines to cover at least 70 per cent of their populations by mid-2022, as per a G20 target. Supply constraints may persist longer for syringes than doses.

As the supply constraint for vaccines lifts, the demand constraint will become binding. Several countries with low coverage are not ready to receive and roll out vaccines at scale in terms of regulation, planning, supply chain and waste management, staffing, safety and monitoring. As of the end of October 2021, 24 countries were judged to be constrained by absorption capacity. For the poorest countries, cost is an important element. In sub-Saharan Africa, the administrative cost of providing a COVID-19 vaccine to each individual, on average, exceeds total government health expenditure per person each year by 50 per cent. For some countries – South Sudan, Cameroon, Central African Republic – vaccine costs are 4 to 5 times public health expenditure. While mismanaged roll-outs and social media-fueled disinformation campaigns have already demonstrated their capacity to exacerbate hesitancy, resistance tends to be responsive to efforts to persuade otherwise, as the majority of people lack firm beliefs about vaccines one way or the other. A 2020 Gallup poll found that in 20 of 117 countries surveyed, a majority of people would decline COVID-19 vaccination, yet at least six of these countries have already vaccinated a majority of their population. The more important question is whether concerted efforts to vaccinate populations will be mobilized everywhere.

Without a concerted effort in each country, the G20 vaccination target looks out of reach. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation forecasts a drop-off in global vaccination coverage persisting into 2022, with coverage in sub-Saharan Africa expected to increase at only 2 percentage points a month. A dose surplus and significant wastage will likely emerge shortly.

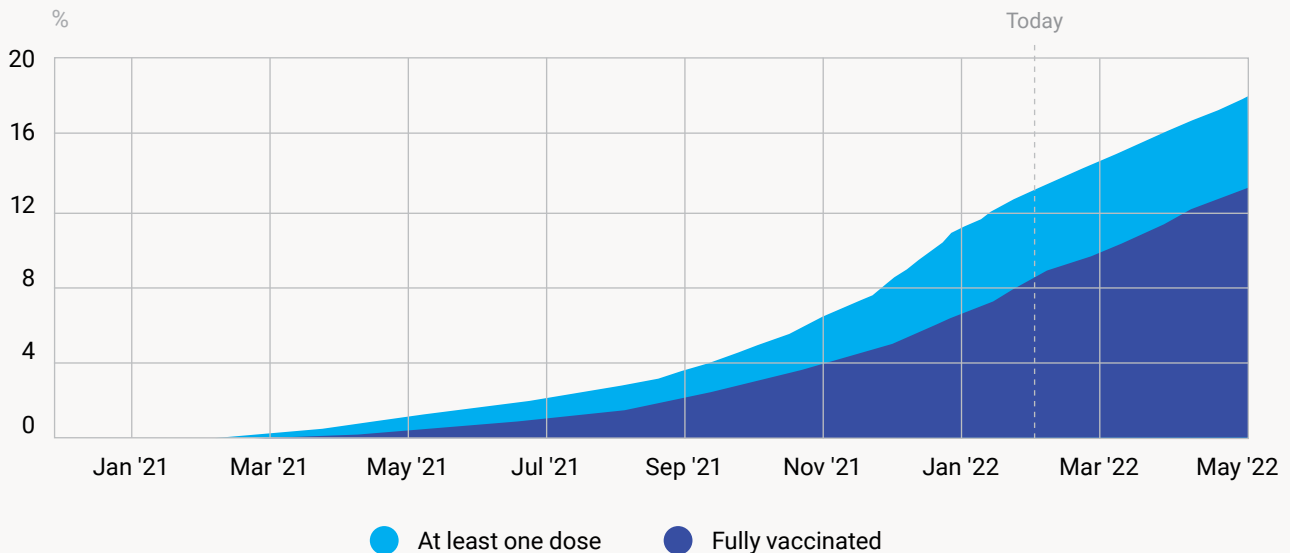
Alongside vaccines, treatments will become a critical tool in enabling humanity to live with COVID-19 in 2022. Results from medical trials of the Pfizer drug, Paxlovid, show a remarkable 88 per cent reduction in the likelihood of hospitalization or death. As with vaccines in 2021, the challenge will be to provide treatment at scale. Pfizer plans to produce only 120 million courses in 2022 – a tiny fraction of potential

"The fact of the matter remains that the two primary institutions for children in their lives, which are the family and school ... those have been directly affected to orders of magnitudes that we have not seen [before] ...that destabilization ...is really the starting point for a framework to analyze the impact of the pandemic on children and youth."

Prof. Prachi Srivastava,
Western University

global demand. Pfizer has established a license agreement with the UN Medicines Patent Pool which offers the possibility of production via third parties, though this is likely to only partially close the gap to demand in 2022, portending a potential new episode in global inequity.

FIGURE 3: FORECAST COVID-19 VACCINE COVERAGE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



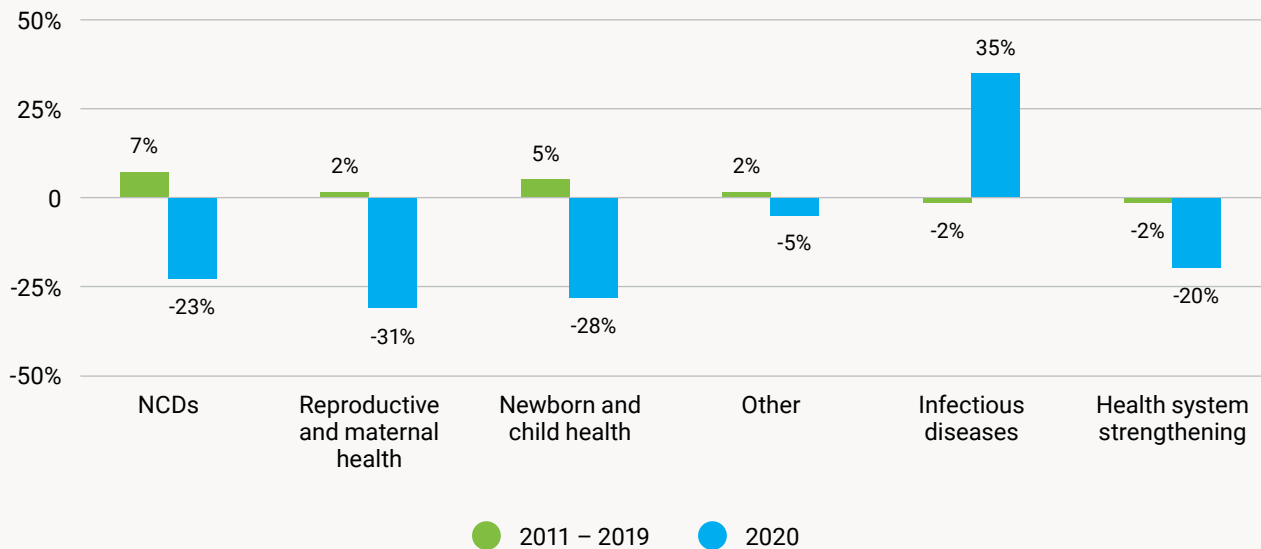
Source: [Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, forecast from January 2022](#)

COVID-19 has exposed the lack of pandemic preparedness and the inadequacy of a global response system that relies on voluntary mechanisms, complex governance and inadequate financing. In 2022 two processes will run in parallel to establish a new health governance for pandemics: first, a review of the existing international binding measures for preventing the spread of infectious diseases (the International Health Regulations); and second, the development of a new instrument to be drafted by an intergovernmental negotiation body by August 2022. Key sticking points in both processes will be equity, access to outbreak sites, requirements for sharing information on new pathogens, and sharing technology. Any steps to establish a more effective global governance of pandemics will benefit children.

Prospects for children in 2022 will continue to hinge foremost on the pandemic and how it is managed. Deaths of [parents and caregivers](#), overwhelmed health systems, intermittent school closures, and disruption to free movement and markets will continue to affect children's well-being – most severely in the worst-affected countries, but in others too given the pandemic's spillover effects. A particular concern is the reallocation of resources away from children to finance the pandemic response – a pattern that is already evident in foreign aid for global health.

The pandemic risks ushering in broader distortions in the allocation of health resources. A consolidation of disparate health investments, informed by calculations of value for money, is sorely needed.

FIGURE 4: REALLOCATION OF GLOBAL HEALTH FINANCE AWAY FROM CHILDREN PROMPTED BY COVID-19



Note: Infectious diseases include funding for COVID-19, malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and other infectious diseases. Other includes other health focus areas and unidentified areas.

Source: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation via the [Council on Foreign Relations](#)

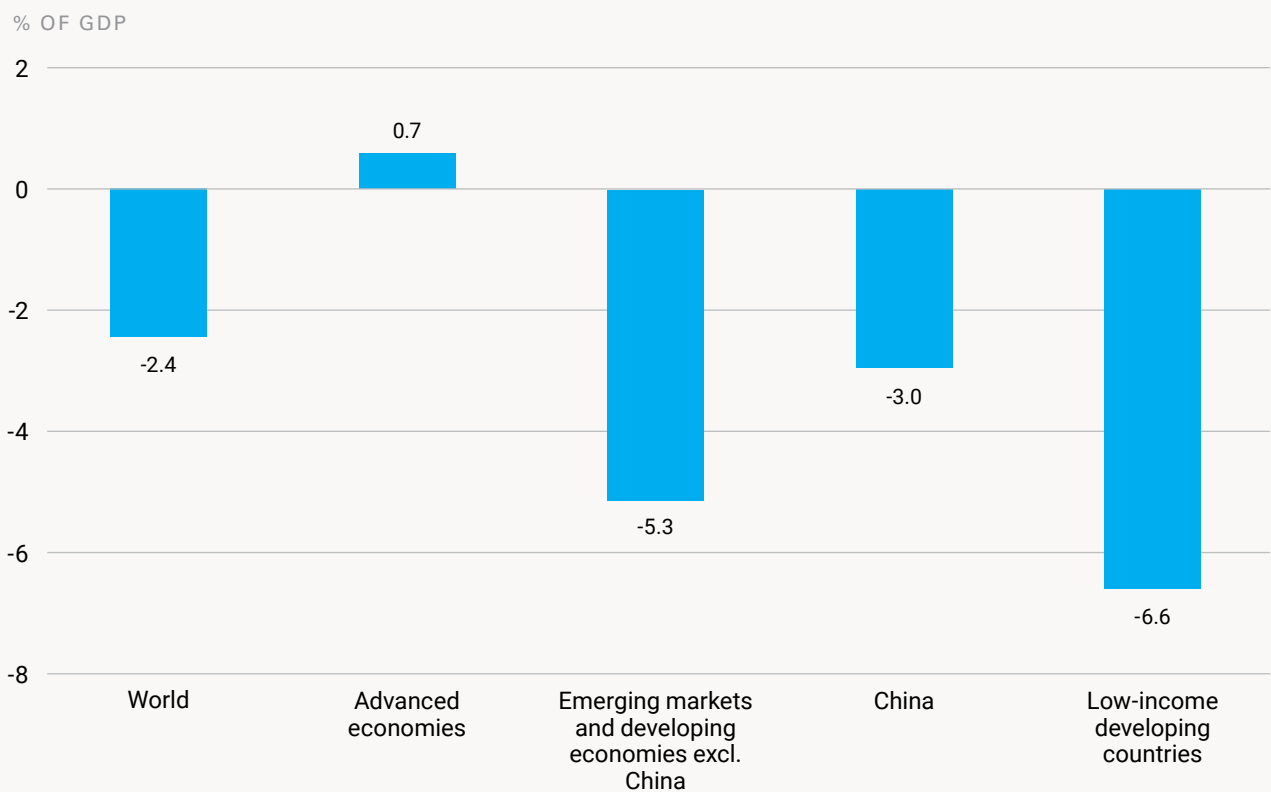
When COVID-19 becomes endemic and demand for vaccines subsides, some of the infrastructure used for pandemic response could be put to new uses that benefit children. Specifically, there is an opportunity to harness mRNA technologies to drive the next revolution in child survival. The first mRNA-vaccine candidates for tuberculosis, malaria and HIV are expected to enter clinical trials in 2022 and 2023, around the time when the recently approved recombinant protein-based malaria vaccine (RTS,S) begins to be rolled out in sub-Saharan Africa. This opportunity should be seized.

The global community urgently needs to expand the goals of global pandemic response beyond minimizing the spread of any infectious disease to also minimizing the damage that disease places on society. COVID-19 has demonstrated the scope and scale of such damage – including on children’s schooling, safety, nutrition, mental health and poverty – and the grave consequences of treating these as second-order concerns. An immediate priority is to invest in restoring losses caused by the pandemic.

2. A K-shaped, uneven global economic recovery — with public investments for children at risk where governments turn to austerity

The global economy in 2021 was characterized by divergent fortunes along familiar lines. Disparities in access to vaccines and fiscal policy support drove an early and rapid recovery in rich countries while developing countries, especially the poorest, have continued to languish.

