

# WORLD COMMERCE REVIEW

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**WILBERT JAN DERKSEN**  
CONSIDERS THE IMPORTANCE  
OF STRATEGIC AUTONOMY FOR  
EUROPE'S SECURITY

**GRAHAM BRIGHT**  
DISCUSSES TECHNOLOGIES  
THAT CAN REDUCE FRICTION  
IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE

THE ECONOMICS OF THE  
UKRAINE WAR ARE DISCUSSED BY  
**OLIVIER BLANCHARD AND JEAN  
PISANI-FERRY**

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# Walk the walk

**E**urope poked the Russian bear with a stick in 2014 and has carried on poking the bear. Is it any wonder that Russia invaded Ukraine? The EU has shown it can talk the talk, but can it walk the walk? The Russia-Ukraine conflict is not the only challenge currently facing the European Union. There is the problem of inflation, supply chain threats, the issue of critical technologies, and how does Europe interact with powers such as China and the United States.

Europe needs to shift priorities in response to the immediate challenges. But it has to decide what the European Union means. Does it want to become a global power, ready to project its strength beyond its borders? If so it will have to look to a proper defence union, a greater role in NATO, and a coordinated defence procurement programme.

Defence spending will have to increase substantially, to compensate for decades of under investment. This will cost, and take time. We are perhaps seeing the start of it. The European Commission has published a frank assessment of the lack of European defence capabilities. Russia's war in Ukraine implies a tectonic shift in European history and Europe needs to make a quantum leap.

A number of initiatives have been launched by European governments to increase defence spending. However, these commitments will not deliver the transformation needed to Europe to defend itself and act independently. Europe today is in a bad situation. It has neither the military muscle or political leadership to confront Russian aggression.

Europe may be on borrowed time as the United States' attention shifts elsewhere. It is paramount that Europe finds more political courage to boost and sustain defence spending. With a defence union and its huge economic power, the EU can use this to shape economic relations. It can also use its transformative power through enlargement and cooperation policy in the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries.

The crisis has given the European Union a huge wake up call. It is time for Europe to become a strategic power. It is time for Europe to rely on itself. It is time for Europe to walk the walk. ■

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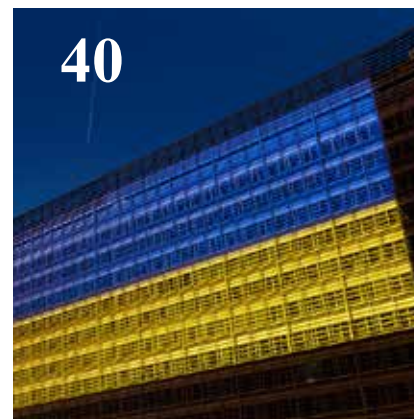
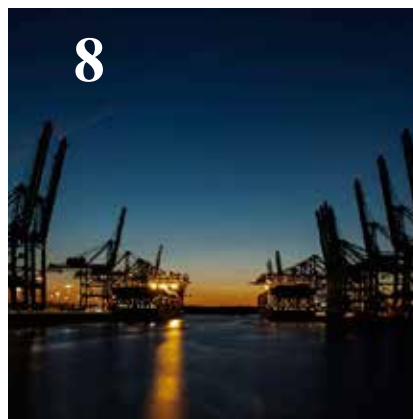
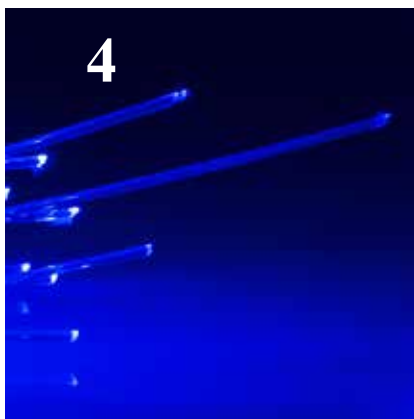
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# The importance of strategic autonomy in the digital era

Wilbert Jan Derksen is a Political Researcher at the TeldersStichting, a Dutch liberal think tank

**D**igitalisation has transformed our society on a fundamental level. Since the introduction of the personal computer in the 1980's and the internet in the 1990's digital technology has gradually become an integral part of our daily lives.