FIGURE 5: IMPACT OF PANDEMIC ON ECONOMIC TRAJECTORIES



Note: Bars show the difference in real output four years after the crisis and anticipated output for the same period prior to the crisis for the indicated regional group. All estimates from January 2022.

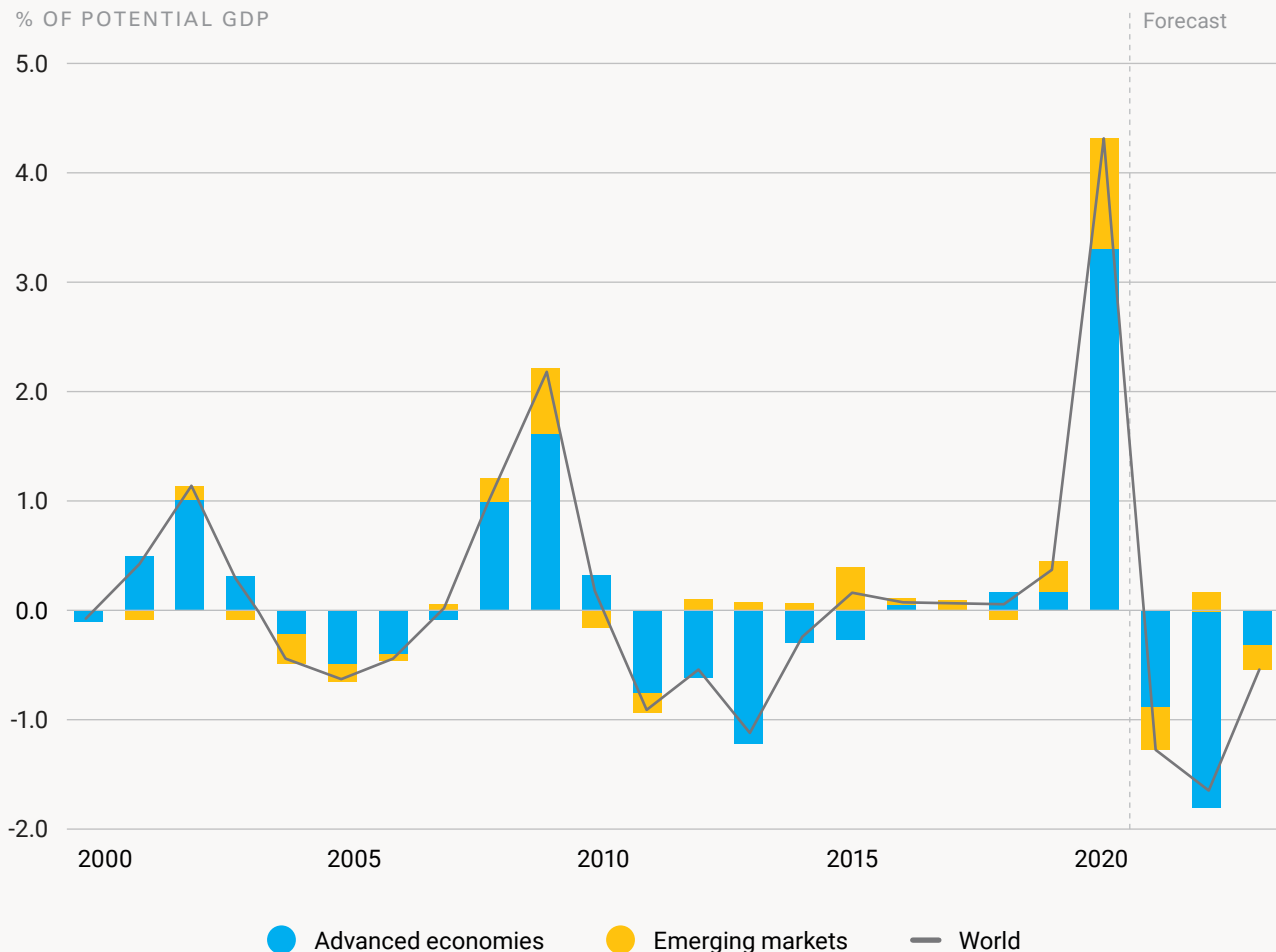
Source: [IMF](#)

Those disparities will lessen in 2022, but some aspects will endure.

Economic recovery in high-income countries will slow but growth rates are expected to remain above trend in 2022, even factoring in further disruptions from the pandemic, enabling a full return to their pre-pandemic trajectory this year. Many developing countries should also see a strong recovery, though not all. A slowdown in China, attributable to problems in the property market, will weaken an important engine of global growth. China is also more prone to future lockdowns so long as it sticks to its

zero-case approach to containing the pandemic. Several developing countries, especially the poorest, are exposed to ongoing gyrations in energy and food markets. The economic outlook for low-income countries remains especially bleak and furthest from the pre-pandemic trend.

FIGURE 6: FISCAL IMPULSE

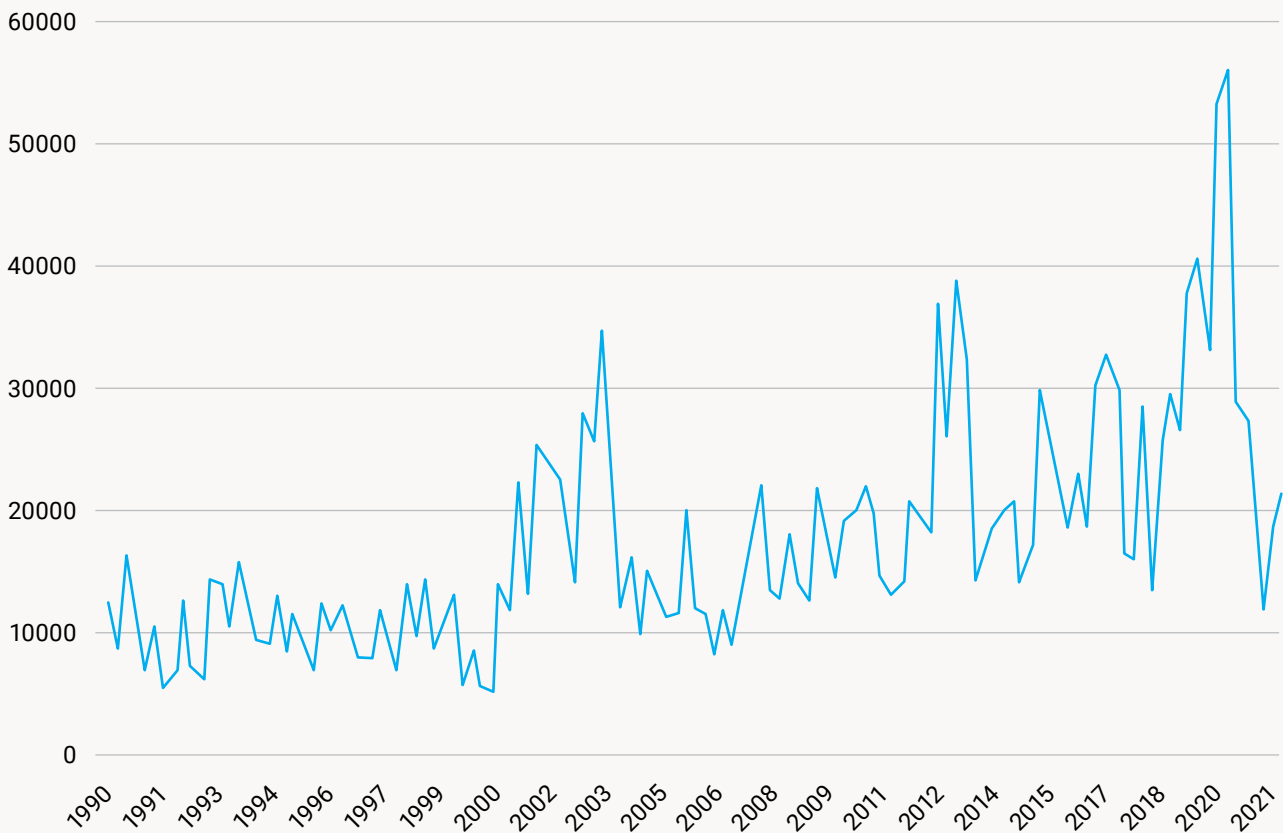


Source: Oxford Economics/Haver Analytics via [The Daily Shot](#)

Recoveries, especially in developing countries, can be undermined by the premature withdrawal of policy support required by fiscal constraints. Such measures put at risk public services for children, including the expanded social protection measures that have served as a lifeline to many families.

Despite the Omicron variant, uncertainty is down from its peak. Nevertheless, a flat yield curve captures ongoing risk and a more modest medium-term economic outlook. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that a prolonged impact from COVID-19 would reduce global income by over US\$5 trillion over the next five years relative to its baseline projection.

FIGURE 7: WORLD UNCERTAINTY INDEX



Note: The WUI is computed by counting the percent of word "uncertain" (or its variant) in the Economist Intelligence Unit country reports. The WUI is then rescaled by multiplying by 1,000,000. A higher number means higher uncertainty and vice versa. For example, an index of 200 corresponds to the word uncertainty accounting for 0.02 percent of all words, which – given the EIU reports are on average about 10,000 words long – means about 2 words per report.

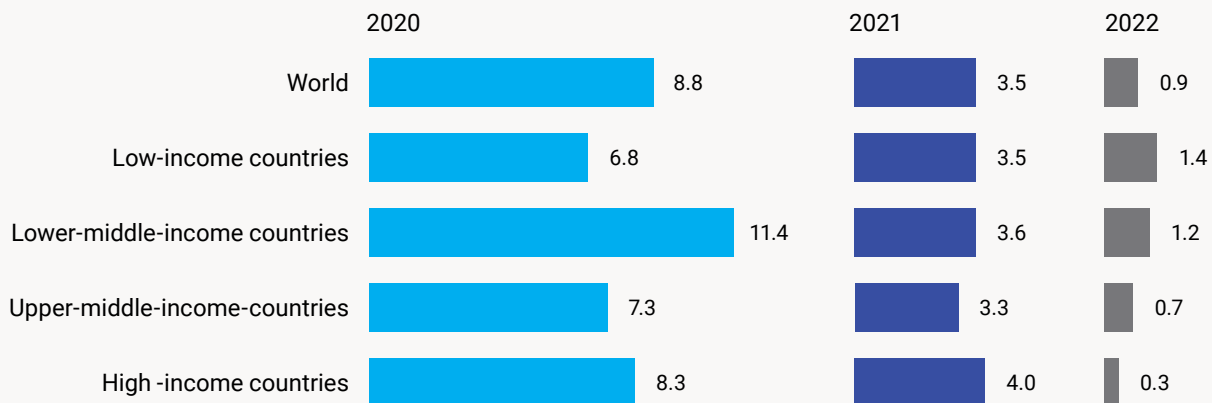
Source: [World Uncertainty Index](#)

The above disparities are also reflected in labour markets. The COVID-19 shock hit labour markets hard, with women and young people most affected. Women accounted for 38.9 per cent of total employment before the pandemic but comprised 47.6 per cent of employment losses in 2020. Youth represented 13 per cent of total employment in 2019 but comprised 34.2 per cent of the 2020 decline in employment. Those groups disproportionately hit are taking longer to recover. Moreover, pandemic-related disruptions to contact-intensive sectors have caused the labour market recovery to lag the output recovery in most countries.

While unemployment rates are expected to normalize in 2022 for developed countries, they are forecast to remain elevated in developing countries. International Labour Organization (ILO) modelling points to the direct connection between pandemic response and labour market outcomes: in a 'fair vaccination' scenario in which vaccines are

distributed equitably, low-income countries would see hours worked increase by 2 percentage points relative to the pre-crisis benchmark, effectively closing the gap in working hours with high-income countries.

FIGURE 8: WORKING HOUR LOSSES ATTRIBUTED TO COVID-19, ESTIMATES AND BASELINE FORECASTS



Note: Working-hour losses are expressed as a percentage difference between the projected number of total hours worked assuming that there had been no pandemic and total hours worked.

Source: ILO

2022 should see the emergence of green investment as a major growth engine. Electric vehicle sales are expected to more than double while renewables are expected to account for 95 per cent of new power generation over the next five years.

Mitigating economic harm remains a critical priority for children, not least those in the poorest households. Families and children and the goods and services on which they depend must be put at the centre of recovery packages and protected from widely-anticipated fiscal adjustments. Without that, the poorest will resort to negative coping strategies: ILO models, for example, forecast a rise in child labour of 8.9 million by the end of 2022. Active labour market policies, including support to re-enter education, training and employment, have proven to be powerful tools to protect young people from long-term exclusion from the labour market in previous crises and should be deployed.

3. Global inflationary pressures — weakening the purchasing power of families, with particular concern regarding the prices of energy and food

A combination of factors contributed to global inflationary pressures emerging in 2021. Demand rebounded strongly in rich economies, supported by exceptional fiscal and monetary measures. Supply disruptions caused by the pandemic and climate change, and a pandemic-induced shift in consumer spending patterns worked their way through markets. This was most visible in global shipping delays and semiconductor shortages. In the United States, where inflation has increased markedly, a sustained drop in labour-force participation has contributed to wage pressures.