This became clearer than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic, where digitalisation provided the means necessary for our economy and society to keep functioning, despite everybody having to stay home due to lockdown measures.

Digital technology has enriched our lives in innumerable ways, but at the same time has made us highly dependent on it. That applies to our personal lives, but in a broader sense also to the whole of society.

Hospitals, banks and power plants are only a few examples of vital service providers that are reliant on digital technology for carrying out many of their respective activities. That means that any disruption of these applications can have serious consequences.

This is especially worrisome in the context of the rising geopolitical tensions we are seeing in the last years. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has once and for all shattered the illusion of a peaceful post-Cold War international order.

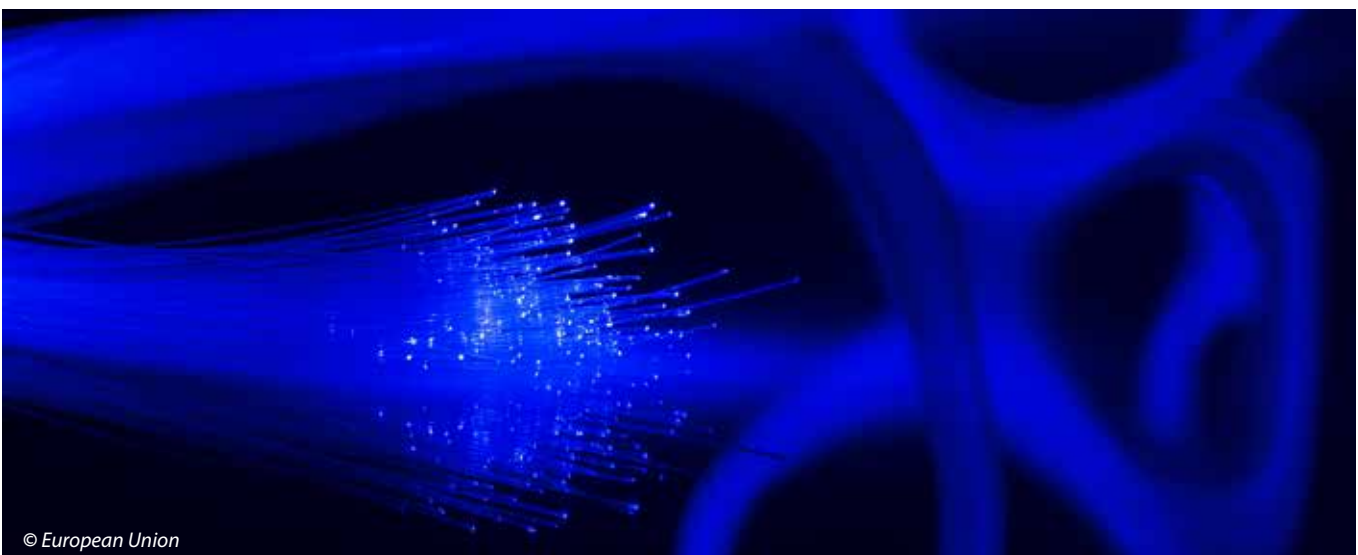
In addition, China has also made clear that it wants to challenge the West in order to become the new global superpower. Cyberspace has become a crucial battleground in this new geopolitical reality. Cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructure could paralyze an entire country.

Furthermore, they are a relatively easy and cheap alternative to traditional means of warfare. The current disastrous Russian military campaign in Ukraine might convince policy makers worldwide that future conflicts will be fought largely, if not exclusively, in the digital realm.

The combination of digital dependency and growing geopolitical antagonism means that 'strategic autonomy' in the area of digitalisation is becoming more and more important.

Strategic autonomy means that in critical areas a country is free of any unwanted dependencies on foreign powers, allowing it to pursue its own interests and not be vulnerable to pressure coming from hostile foreign states.

This entails that security interests should take priority over financial gains and that trustworthiness is most important factor in determining what actors are allowed to play a role in providing vital services. Strategic autonomy in general can



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apply to many different policy fields, but here we are focusing on the digital component of this concept.

In a European context this means that EU member states have to make sure that they prevent unwanted digital dependencies on countries that are seen as strategic opponents, such as Russia and China.