These effects are expected to attenuate in the second half of 2022 as supply chains adapt, and fiscal and monetary measures unwind. There is already some evidence of adjustment: shipping rates are down although delays persist at ports, and the prices of lumber, ferrous metals and coal have all retreated from their 2021 peaks. There is no evidence of inflation having altered expectations, as reflected in a flat yield curve for United States Treasuries.

FIGURE 9: YIELDS ON US TREASURIES, BY DATE



Source: [FT](#)

Nevertheless, stress on supply chains remains substantial for now, and inventories in semiconductors, durable goods, and energy markets are very low. In such an environment, even moderate disruptions to production prompted by the Omicron variant, by an energy demand spike related to a severe winter, or other short-term shocks could further drive up prices. These shocks can have far-reaching spillover effects, as demonstrated by the drop in industrial production triggered by energy restrictions in East Asia in late 2021.

Inflationary pressures are not uniform. They differ across countries and sectors. Inflation has been greater in the United States than in Europe. Among emerging markets, China, Indonesia and Turkey have also seen rising prices. Food and energy markets have experienced the greatest increases.

This diversity heightens the risk of triggering the wrong policy response or unintended effects. An excessive response by Central Banks could suppress economic recovery while an insufficient response that allows prices to rise unrestrained would hurt the purchasing power of households. Inevitable interest rate rises in rich countries risk triggering an outflow of capital from developing countries and downward pressure on their exchange rates.

Rising inflationary pressure or a poorly managed policy response both pose risks for children, especially the most vulnerable.

Sustained pressure on food prices would have particularly negative consequences for households in low-income countries, where 50 per cent of consumption spending is on food, and the Middle East, which is disproportionately dependent on global food markets, importing 50 per cent of its food. Supply bottlenecks impacting humanitarian goods and other key commodities for children and households are also a concern. A well-managed, internationally-coordinated policy response to inflation is a critical factor in enabling developing economies to recover lost ground from the COVID-19 recession.

"When we think about...young people, youth...one of the things that...is important is the gig economy...a lot of young people work within the gig economy, which we know has...insufficient labor protection."

Sofia Nazalya, Human Rights Analyst, Maplecroft Verisk

4. Mainstreaming of digital currencies — demonstrating both the promise of greater financial inclusion and the need for new child safeguards

The financial technology revolution, led by the rise in digital and cryptocurrencies, gathered steam in 2021. Digital currencies gained widespread interest with 87 countries, representing over 90 per cent of the global economy, actively exploring a Central Bank Digital Currency – an increase from only 35 countries in May 2020. The market capitalization of cryptocurrencies oscillated wildly but ended the year above US\$2 trillion. Meanwhile, the need to disburse social and humanitarian cash transfers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the rate of digital financial inclusion – for instance, the number of active mobile money accounts in Latin America grew by a stunning 67 per cent in a year.

This revolution is expected to continue in 2022 when we should learn more about what future it will deliver. Applications of public blockchains, such as decentralized finance, are likely to reach greater maturity and present viable alternatives to traditional financial markets. The recently announced initiatives of Mastercard and Visa to offer crypto wallets to their clients hint at the speed with which cryptocurrencies could soon become widely accepted. Consumers seem ready to get on board: one survey indicates that 40 per cent of global consumers plan to use cryptocurrencies in 2022. Fintech companies will also push incumbents in the financial industry towards more financial inclusion, simplicity and efficiency. Those incumbents include governments.

A potential alliance between governments, large banks and investment firms against challenger banks and blockchain-based finance could arise in many countries. China's decision to implement a closely controlled and monitored digital currency that builds on many of the innovations, while declaring all cryptocurrency transactions illegal, offers one template for curbing the proliferation of private financial technologies in favour of public alternatives. India appears to be following suit by contemplating a ban on private cryptocurrencies. Others may look to bring cryptocurrencies into the fold of the financial industry and under the authority of financial regulators. The United States has proposed banning non-banks from issuing some types of cryptocurrency, while the European Union has drawn up draft rules to regulate those who service and issue crypto assets.

These developments will eventually require the emergence of national and international legal and regulatory frameworks. Developing countries will have to choose between adopting digital currencies of major economies, issuing their own and figuring out interoperability (the direction Tunisia appears to be moving in with the eDinar), or betting on decentralized cryptocurrencies and decentralized finance (as Ecuador has done).

As we wait to see what direction these trends take us in, the implications for children hang in the balance. The promise of greater financial inclusion offers significant benefits to the livelihoods of families around the world, including through more frictionless remittances and more instant, transparent and efficient social assistance programmes. On the other hand, unregulated cryptocurrencies pose a threat to the stability of financial systems, government revenues on which many child services depend, and children directly when they facilitate unregulated transactions that underpin child trafficking, sexual exploitation, the sale and purchase of content depicting child abuse, and the defrauding and extortion of children. Now is the time to begin incorporating cryptocurrency and digital currency child safeguards into online child protection initiatives.

5. The multilateral fallout from COVID-19 — testing states' ability to forge enduring solutions to many of the greatest threats affecting children's lives

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the ill health of multilateralism: from the repeated inability to raise the modest funds required for a joined-up global response, to G20 vaccination pledges not being honoured; and from a lack of cooperation on critical issues such as border control, to the flouting of the authority of global institutions. The crisis is not limited to health: the World Trade Organization appellate body, responsible for settling trade disputes, has been defunct since 2019 as member states refuse to appoint new officials. Yet the pandemic is unique in exposing the weakened spirit of multilateralism and its formidable cost. This stands in stark contrast to 2008 when a muscular multilateral response to the global financial crisis demonstrated that the system worked. A number of factors are blamed for this rapid deterioration – resurgent nationalism, global great power competition, a lack of faith in the multilateral system's efficacy and legitimacy – and serve as constraints to its renewal.

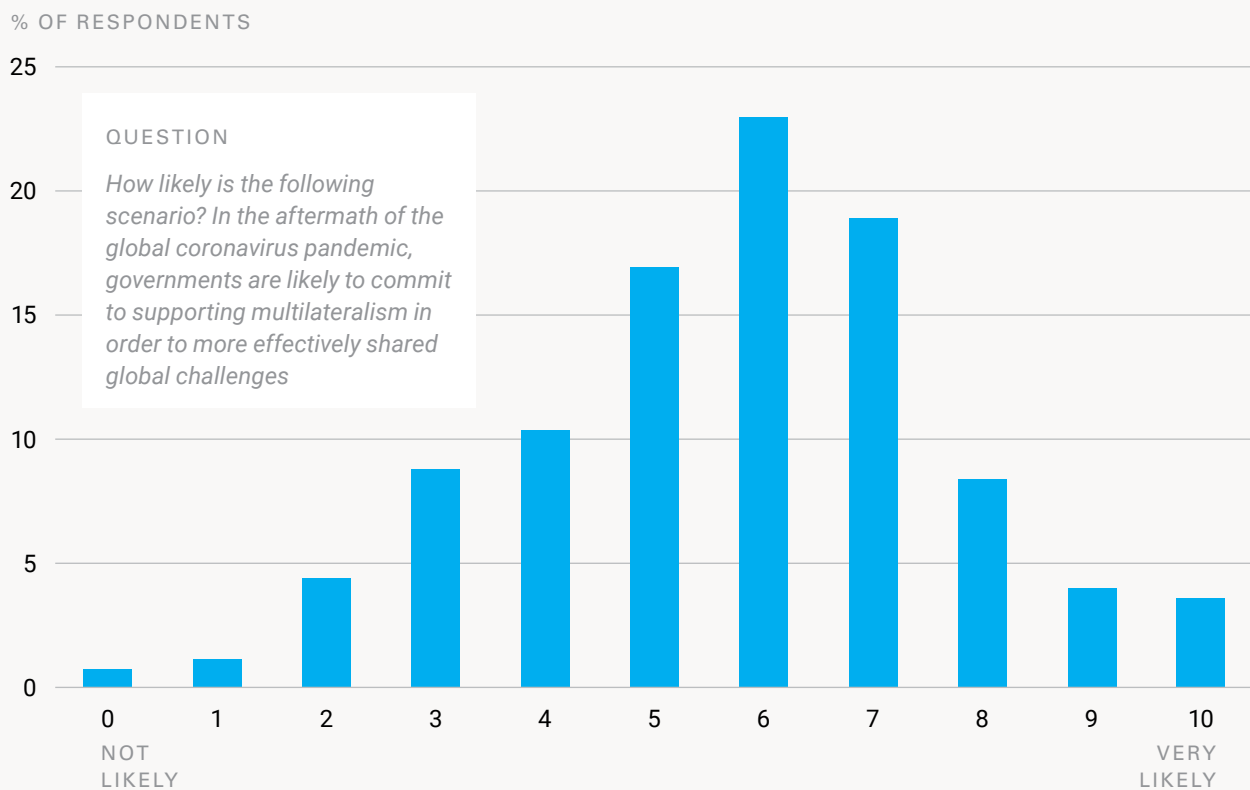
The irony is that the deterioration of multilateralism has occurred when it is needed more than ever. This was captured in a 2021 survey of global experts conducted by the Brookings Institution where 69 per cent of respondents reported that the state of multilateralism has worsened,

"We need to focus on more solidarity... nationalism is fed by media and misinformation."

Peter Ceretti, Senior Analyst, Eurasia Group

while over 80 per cent reported that the need for effective multilateralism has increased. This growing need reflects a world that is increasingly interconnected and whose prosperity increasingly hinges on the provision of global public goods. Survey respondents from the Global North and South alike were only moderately optimistic that COVID-19 will provide the necessary wake-up call for governments to recommit to supporting multilateralism. Looking further ahead, there is ambivalence as to whether the multilateral system is likely to function more effectively a decade from now than it does today, although pessimism is more common than optimism.

FIGURE 10: CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE OF MULTILATERALISM

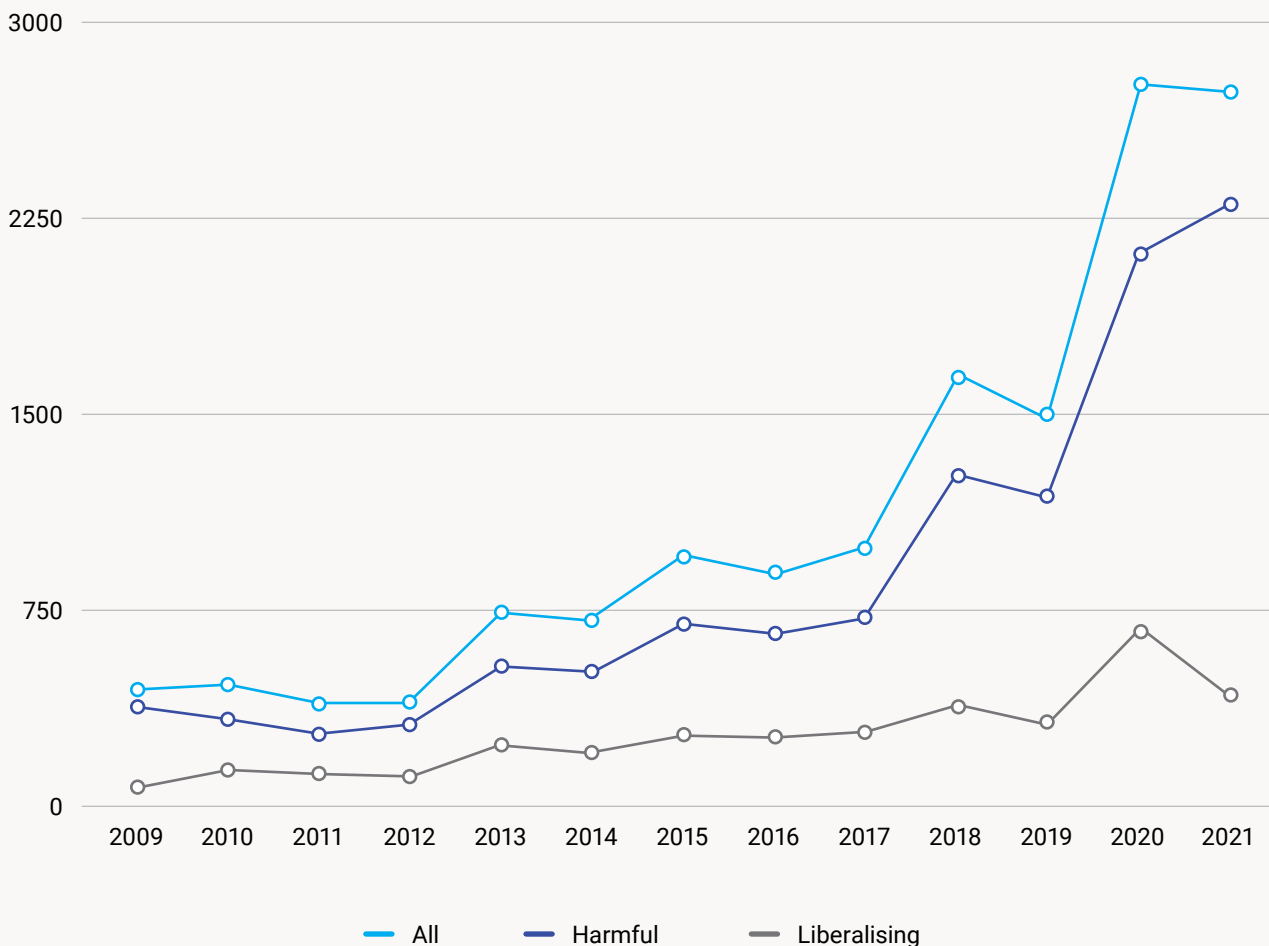


Source: [Brookings Institution](#)

The last decade has seen the rise of nationalists and populists who have contested elections on platforms seeking to address, or at least take advantage of, the fears of constituencies about the local impact of globalization and the surrender of sovereignty to supranational institutions. It is unclear whether this trend has peaked, but many of its protagonists remain in office and we should expect them to block actions to rebuild multilateral norms and institutions, or to weaken the system further. This tension between the need for global collective action and the aspiration to rebuild political communities behind national

borders is a defining challenge for today's policymakers. In areas such as trade, we're seeing geopolitical interests dominate a sphere that has traditionally been shaped predominantly by economic interests.