According to liberals, providing security is the most important task of the government. Hence, EU governments (and by extension the European Union) have a crucial role to play in achieving strategic autonomy, as it directly concerns national security interests.

Most recently we have seen a big debate about the importance of strategic autonomy with regards to the 5G telecom network that will be unfolded in the upcoming years. 5G will allow data to travel at never seen before quantities and speed. It will form the basis of new exciting technologies such as autonomous vehicles and virtual reality.

However, the installation of a 5G network is quite an expensive undertaking and there are only a few corporations that have the know-how to do so. A key player in this field is the Chinese tech company Huawei. It can offer high quality 5G technology for a relatively low price, making it the most interesting player on the market from a financial point of view.

However, there are serious allegations against Huawei concerning spying activities carried out on behalf of the Chinese government. Although Huawei presents itself as a privately owned company, its vague ownership structure seems to be a disguise for the fact that in reality it is a state-owned enterprise.

Inviting Huawei into the heart of our telecom network could therefore pose a serious threat to national security, as this would allow the Chinese government to have direct access to sensitive communication lines by installing so-called hidden backdoors in their equipment.

For instance, they could peek into confidential information shared between intelligence agencies or steal valuable trade secrets from important European companies in the area of high-tech and defence.

Hence, many countries have decided to impose restrictions on Huawei products. The United States (as well as some of its closest allies like Canada and Japan) has decided on a total ban.

However, this rigorous measure can't be seen as separate from the current trade war that is going on between China and the US. EU countries don't need to base their respective policies on the economic interests of the US, which leaves more room for flexibility. For example, the Netherlands has decided not to impose a total ban on Huawei, but to keep the company out of the core of its network.

This should be sufficient to avoid any unwanted security risks, while also not hurting competition on the market by

*“... strategic autonomy will require a lot of effort, but in the long run guarantee that the EU is able to stand on its own feet”*

eliminating a major player. After all, strategic autonomy is solely about safeguarding national security interests and should never be a disguise for economic protectionism.

It is very important to make sure that foreign companies and investors that can't be trusted are not allowed to have direct access to our critical infrastructure. But we also need to take a look at the entire supply chain in order to prevent any damages that could arise indirectly.

Not only vital service providers can be targeted by cyberattacks, also the logistic companies that they work together with can for example be attacked. If vital products like medicines can be produced, but not delivered, this would also cause major problems for society. Thus, strategic autonomy requires taking into account the entire supply chain.

Taking such necessary precautions in doing business with foreign actors is only half the story though. Strategic autonomy can't only be realised on the demand-side (protecting against unwanted influence from outside), but also on the supply-side. That is to say, stimulating innovation so European tech companies are also relevant players on the market.

Unfortunately, the EU seems to be highly lacking in this regard. Out of the top twenty biggest tech companies in the world, only one is European. The world's tech industry is dominated by American and Asian (mostly Chinese) corporations. For behemoths like Microsoft, Apple, Tencent and Alibaba there aren't any real European counterparts.

Stimulating innovation is therefore necessary in order to change this fact. This would also provide EU countries the opportunity to invest in technologies that have integrated certain values in their design that are important, like privacy, autonomy, transparency and security.

For example, there already exists the French search engine Qwant, that unlike many other search engines like Google, doesn't track its users and respects their privacy.

In addition, open-source software and hardware products allow full insight into their design, thereby ensuring complete transparency. Investing in these type of products would be a perfect complement to EU regulations like the GDPR, Digital Market Act and Digital Service Act.

The question is then how the EU can improve its innovation policy. When we compare this to the US, we see for example that the EU does provide funding, but that vested interests play a stronger role in preventing strong disruptions on the market.



This means that the process of ‘creative destruction’ – the continuous replacement of older tech by newer, more efficient technologies – can’t be fully realised.

From a liberal standpoint this is undesirable, as it contradicts the free market principle of unobstructed competition. Investment therefore ought not to be affected by such interests and allow for an equal playing field.

In addition, it is important that investments are embedded in a broader innovation ecosystem. There the government can play a crucial role, by fostering cooperation between the academic world and business sectors. This can also be realised on an EU level, through close cooperation between the different member states.

In this context we have seen initiatives like GAIA-X and IPCEI-CIS arise, through which EU nations strive for a common European data infrastructure. However, we have seen here that disagreement among member states about the strategy and goals can cause infighting and prevent such initiatives from coming to fruition.

Strategic autonomy therefore will also require willingness among European nations to cooperate and not to let personal ambitions stand in the way of this common interest.

One of the most important reasons why the European tech sector has fallen behind over the years has been the lack of venture capital available on the market. This refers to high risk investments in promising early-stage companies.

Such capital injections can help them to grow rapidly and become successful. Especially in the tech sector such investments are necessary as many businesses only become profitable after a certain critical mass has been reached.

In the US there is almost three times more venture capital available than in the EU. Moreover, investors there are more focussed on growth, than on immediate profits. They are also more willing to kill a business once it becomes clear that it isn’t meeting expectations, thereby creating a more dynamic market.

In addition, there is a lot more interaction between businesses, which allows for an exchange of ideas between them. Though it is hopeful to see that European investments in the tech industry have soared during the last couple of years, reaching 100 billion dollars in 2021, it is vital that a sufficient part of this money is allocated as venture capital investments.

What can also help tech businesses to grow is for the government to act as a ‘launching customer’. As governments





make use of various digital products and services, they can help up-and-coming companies by doing business with them. Having such a major client will allow them to scale up faster.

Moreover, it might have a pull effect on other potential clients. Again, the government can specifically select companies that take into account important values such as privacy and autonomy.

Lastly, it is important to keep investing in education programmes in the field of IT. There is a general shortage in IT personnel in the economy, that not only affects the tech industry, but also other sectors, as many businesses need to undergo certain digital transformations.

This can also be done by offering funds to retrain workers who otherwise might face unemployment in the years to come. The impact of automation on the job market is expected to be massive, as many professions will be partially or entirely taken over by automated technologies.

Offering these workers the opportunity to re-educate themselves in the area of IT will prevent them from becoming unemployed and help businesses to find sufficient IT personnel.

To summarise, strategic autonomy has become a necessity in a world where digital technologies are such a fundamental part of society and geopolitical tensions have caused concerns about unwanted foreign dependencies in this area.

First of all, it is imperative that vital service providers are shielded from any possible digital intrusion by strategic opponents like China and Russia. When it comes to our critical infrastructure, it is important to let security interests take precedence over financial arguments.

Trustworthiness should be the principal factor in deciding who to do business with. That applies to the entire supply chain of these vital services. At the same time it is crucial to improve innovation policy, so that the European tech industry catches up on its American and Asian counterparts.

This can be done by not letting vested interests play a role, fostering cooperation between business and academic actors, increasing the amount of venture capital investments, letting the government be a launching customer and investing in IT (re-)education programmes.

Consequently, strategic autonomy will require a lot of effort, but in the long run guarantee that the EU is able to stand on its own feet. ■



# Meeting the challenges

**Dr Graham Bright is Head – Compliance & Operations at Euro Exim Bank**

**O**ver the past three months, as fear, uncertainty and doubt grip the world, we have witnessed unimaginable change with global implications, leaving us with no doubt we are experiencing the most challenging times ever in our lifetimes.

International harmony has turned to hatred, co-existence to conflict, and welfare to warfare.

As Russia continues its efforts to engulf Ukraine to take control of its Black Sea ports and highly productive fertile plains, just as history shows Napoleon advanced on Moscow two hundred years ago, scorched earth, an angry residual population and destroyed infrastructure is not a victory.

And the repercussions have had dramatic effects across the globe. From an energy perspective, the cost per barrel of oil has had a direct effect on domestic fuel prices, reaching record levels and throwing people into fuel poverty.

Political posturing influencing the supply of gas threatens access to supplies, leading western economies to review energy policy and belatedly look for more self-sufficiency. Perhaps a case of ‘too little too late’ as thoughts turn to fracking and non-fossil renewable energy.

Just as Oxford University has announced a radical nuclear fusion breakthrough as a possible sustainable green fuel source helping to reduce carbon and power the world, producing energy at less than the cost of production has always been the issue.

However, whilst projects start small and there is promise, it will take years to be economically viable. If we wish to be truly released from energy dependency, this is time we do not have.

For pensioners, the domestic outlook is stark, with many, caught in a real life-threatening dilemma, having to choose



whether to heat or eat. Perhaps the only short-term saving grace is less demand for domestic heating as we move into the warmer months of summer.