FIGURE 11: NUMBER OF STATE INTERVENTIONS IN GLOBAL TRADE



Source: [Global Trade Alert](#)

Notwithstanding these challenges, multilateralism has demonstrated a resilience of sorts. This includes the recent global agreement on minimum corporate tax rates, and the ratcheting up of national and sectoral commitments to decarbonize through voluntary steps engendered in the Paris Agreement on climate change. [Polling](#) suggests that views regarding the United Nations have recovered well in 2021 from historic lows.

That resilience includes the rise of 'minilateralism': collaboration often characterized by informal agreements – based on interpersonal relations and limited membership – in place of the authority of the formal multilateral system and institutions. Ideological and issue-based clusters of states will likely continue to develop in 2022, especially

around the topics of democracy and military affairs. This in part reflects the competition of ideas between democracy and illiberalism which permeates key multilateral institutions. Regional arrangements have been an important feature of the pandemic response – most notably in Africa, where the African Union has emerged as a leading negotiator and decision-making body. This shift will be reinforced as regional blocs seek to increase self-reliance in the production of vaccines and other strategically critical goods and services. The first steps toward this new arrangement should emerge in 2022.

FIGURE 12: PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION WHO HAVE A FAVORABLE VIEW OF THE UNITED NATIONS

	'04	'06	'07	'09	'11	'12	'13	'16	'19	'20	'21	'20-'21 change
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Italy	–	–	67	–	–	67	67	69	71	63	75	▲ 12
Japan	–	56	41	45	61	57	45	45	47	29	41	▲ 12
Germany	71	68	64	65	73	73	65	65	65	61	72	▲ 11
Sweden	–	–	79	–	–	–	–	82	80	77	84	▲ 7
Netherlands	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	74	70	64	71	▲ 7
Spain	–	60	63	61	66	57	50	55	63	61	67	▲ 6
Belgium	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	59	65	▲ 6
South Korea	–	–	74	79	–	–	84	–	82	69	73	▲ 4
Australia	–	–	–	–	–	–	63	66	60	61	65	▲ 4
Canada	–	–	64	70	–	–	62	68	69	68	71	▲ 3
France	67	72	66	74	76	72	63	59	62	60	63	▲ 3
Greece	–	–	–	–	–	37	36	41	48	–	50	▲ 2*
UK	74	65	58	67	73	68	64	68	68	70	69	▼ 1
U.S.	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	60	59	▼ 1

Note: *Greece change is from 2019 to 2021. Statistically significant changes in bold. Only publics for which trend data is available included. Prior to 2020, U.S. surveys were conducted by phone. See topline for results.

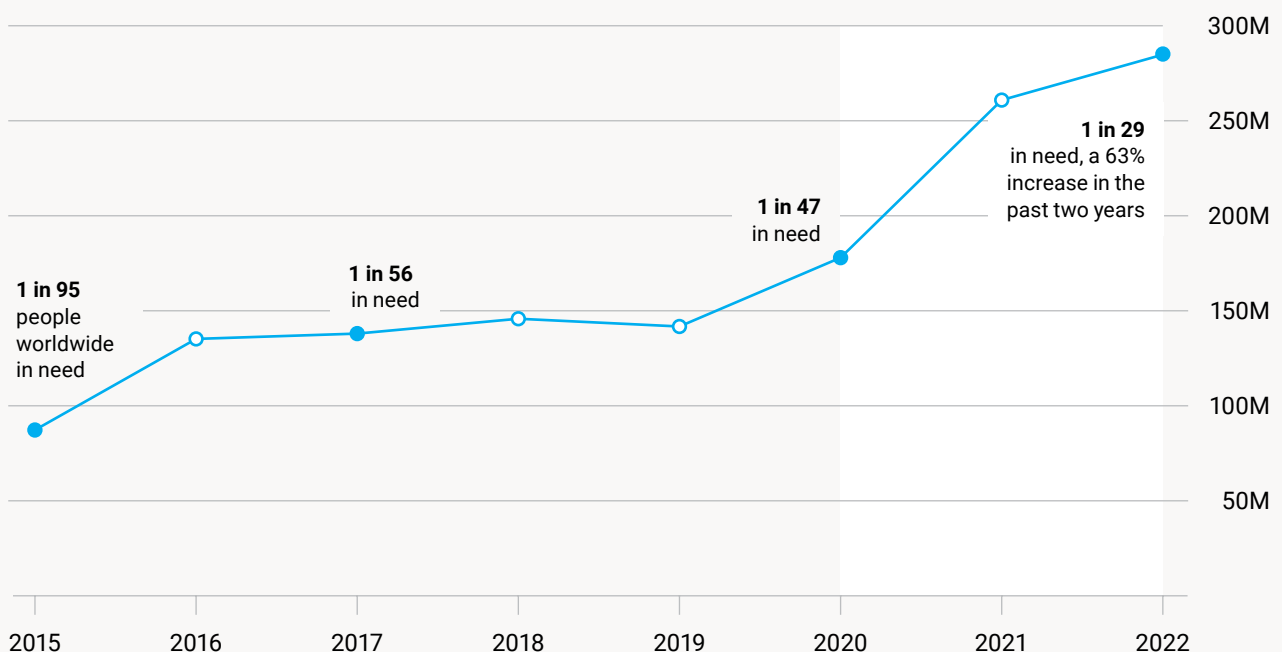
Source: [Pew Research Center](#)

The ability of countries to forge cooperative and enduring solutions is critical to so many of the ills affecting children's lives, from climate change to the pandemic. The poor health of multilateralism means not only that optimal solutions to those problems are unlikely to be realized, but also multilateral bodies intended to address them are stymied and risk descending into dysfunction. The challenge for each issue affecting children is to identify the most viable means of progress: whether working through existing institutions or some form of minilateralism. In this context, the ability to uphold global norms concerning children will remain complex.

6. Political instability and conflict — leading to record humanitarian needs for children and families, and greater demands by young people for political participation

Political instability and conflict have now become almost permanent features of some 20 countries in the world. According to the [International Rescue Committee Emergency Watchlist 2022](#) these countries were home to 800 million people, of which 200 million are in dire humanitarian need. The [World Bank](#) has estimated that in 2021 an additional 20 million people were living in extreme poverty in countries affected by fragility, conflict and violence than before the pandemic. The combination of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict and climate crisis is leading to record humanitarian needs, far exceeding historical estimates. In 2022, it is projected that 274 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection, while in 2021 and 2020 that number was 235.4 million and 167.6 million respectively. UNICEF estimates that 177.7 million children worldwide will be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2022 due to the impact of these factors. If these needs are not met, children from those countries face serious risks to their health, development and well-being.

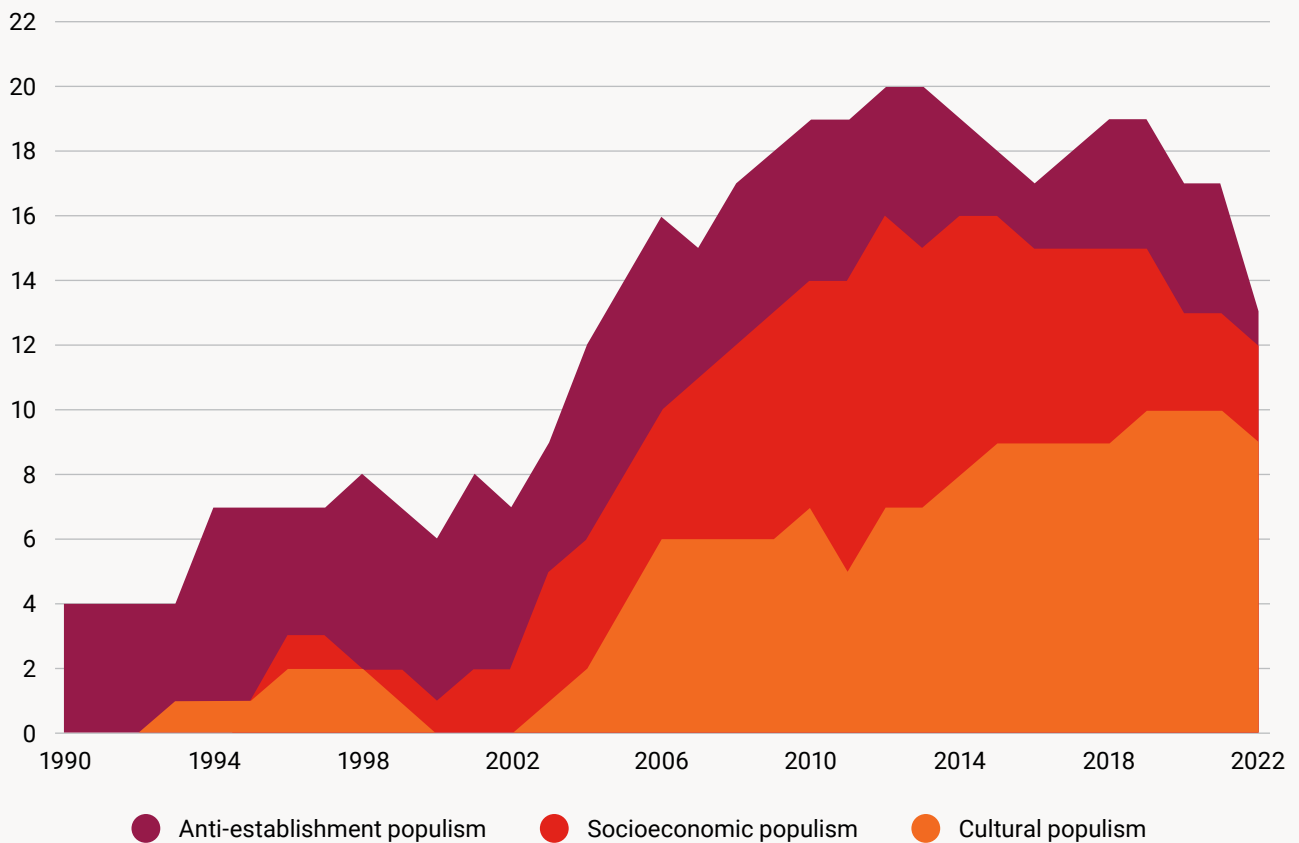
FIGURE 13: THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN NEED OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE



Source: [Global Humanitarian Overview 2022](#)

While authoritarian drift may be facing pushback in some countries, we should prepare for it to deepen in others. Globally, democracy has been weakening for the past 15 years. The [COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a further slide](#) with the [Economist Intelligence Unit](#) reporting that in 2020 only 8.4 per cent of the world's population lived under a full democracy while one third lived under authoritarian rule. The health of democracy depends on many factors, key among those being the population's trust in the system and relatedly whether democratic governments can deliver what is expected of them. The rise of thinly regulated digital media with its capacity to spread misinformation, and the blow of the COVID-19 pandemic make those factors harder to achieve.

FIGURE 14: NUMBER OF POPULIST LEADERS BY TYPE



Source: [Tony Blair Institute for Global Policy](#)

Populism will continue its appeal as a political mechanism for the left and right in high-profile elections in 2022. The number of countries with populist governments in power grew steadily over the past three decades, but that ascent now appears to have plateaued. The majority of populist governments in 2021 promoted nationalistic, xenophobic and anti-immigrant rhetoric, placing the children of migrant and ethnic minority communities at particular risk.

"With elections in a number of key countries across the regions next year, there is a great risk of youth being manipulated to generate violence. We need to find solutions for these countries to make sure children and youth are safe"

Christine Rashid, Strategic
Community Development
Organisation

A number of key elections will take place in 2022, with Brazil, France, Kenya, India and the Philippines – serving as political tests locally but also as broader measures of the durability of the competing trends of liberal democracy, populism and greater autocracy. Some may pose risks for protests, unrest and violence. While many elections were postponed, 2020 and 2021 also saw an acceleration of practices that helped make voting safer, more voter-friendly, accessible and convenient. In those countries where these changes can be made permanent, voter turnout may continue to increase as it did for 31 countries since the start of the pandemic.

Several countries are moving towards lowering the voting age.

Malaysia passed a bill that reduces the voting age from 21 to 18, paving the way for an increase of almost 8 million young voters by 2023. In Germany, the new coalition government is in agreement that lowering the age of enfranchisement to 16 should be a priority, in order to allow young voters a say in how the country is run. Other European countries, especially those where the youth-led global climate strike (#FridaysforFuture) movement has been very active, or where the population is aging rapidly, are likely to see more debates on lowering the voting age in the coming years.

Other, informal means of political participation will remain important to young people. Lowering the voting age can help catalyse the formation of voting habits at a younger age, while also ensuring a stronger representation of young people's opinions in political processes. However, younger people in many countries prefer informal over formal political activity, engaging instead in protests and demonstrations and other forms of civic activism. The number of protests and demonstrations has risen rapidly over the past 15 years – across all regions, and those led by young people and students have seen a seven-fold increase between 2006 and 2020. Whilst 2021 has shown a slight drop in the number of protests with numbers returning closer to levels seen in 2019, the overall trend of people taking to the streets to demand changes is likely to remain high. The majority of protests have been prompted by disappointment with political systems and a lack of trust in governments with regard to issues such as climate change, inequality, racism and corruption. Globally, youth satisfaction with democracy is declining – not only in absolute terms, but also relative to how older generations felt at the same stage in life.

Fragility, democratic backsliding, erosion of institutions and restriction of political and civil rights can have a severe impact on children and young people. Their civil rights, such as freedom of expression and the right to assembly can be negatively affected. Their rights to privacy may be challenged through state surveillance. In the most severe cases, children can be directly targeted or killed in armed conflicts or riots or face detention and violence for the expression of their beliefs

and participation in protests. Keeping children safe during periods of political instability and conflicts, and allowing them to participate in meaningful ways in the political life of their countries, presents a major challenge in 2022 and beyond. Civic education, provision of special voting arrangements or lowering of voting age, and greater opportunities for children and young people to contribute to policy discussions, can all play a role in meeting that challenge.

7. Renegotiation of social contracts post COVID — requiring more broad-based social protection measures and improved levels of trust

The year 2021 saw governments around the world breaking with tradition when it came to social spending and mitigating risks spurred by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As of January 2022, there were a total of 3,856 social protection measures planned and implemented globally since the outset of the pandemic. Those countries that spent more on a range of safety-net programmes pre-COVID-19 could more readily deploy their existing programmes to deal with emergency measures, while those countries with widespread use of digital payments and relevant data linked to identities were able to reach large numbers of people quickly with increased accuracy. A few countries built new digital systems rapidly in order to respond to COVID-19, including Togo which was able to reach 12 per cent of its population with a digital cash transfer programme which uses machine learning, geospatial analytics and mobile phone data and was built in just ten days.

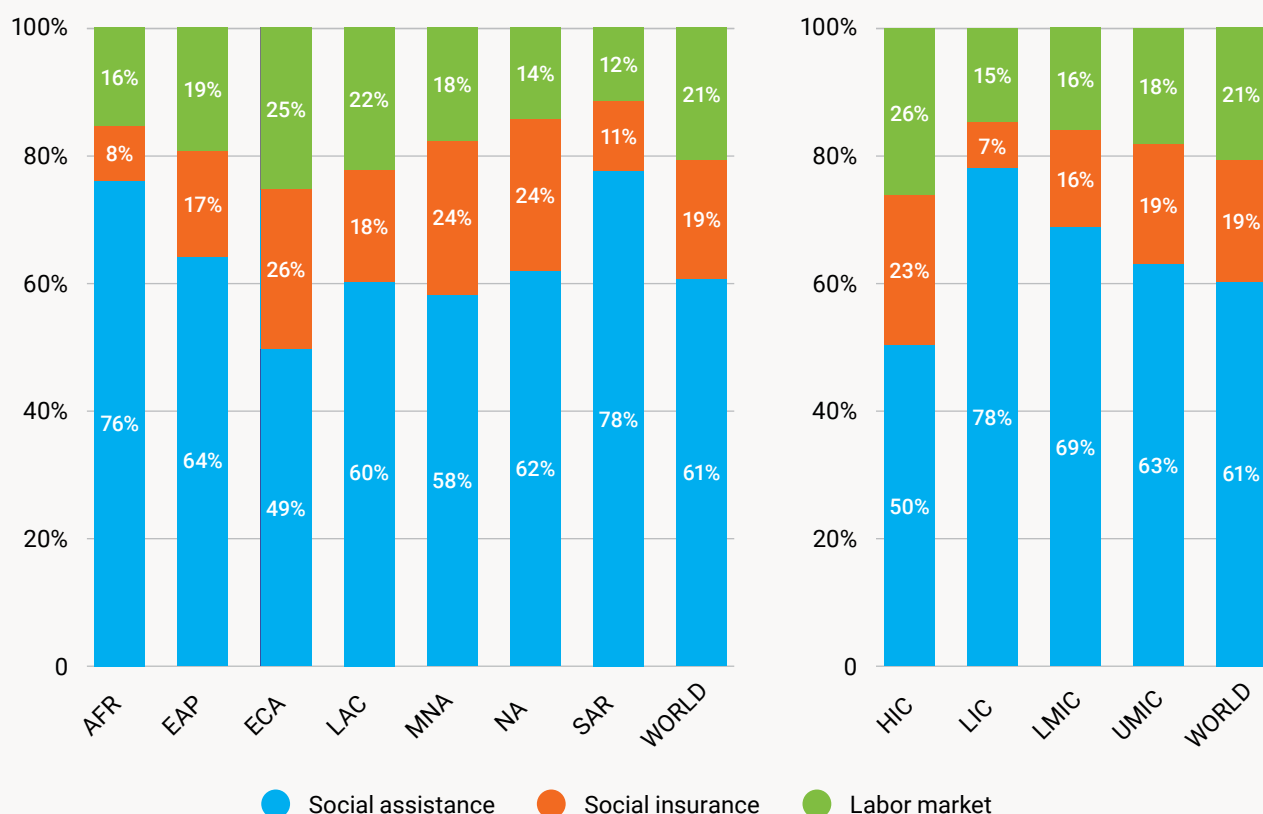
COVID emergency measures also included important changes to childcare provision. For example, Australia made childcare free in the early stages of the pandemic, while Italy introduced childcare vouchers. South Korea, Suriname and the United States increased the availability of childcare facilities for unemployed parents and low-income families and the United Kingdom kept schools open to the children of staff working in essential services during lockdown. Furthermore, COVID emergency measures included changes to primary health-care provision that benefited children as well as a greater interest in and focus on mental health as a key concern particularly for adolescents. Half of OECD countries have strengthened youth mental health services and/or increased financing in 2020 and 2021.

The question remains whether these positive developments will now be built upon, sustained, or rolled back in the coming years. History has taught us that increases in social spending rarely disappear completely after a major crisis. However, with many countries facing fiscal deficits and large debts, it is uncertain which policy direction governments will take going forward.

"When we think about...young people, youth...one of the things that...is important is the gig economy...a lot of young people work within the gig economy, which we know has...insufficient labor protection."

Sofia Nazalya, Human Rights Analyst, Maplecroft Verisk

FIGURE 15: COMPOSITION OF SOCIAL PROTECTION RESPONSES BY COMPONENTS IN REGIONS AND COUNTRY INCOME GROUPS



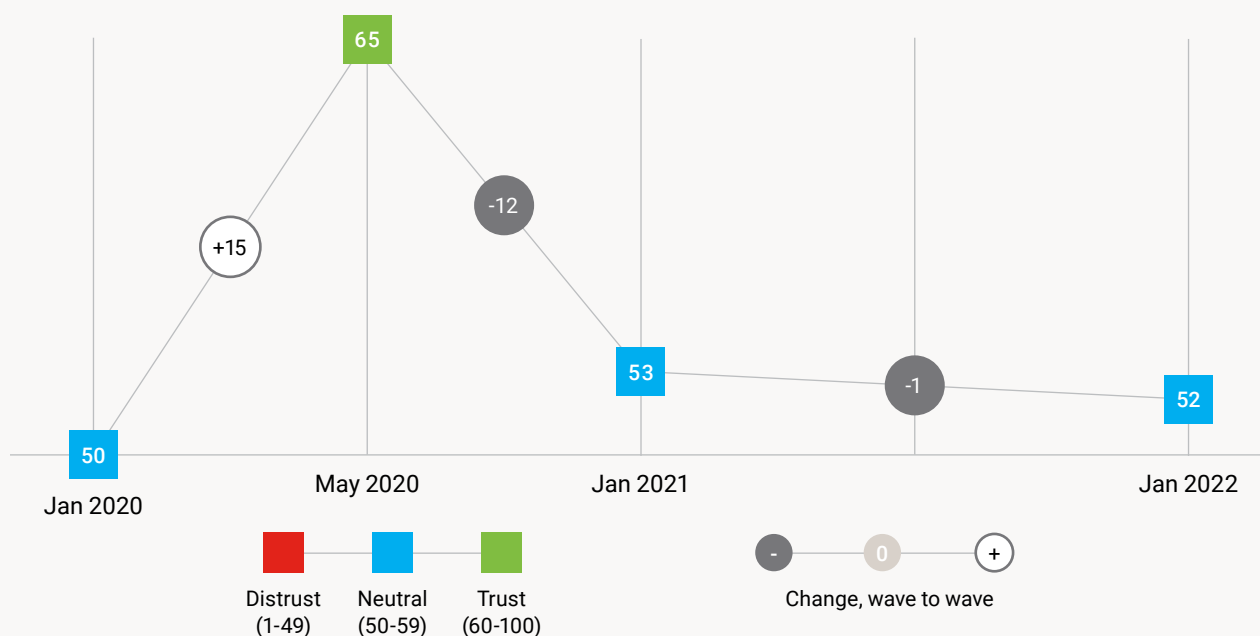
Note: Abbreviations: AFR = Africa, EAP = East Asia and Pacific, ECA = Europe and Central Asia, LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean, MNA = Middle East and North Africa, NA = North America, SAR = South Asia, HIC = High income country, LIC = Low income country, LMIC = Lower middle income country, UMIC = Upper middle income country

Source: World Bank (forthcoming)

Moreover, the social protection and other measures introduced during the pandemic offer only a first step in bringing about the kind of changes societies have been demanding – fairness, equality, participation and social cohesion. To guarantee at least a basic level of social security through a nationally defined social protection floor, the [World Social Protection Report](#) estimates that lower-middle-income countries would need to invest an additional US\$363 billion, while low income countries a further US\$78 billion, equivalent to 5.1 per cent and 15.9 per cent of their respective GDPs. Children continue to be poorly covered by existing social protection instruments, as [only 26.4 per cent of the world's children](#) were covered by a child or family benefit, with regions with the largest share of children in the population having some of the lowest coverage. Those instruments also favour the elderly over the young: [national expenditure on social protection](#) for children equates to only 1.1 per cent of GDP compared to 7 per cent of GDP spent on pensions.

In the early stages of the pandemic, trust in governments improved, particularly in countries where they were seen to be disseminating clear messages and providing fair emergency relief. Opinion polls conducted by the Edelman Trust Barometer showed that this brief uptick did not last long, indicating that people expect more from their governments than temporary policy measures to fight the pandemic. This decline is particularly evident among youth. Evidence suggests that being exposed to epidemics during late adolescence and early adulthood is more likely to result in a long-lasting lack of confidence in political institutions, elections and leaders – and more so in democratic than autocratic countries.

FIGURE 16: LEVELS OF TRUST IN GOVERNMENTS



Note: Figures for May 2021 were based on a smaller subset of only 11 countries, rather than the 28 countries represented in the January 2021 and 2022 reports.

Source: Edelman Trust Barometer, 2021 and 2022

And yet young people are not despondent. UNICEF's global poll revealed that levels of optimism amongst young people about their prospects post-COVID remain stronger than for older age cohorts.