With inflation rising at record speed and energy prices kept artificially unsustainably low in the past, the removal of the fuel cap will have direct and devastating consequences.

Effecting millions in the UK and especially those living on state pensions, subject to the removal of energy company fuel caps are already under tight financial restraints.

With mortgage rises, with general cost of living expenses soaring not linked to increases in wages, we can expect mortgage defaults, more use of food banks, less food in our shops and a heavier burden on Government for financial assistance.

But staple food prices are also rising, with milk estimated to rise by 50%, a shortage of sunflower oil (mainly produced in Ukraine), shortage of foreign causal labour to work on farms, and the Government resorting to pay farmers not to produce certain crops.

With a 4x increase in fertiliser costs from £7,000 to £28,000 per load, food prices must be passed on to consumers as farmers struggle with rocketing costs for feed, fertiliser, fuel and energy, forcing up prices on supermarket shelves.

And the problems are truly global. As an example, the poor coffee harvest in Brazil caused by drought and frost and then container shortages have seen prices rise to all-time highs. Wheat prices have risen nearly 20% in March, with cooking oil, meat and cereals up and rises of 33% in food commodities.

*“... we are experiencing the most challenging times ever in our lifetimes”*

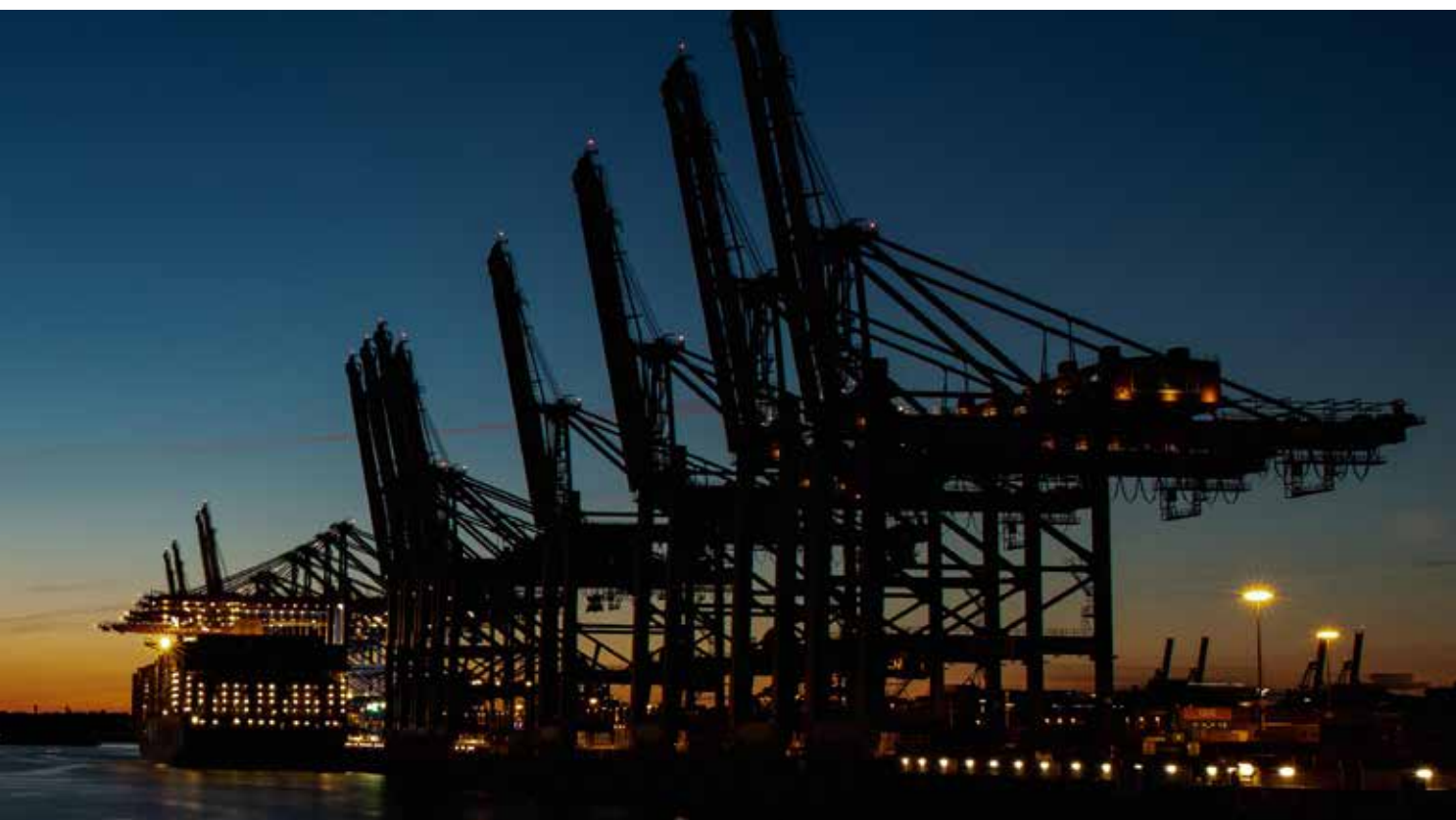
And, with a lack of liquidity in those markets, alternative financing has become a major issue, with banks unwilling to take major positions, but happier to support funds providers and spreading the risk.