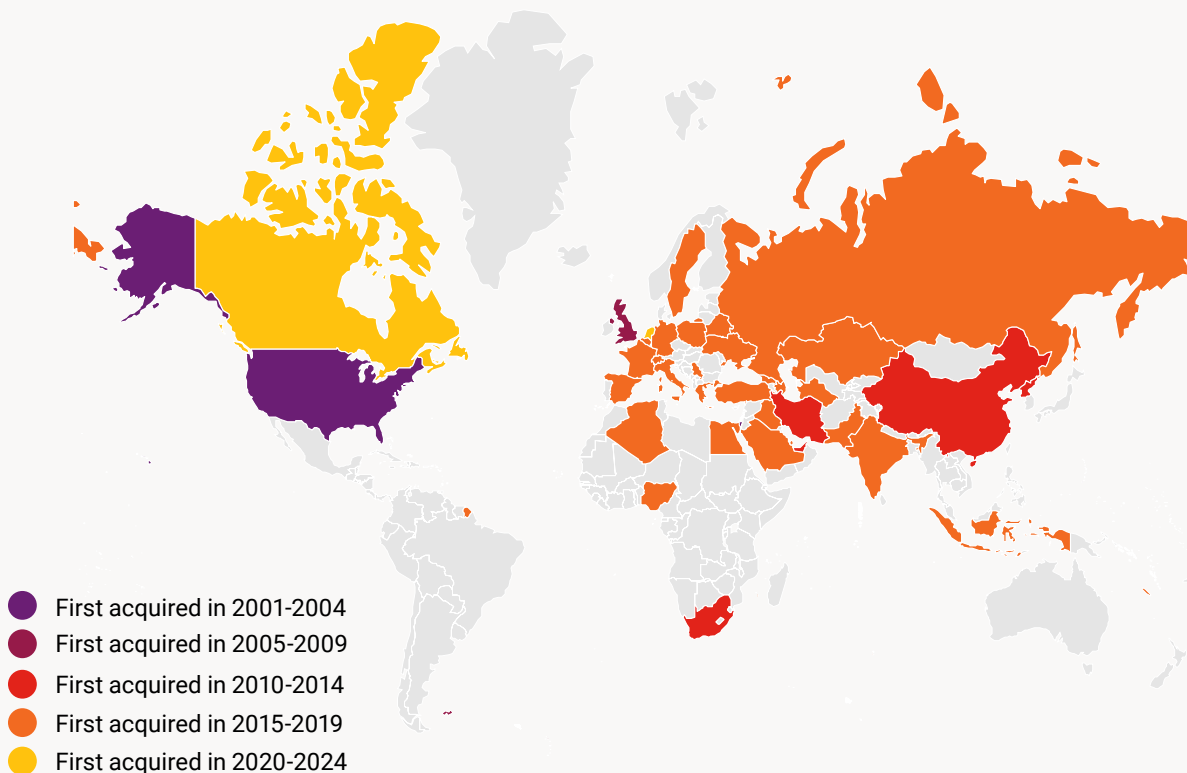
Explore findings from UNICEF's global poll with the **interactive microsite**

The COVID-19 recovery period is likely to prove a critical period for determining the future of social protection and more broadly revisiting the social contract. Children have a lot at stake – not least after two years of a pandemic when societies have implicitly asked the young to make sacrifices to protect the elderly – despite having less obvious opportunities to engage in bargaining with other societal groups.

8. Convergence of frontier technologies in modern warfare and politics — posing new threats to children and sparking negotiations for stronger regulations

In the past few years, state and non-state actors have been increasingly relying on cyber capabilities and frontier technologies to achieve their political and military objectives. These include advances in unmanned aerial vehicles or drones and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) as an accelerator across military platforms. These technologies are now converging into complex weapons' systems creating a complicated operational environment, and posing new and unanticipated risks to civilians and children. Political confrontation and warfare are also increasingly moving into cyberspace, with cyberattacks being carried out with alarming frequency and governments shutting down access to the internet to stifle political opposition.

FIGURE 17: COUNTRIES WITH ARMED DRONES



Note: This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers.

Source: [New America: World of Drones](#)

The use of drones as a cost-effective weapon of choice among warring parties is set to expand. In the last five years the deployment of armed drones in conflicts has played an increasingly significant role. Drone operations have already been carried out in at least 20 States in Africa, 9 of which involved the use of armed drones. Non-State groups have also employed armed drones. The cost of developing drones has been greatly reduced, making them easily available. Those used for war have increased capability in stabilization, navigation, visualization and image recognition technology. The technology required for fully autonomous drones that can hunt, target and kill people is now proven, creating the possibility of their widespread use.

Such weapons are poised to dramatically alter the nature of warfare. As governments continue to develop weapons' systems that integrate technological advances in robotics and artificial intelligence, serious and interrelated ethical, legal and technical questions are yet to be settled. There is a risk these systems could mistakenly target civilians, including children, due to a programming or an algorithmic error. The use of armed drones in conflict will continue to kill or hurt civilians and may have harmful psychosocial effects on particular populations, especially children.

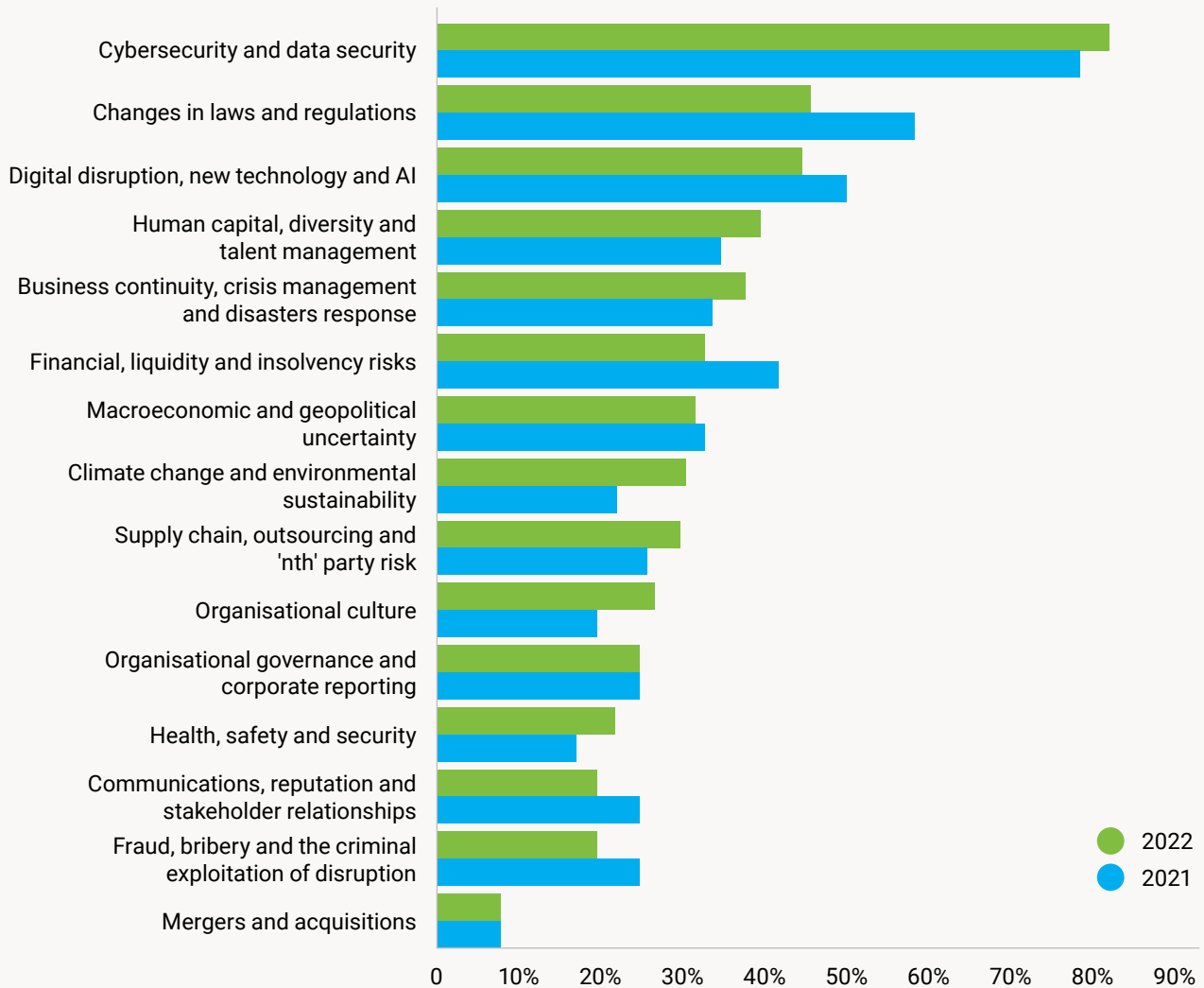
2022 is poised to be an important year in determining the regulation of autonomous weapons systems. So far 100 countries have called for meaningful human control of use of force and 31 have called for a complete ban on lethal autonomous weapons' systems. Even though negotiations during the sixth Review Conference on the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons failed to reach a consensus, it is possible that a separate process to regulate the use of lethal autonomous weapons will still happen under United Nations auspices.

The frequency and destructive impact of cyberattacks have spiked markedly in just the last three years and are expected to continue, with implications for critical infrastructure, installations and systems. The threat actors behind cyberattacks, their motivations and goals, and how they carry out their attacks are diverse. They range from government intelligence agencies, to cybercriminals operating for financial gain or teenage 'hacktivists' breaking into government intelligence files as a protest against certain policies. The line between these actors is increasingly blurry as government agents sometimes turn to criminal proxies as a tool of state power. In Europe, cybersecurity is seen as the number one threat facing organizations in 2022. These risks are unlikely to be solved without coordinated global policy.

Children can be directly or indirectly affected by these attacks. For example, the increased targeting of banks and payment institutions in the Global South puts families at risk of their savings being wiped out.

The targeting of public infrastructure can result in the interruption of critical services for children. [Cyberattacks on schools and educational institutions](#) have risen 25 per cent in Europe and 21 per cent in Asia during the pandemic.

FIGURE 18: TOP 5 RISKS REPORTED BY CHIEF AUDIT EXECUTIVES



Source: [Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors \(Chartered IIA\) Annual Ranking](#)

Deliberate internet shutdowns are becoming an increasingly prominent political tool by which governments seek to hamper legitimate protests and stem the flow of information. While usually invoked in the name of national security and peacekeeping, [shutdowns have most recently been used](#) to influence elections, weaken opposition voices and to control information on social media platforms. The effects of lockdowns extend far beyond the political sphere: interrupting economic activity, and limiting access to services, including for children.

The changing nature of warfare and use of digital and frontier technology as political tools demand stronger regulation and cooperation. Furthermore, existing efforts inadequately take into account implications for children, placing them at increased risk as innocent bystanders in adults' wargames. In 2022, child advocates will need to raise their calls for inclusion of appropriate safeguards for children so that these risks can be mitigated.

9. Growth of the digital economy — driving disparities in access, opportunities, skills development and protections that shape children's long-term prospects

Digitalization of societies and the data economy will continue to grow at a fast pace. In the last decade, digital technology has led to the development of many new products and services and driven productivity across all sectors of the economy. Simultaneously, we have seen a growing share of the global population interact with the digital economy, a trend that increased sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the share of the world's population using the internet rose from 54 per cent in 2019 to 63 per cent in 2021. It is forecast that global government information technology spending for infrastructure, software, digital services and data centres that underpin the sector will increase by 6.5 per cent in 2022. This digital growth has also led to a growing concentration of power among a small number of tech companies who are investing in all parts of the global data value chain – data capture, data analysis, data use for development of AI systems.

"There is a thin line between when it becomes security to surveillance."

Ayadi Mishra, CY@MG

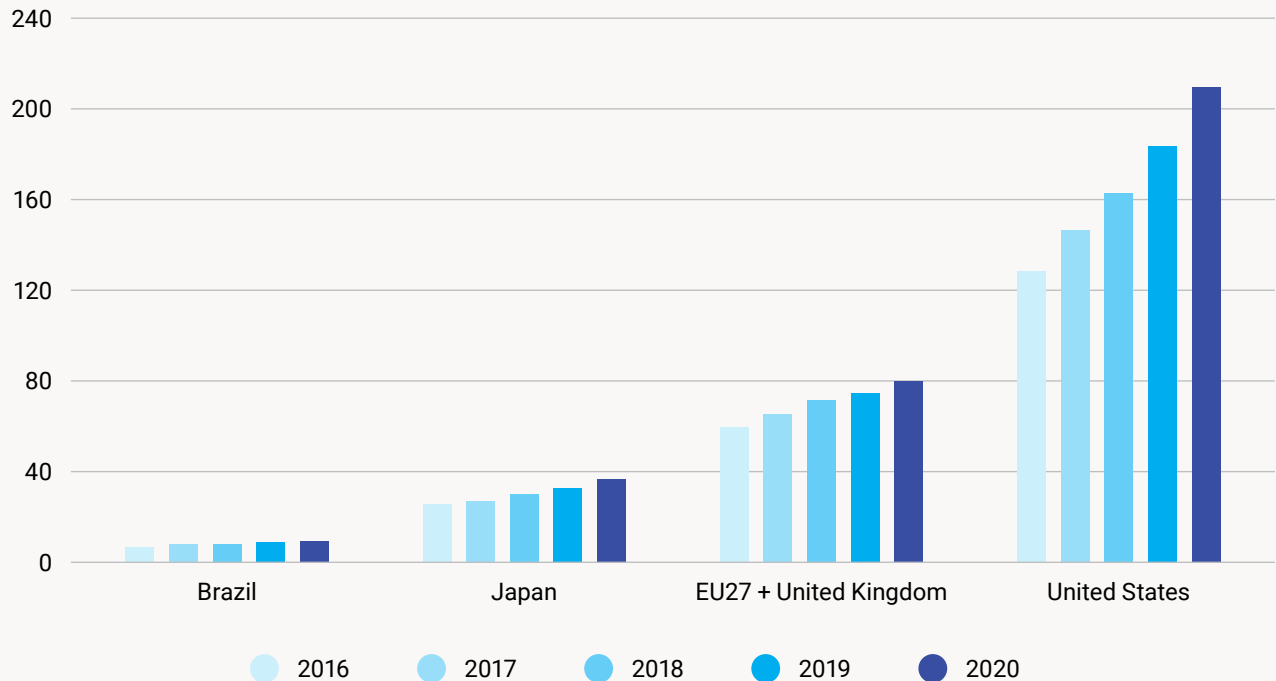
Data and data sharing, between private and public entities and between countries, constitute a large part of the digital economy. Digitally processed and aggregated data have become an important economic, political and strategic resource, and its use can further fuel innovation.