The push to reduce reliance on oil and gas, petrol and diesel cars, towards electric vehicles goes some way in resolving at least part of the energy consumption and pricing issues.

However, demand has far outstripped supply and the ongoing shortage of semiconductors and other vital components (mainly manufactured in Ukraine) means waits of up to one year for new vehicles.

With seemingly every product and service in every country experiencing supply issues and price pressure, nowhere is this more felt than in the world of international trade and logistics.

Physical container and transport costs have multiplied, leading to the bizarre situation of procurement and transport for some containers costing more than the contents. As such, trade is non-competitive, uneconomic, unreasonable, and unworkable. Little wonder that factories in high labour cost locations cannot afford to make, move, and market their goods.



And whilst in the throes of writing this article, international events are moving so fast that predicting or even imagining the short-term state of trade is more difficult than ever.

The latest disruption to supply chains concerns natural gas, with threats made to European countries such as Poland, effectively isolating them if they do not pay Russia in local currency.

As EU members scramble to find alternative supplies, including reverting to short-term re-visiting of fossil fuels such as coal and crude oil, eyes are turning to the previously untapped resources of North Africa, where connectivity and volume, principally through Egypt and Morocco, offer the prospect of sustained supply.

As another example of how energy demand has surged, there were some 30 power projects in Africa, where that number now exceeds 110, supported by new regulatory criteria, executed through public private partnerships to finance, build, and operate new facilities, providing sustainability and self-sufficiency.

In international trade, even with shrinking liquidity, there are still seeds of investment in green projects, as companies jump on the ESG bandwagon, toting their plans, but with little real action.

The key problem remains that there are critical raw materials, which do not fit the current ESG narrative that are the cornerstone of global industrial processes. To protect these precious resources, it is heartening to see the inception of initiatives such as the CRM Alliance in an awareness raising advocacy role in the EU identifying the 30 materials potentially at risk.

The viability of global industries such as medical, electronics, steel, aviation, and defence, is almost exclusively based around critical materials, which include tungsten, 17 elements comprising heavy rare earths (HREE), bauxite, lithium, and titanium, vital in joint replacements in the health industry.

Whilst not defined as being scarce, their characteristics include being high supply risk due to where they are found and levels of concentration, lack of viable alternatives and the unabating demand from western economies for their domestic manufacturing processes.

Where these resources are sourced, how they are extracted, transported, costed, consumed, re-used, and contribute to ESG policy will be an increasing issue for investors wishing to receive either penalty or reward for sustainability as countries strive to be competitive, green and digital.

The challenge now is for companies not only to identify which products meet standards from a local perspective but to have complete oversight on responsible sourcing and labour at each stage of the manufacturing and supply process, right back to the factory or farm.

Regarding automating and going more digital, it is estimated that there are four billion paper documents in the ecosystem of trade. Many small SME's and global corporates struggle with inadequate systems and controls, access to liquidity, sparse industry knowledge, cost of US dollars, fraud, corruption, and transport difficulties.