This growth in the digital economy is characterized by large imbalances and disparities, which will continue to widen. The large digital platforms that are competing for emerging technologies' dominance are concentrated in a few countries – Canada, China, the European Union, Japan and United States. Frontier technologies like AI require investment, infrastructure and talent to develop, so it is likely that the divide between those countries that are digitally strong and those that are not will grow, reinforcing existing inequalities in wealth, opportunity, education and health. Disparities in access to the internet and basic digital technologies that are still persistent in lower income countries will also mean that large sections of the global population, including children, will not be able to access government services, including for education

and health, which increasingly are being provided online. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), only 34 per cent of young people in the least developed countries are connected, as opposed to 99 per cent in developed countries.

FIGURE 19: DATA MARKET VALUE OF SELECTED ECONOMIES

EUROS
(MILLION)



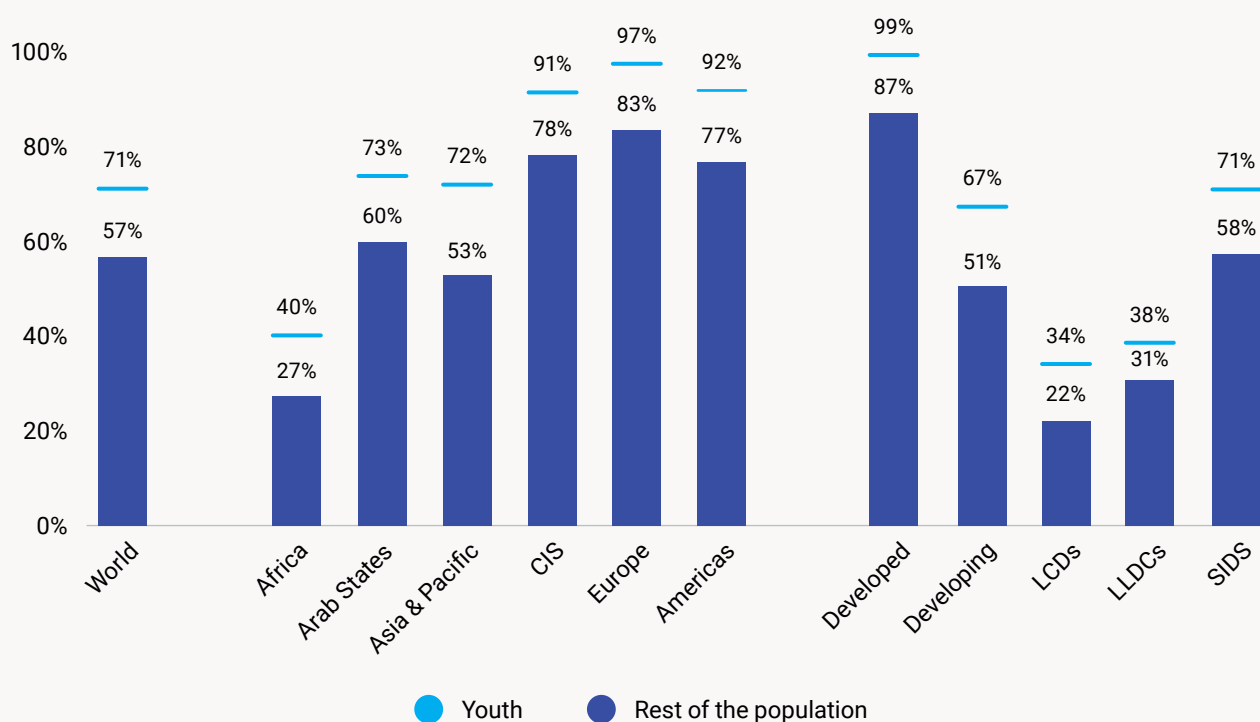
Source: [UNCTAD Digital Economy Report 2022](#)

Growth in the digital and data economies will lead to stricter regulatory environments due to concerns about privacy and data protection, including for children. Data collection and use have implications not only for trade and economic development but also for rights. This has led to a proliferation of regulatory frameworks around the world – some leaning more towards industry self-regulation, and others increasing government regulation of industry. While the [General Data Protection Regulation](#) represents the current gold standard in data protection regulation, an [expected tsunami](#) of national data protection laws may lead to different approaches to what governments expect of businesses in order to secure privacy of individual data collected and processed within their borders and how cross-border data flows should be governed. This lack of uniformity in data governance risks fragmentation of the internet, stifles cross-border collaboration and leads to further the dominance of certain companies and countries.



Read ***The Case for Better Governance of Children's Data: A Manifesto***

FIGURE 20: PERCENTAGE OF POPULATIONS USING THE INTERNET, 2020



Note: Youth = 15-24 year olds. Rest of the population refers to individuals aged below 15 and over 24.

Abbreviations: CIS = Commonwealth of Independent States, LDCs = Least developed states, LLDCs = Landlocked developing countries, SIDS = Small island developing States

Source: ITU. [Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2021](#)

In 2022 we expect to see the beginning of development of global data governance frameworks, that go beyond data protection and regulate cross-border data sharing and data economy. At the European level the recently adopted [Data Governance Act](#) will facilitate re-use of certain categories of public sector data in research and creation of new services and products. At the global level, the UN Conference on Trade and Development ([UNCTAD](#)) and other international bodies are calling for a global data governance framework that would standardise data-related rights and principles and deal with data as a global public good.

Digitalization, data processing and data flows are becoming increasingly crucial to children's lives across the globe. Digital platforms and services facilitate children's access to information and education, help them form communities and socialize with peers and receive public services. However, the implications for children of their data use are different to those of adults due to their age, maturity and capacity to understand how their data is used or to give meaningful consent. Children's data can be used to profile and track them for targeted marketing and advertising, including for products that are harmful to them. Inappropriate data use can violate children's privacy, discriminate against them, and impact



Read UNICEF's
2021 **Policy
Guidance on AI
for Children**

their choices and options for the future, while fragmentation of the data regulatory ecosystem is likely to lead to fewer data protections and opportunities for children.

In the past couple of years there has been an increase in child-related digital, AI and data protection guidance, policies and laws which provide both opportunities for safer child spaces online and the need for balanced and child rights-affirming regulations. 2022 is set to be a critical year in the maturity of those policies and laws, and for determining their adequacy in meeting the needs of today's children and ensuring equity.

10. Globalization of climate policies, finance and justice movements — can spark investments into programmes and sectors that better serve children

As the 2021 IPCC report alerted us, climate change is happening faster than previously understood, and the likelihood that the increase in global temperatures can stay within the Paris Agreement goal of 1.5°C is extremely slim. Climate change is increasingly recognised as only one of the contributors to the triple planetary crisis, along with nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste. The impact on children of these three crises will be profound affecting their health, nutrition and safety – particularly in the most vulnerable countries.

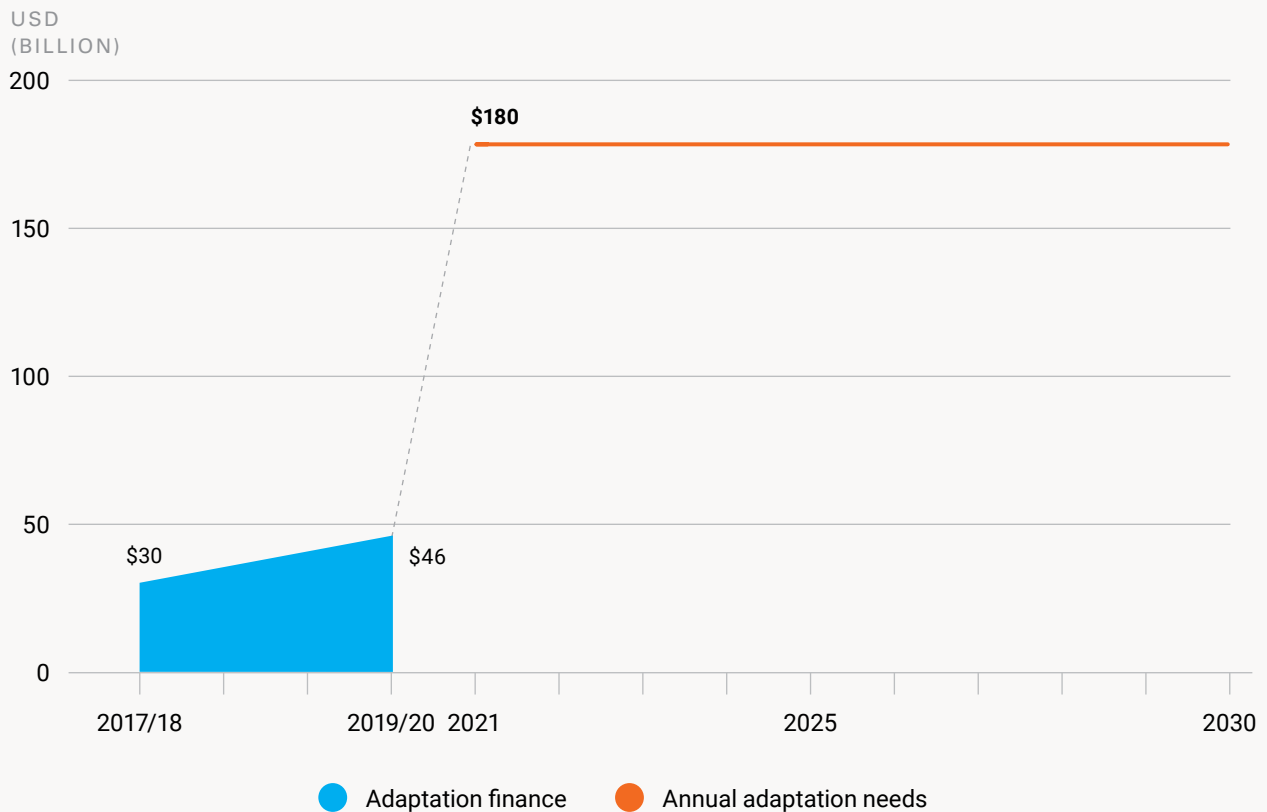
Despite its limitations, the 2021 COP26 conference demonstrated **growing recognition of the urgency of the task and some advances in the coordination of climate policies**. Indeed, while the Paris Framework has a decentralized structure, it is increasingly evident how policies set in different jurisdictions are having a globalizing effect: the gradual harmonization of carbon price regimes, the proposed imposition of carbon taxes on global trade, and the spillover benefits of research and development in green technologies.



**Five things you
need to know**
about why
biodiversity is
important for
children

Climate finance is belatedly being taken more seriously, with rich countries renewing their pledge to mobilize US\$100 billion a year for developing countries and some announcing increased contributions. However, the devil is in the details: past pledges haven't translated into disbursements, annual commitments are projected to continue falling short of US\$100 billion until 2023 and 70 per cent of disbursements have been provided via loans rather than grants. Moreover, it remains unclear to what extent climate funds are new and additional to existing development finance, and only about a quarter of pledged funds are devoted to adaptation where the needs of the poorest countries are greatest. Climate finance risks being unhelpfully pitted against development finance, crowding out funding in other areas that are critical to child welfare and well-being.

FIGURE 21: CLIMATE ADAPTATION FINANCE AND NEEDS



Source: [Climate Policy Initiative](#)

"The point about irreversibility and tipping points is very important because what youth will inherit is a no-go-back situation."

Dr Kanta Kumari Rigaud,
Lead Environmental
Specialist, The World Bank

An important trend that is set to continue in 2022 is the rapid growth of renewable energy capacity. It is estimated that global renewable electricity capacity will rise more than 60 per cent by 2026, eclipsing the current total global power capacity of fossil fuels and nuclear energy combined. This transition to green energy is driven by technological advances and government policies geared towards sustainability and equity that make green investments increasingly competitive and profitable. While investments in renewable energy sources have been largely focused in high-income countries as part of climate mitigation strategies, renewable energy opens adaptation pathways for climate vulnerable sectors as well. In addition to reducing carbon missions, green energy can spur economic growth and employment opportunities. While further behind than energy, the greening of transport, agriculture, housing and manufacturing sectors is also expected to grow in 2022.

Children and young people stand to benefit from climate action. This includes the rise of 'green jobs' which will require specialized technology-driven skills that children and young people can acquire more easily than older adults.

Demands for climate action have become increasingly associated with children and linked to broader notions of economic and social justice.

Environmental and climate justice are increasingly being pursued through formal means via climate litigation. Globally, the cumulative number of climate change-related cases has more than doubled since 2015. Just over 800 cases were filed between 1986 and 2014, while over 1,000 cases have been brought in the last 6 years. Cases are targeting a wider variety of private sector and financial actors and there is more diversity in the arguments being used, incorporating, for example, themes of greenwashing and fiduciary duty. In the last two years alone, there have been several landmark cases which have ruled against States and companies accused of not doing enough to decarbonise. The most prominent case involving children in 2021 was *Sacchi et al. v. Argentina et al.* that 16 young activists brought to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Despite the fact that the case was made inadmissible due to failure to exhaust national remedies, the petitioners won on several of the most challenging legal issues in climate litigation. The Committee accepted their arguments that States are legally responsible for the harmful effects of emissions originating in their territory on children outside their borders. The fact that all States are causing climate change, the Committee held, does not absolve States of individual responsibility to reduce their own share of emissions.

This climate litigation trend will likely increase in 2022. Three areas to watch in the future are value chain litigation, government support to the fossil fuel industry (through subsidies or tax relief, for example), and cases focused on the distribution of the burdens associated with taking action, perhaps classed as 'just transition' cases.

The climate policy landscape and green energy development today will have a far-reaching impact in the years to come. It is therefore imperative to seize opportunities to make these policies and financial investments more sensitive to the present and future needs of children. Climate finance challenges require innovative approaches that leverage private and public sector investments in mitigation and adaptation projects, without compromising development finance and social protection support to families and children most affected by the climate crisis. Adaptation investments in sectors benefiting children such as education, health, urban and local governance projects will yield long-term results.

"As much as we want to be at the COP table, you can't get there just by passion alone. We do climate strikes and protests, but.. to be at the drawing table you have to be at the learning table first and influence [institutions] at the local levels"

Ayoola Orimoloye,
Student and environmental
consultant



**Weak signals, tipping points,
black and white swans** →



Weak signals,
tipping points, black
and white swans



Weak signals
are data points
that augur an
emerging trend



Tipping points
are emerging
trends that
precipitate
irreversible,
systemic effects
if they pass a
threshold



Black swans
are highly
infrequent and
unexpected
events



White swans
are highly
infrequent and
anticipated
events

While this report focuses on trends that we believe will be most significant in shaping 2022, we also draw attention to possible events that could prove equally consequential for the world and for children. **Many such events remain highly unlikely, but their far-reaching repercussions, if they were to manifest, demand our attention.**



The continued over- and mis-use of antibiotics in livestock production and for the treatment of human illnesses will continue to **drive anti-microbial resistance** (AMR) and place public health care in jeopardy in the coming years – particularly in low- and middle-income countries where resistance is causing major problems for the treatment of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Deaths due to infections from *E.coli* acquired through contaminated food and water is also a rising concern. Already, it is estimated that AMR causes more than a million deaths each year, of which one in five are children under the age of 5. Without concerted efforts to develop new antibiotics and ensure a more prudent use of existing drugs, routine surgeries may soon be deemed too risky where there is a lack of drugs to counter common infections.



COVID-19 has dramatically increased the number of food insecure people around the world with 45 million people now on the brink of famine. Food insecurity is greatest in conflict zones such as parts of Ethiopia, Yemen and Afghanistan, where children are disproportionately affected. Ongoing supply chain disruptions and the potential for further droughts in major breadbaskets could even trigger a **food crisis at a global scale**.



The intersection of climate-driven drought or extreme weather event(s) with conflict could easily trigger a **refugee crisis** in 2022 with severe consequences for displaced children and young people. Young populations typically make up a disproportionate share of refugees. Rising levels of nationalism and strengthening of populist parties is a potential outcome for receiving countries.

🦢 There is a growing likelihood of **digital interference in elections** among the many high-profile elections taking place in 2022, as well as other forms of cyberattacks aimed at the financial sector, oil and gas infrastructures, and military assets. Infrastructure on which children depend, including schools and health centres, are also possible targets.

💡 Pent-up resentment against governments and restrictive social norms as well as frustrations over the climate crises, inequality and injustices might trigger further overlapping **youth-led movements and demonstrations** in 2022 with faint echoes of 1968, but with a more decentralized approach and global reach.

🦢 Although highly unlikely in 2022, the consequences of geopolitical fissures between existing or emerging nuclear powers erupting into **military confrontations** would be devastating for children and young people – whether caught up directly in conflict zones, or affected via the damaging effects on economies and financial markets. Close attention will need to be paid to ongoing posturing and threats of military and economic coercion in different parts of the world.

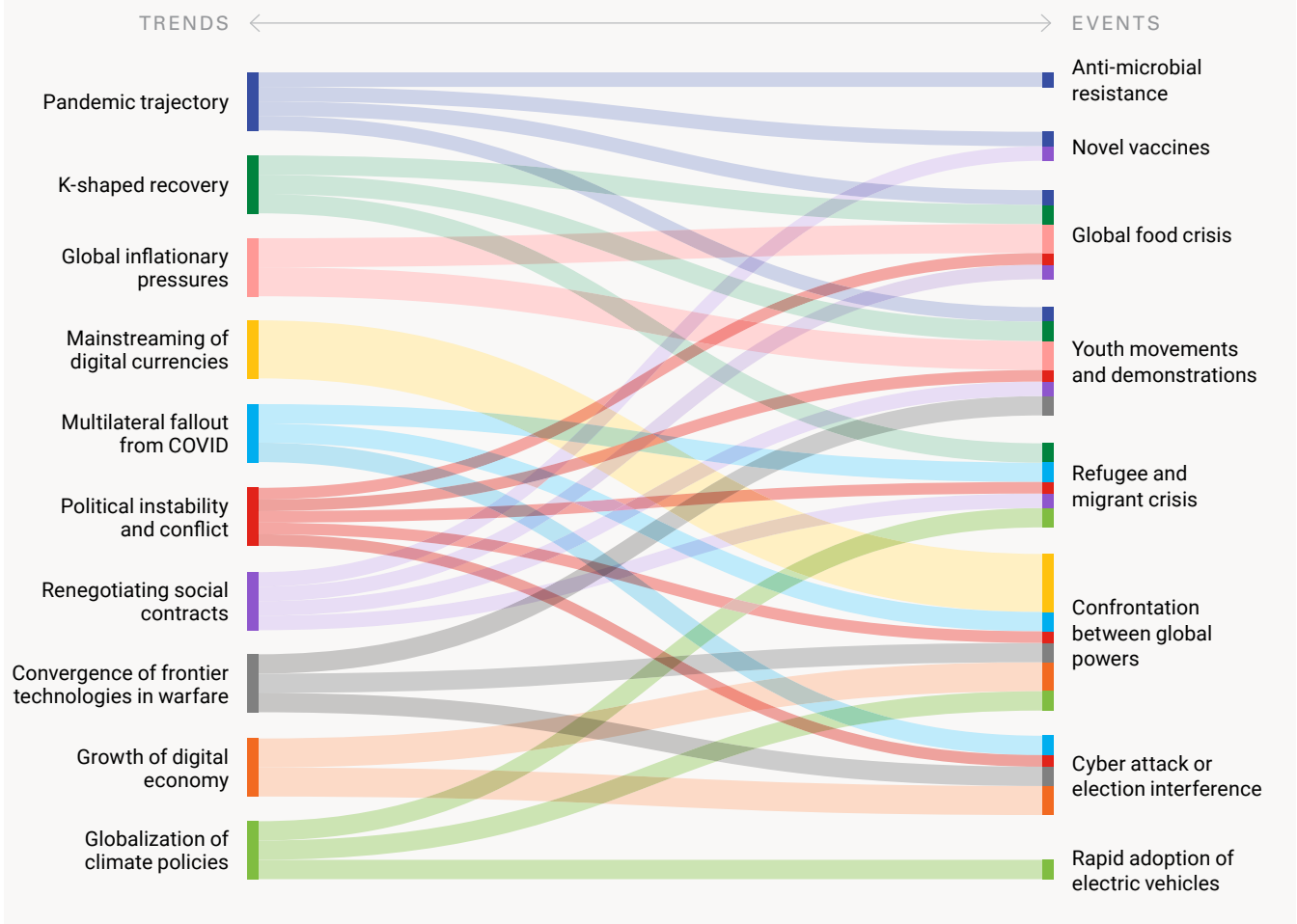
💡 On a more positive note, 2022 could see the development of a vaccine that can combat a wide spectrum of both existing and future coronaviruses. The Gilling's School of Global Public Health has reported encouraging results for such a broad-spectrum vaccine that combines mRNA from multiple coronaviruses; human trials are scheduled to begin in 2022. mRNA **preventative vaccines** offer promise against a range of other diseases, including certain cancers and malaria, with profound implications for child health globally given that malaria is one of the leading causes of death in children under five.

⚠️ 2022 could also be a tipping point for changes in the automotive industry. The global market share of electric vehicles is likely to surpass 10 per cent in 2022 and to grow strongly thereafter, with projections that sales may reach 70 per cent by 2030. Ambitious sales targets in Europe, new electric vehicle tax credits in the United States, and **widespread adoption of electric vehicles** in China, which makes up more than half of global sales, will help spur demand in 2022 and drive progress against climate targets in the longer term.



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FIGURE 22: INTERDEPENDENCE OF ONGOING TRENDS AND POTENTIAL EVENTS



As noted in the Introduction, the trends identified in this report are highly nested and interlinked. The same is true for these events. Great power rivalry threatens to spill over into a confrontation, and has already contributed to weakening support for multilateralism and the slowdown in globalization that were explored in our report [‘Prospects for children: a global outlook through 2025’](#). If such a confrontation manifests in 2022, it would of course have a devastating and rapid impact on a wide range of trends including the post-COVID-19 economic recovery, political instability around the world and global climate policies. It would also likely catalyse other events identified as tipping points or swans such as refugee and migrant crises and an escalation of cyberattacks. A similar cascade of impacts would likely result from the rapid rollout of a novel vaccine, positively affecting the post-COVID-19 trajectory and economic recovery. The figure above attempts to capture some of these interactions, notwithstanding the complexities that characterize these trends and events.

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Staff from the Office of Global Insight and Policy who contributed to

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Siakachoma

External experts from the Atlantic Council and their partner

organizations included: Mr Amjad Ahmad (Director and Senior Fellow, empowerME, Atlantic Council), Mr Imran Bayoumi (Project Assistant, Scowcroft Strategy Initiative, Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security Atlantic Council), Mr David K. Bohl (Associate Director of Modeling and Analysis, Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures), Dr Mathew Burrows (Director of Foresight, Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, Atlantic Council), Ms Gretchen Ehle (Senior Director, Business Development and Operations, Atlantic Council), Dr Peter Engelke (Deputy Director and Senior Fellow for Foresight, Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, Atlantic Council), Dr Nicole Goldin (Nonresident Senior Fellow, GeoEconomics Center, Atlantic Council), Dr Jonathan D. Moyer (Director, Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures).

Consultation participants included: Mr Tahir Amin (Co-founder and Co-executive Director, Initiative for Medicines, Access + Knowledge), Ms Wafa Ben-Hassine (Responsible Tech Principal, Omidyar Network), Mr Javier Cardozo (Executive Director, Venezuelan Youth Organization for United Nations), Mr Peter Ceretti (Senior Analyst and Practice Manager, Eurasia Group), Ms Kar Marn Chin (Outreach Director, Southeast Asia Global Affairs Network (SEAGAN)), Mr David Freedman (Country Economist, Asian Development Bank), Mr Kushagra Gupta (DeepLearning.AI, AI Student Event Ambassador), Ms Ayadi Mishra (Student, CY@ MG), Ms Sofia Nazalya (Human Rights Analyst, Verisk Maplecroft), Mr Ayoola Orimoloye (Graduate Student/Environmental Consultant, YOUNGO), Dr David Passarelli (Executive Director, UNU Center for Policy Research), Ms Priti Patnaik (Founding Editor, Geneva Health Files), Ms Christine Rashid (Team Leader, Strategic

Community Development Organization), Dr Kanta Kumari Rigaud (Lead Environmental Specialist, World Bank), Mr Alfredo Lorenzo Sablay (MoreViralThanTheVirus Philippines Country Lead), Dr Prachi Srivastava (Tenured Associate Professor, Western University), Mr Nelson Usiri (National Coordinator, Students for Liberty).



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Office of Global Insight and Policy
United Nations Children's Fund
3 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY, 10017, USA

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United Nations Children's Fund
3 United Nations Plaza,
New York, NY, 10017, USA

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