As we prepare to meet the dynamic challenges in the geopolitical and trade spheres, the MLETR, the Model Law on Electronic Transferable Records will, according to International Chamber of Commerce estimates indicate that digitising trade documents could generate £25 billion in economic growth by 2024, and savings of £224 billion.

The solutions are here with a plethora of fintech companies and alternative finance providers offering funds, machine learning, artificial intelligence, blockchain enabled toolkits and applications, the financing and technology is available today.

Moving forward, and organisationally ready to support these new, exciting initiatives, we are using the latest tools and are well positioned to reduce friction in transaction flows, reduce fraud, and improve delivery and trust. ■



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# How technology is reshaping trade

Robert D Atkinson is President of the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation

**T**rade has always been shaped by technology. As technology improved shipping and logistics, trade became cheaper and more extensive. As technology enabled production to be more sophisticated, minimum efficient size of factories got larger, and that meant companies needed to sell to broader markets.

Today is no different. New technology developments has the potential to reshape trade patterns, potentially in unexpected ways. Some, like the rise of digital goods and services promise to expand trade. Others, such as the emergence of what some call 'industry 4.0' (the integration of digital technologies into the production of goods) might actually reduce trade by making it more economical to produce more locally.

Let's start with the fact that if everything was easy to produce and with few economies of scale effects, there'd be little trade, just as there was before the first industrial revolution in Great Britain. At the most extreme level of this, every city would be self-sufficient. It would be like living on the Starship enterprise with everything coming from the replicator: *"tea, Earl Grey, hot."*

But for most industries technology went in the other direction, with massive scale effects and specialization. Consider that 92 percent<sup>1</sup> of the world's most-sophisticated semiconductors (those made at process nodes 10 nanometers (nm) or below) are manufactured on the island of Taiwan (and the remaining 8 percent in South Korea).



These are exported around the world, not just because their value to weight ratio is so high, but because there are few if any companies in other parts of the world that can even make them. Consider also that each segment<sup>2</sup> of the global semiconductor value chain has, on average, enterprises from 25 countries involved directly, and enterprises from 23 countries in support functions.

Likewise, if automation was extremely high there would be less globalization, given how a significant share of global trade is based upon wage arbitrage, with production of lower-skill manufacturing goods often moving from high-wage to low-wage nations.

It makes economic sense for companies do this if the production process requires a significant amount of lower to mid-skilled labour. But if automation technologies improve so that companies are able to replace even more labour with machines, the advantage of producing in a low-wage nation and paying to ship the product long distances is reduced.

At the same time, if transportation costs are very low there would be much more trade. Indeed, the rise of the container ship and cargo containers, coupled with electronic data interchange, lowered shipping and logistic costs, leading to an expansion of global trade.

Going forward, the increase in the share of the economy that is digital—and able to be moved around the globe instantaneously and at almost no cost—is growing. This will mean an increase in the share of the economy that is traded.

*“Since the emergence of the first industrial revolution, technology has changed trade patterns and flows. Today is no different as digital technologies transform both goods and services production”*

Case in point, in the old days when one used a bank, all the revenue stayed in the local community and the country. Now with the rise of fintech and online banking, people can bank in cyberspace, turning what was once a local-serving industry into a globally traded one.

When it comes to recent trends, the pattern is on the side of trade contraction. As the McKinsey Global Institute points out<sup>3</sup>, total exports as share of GDP has fallen. Trade is still growing but the share of output moving across borders fell from 28.1 percent in 2007 to 22.5 percent in 2017.

Some of this may be due to technology forces, some to broad economic ones and still others to political ones as more and more countries focus on localization barriers to trade. It’s not clear what the future trends will be.



One factor that could continue this trend is the potential increase in automation and robots. To the extent that relative factor endowments determine the international division of labour and trade, the use of robots and other automation technologies could alter the location of manufacturing of particular sorts of goods by altering their relative factor intensities.

Assuming that low-skilled human labour and the use of robots are close substitutes and that robots controlled by high-skilled workers could perform, for example, clothing production and electronics assembly more efficiently than low skilled workers, then these activities become relatively more skill- and capital-intensive.

Doing so would allow countries with a low ratio of low-skilled to high-skilled workers to reduce their labour-cost disadvantage and make labour-intensive manufacturing more competitive.

This is because the rate of return of robots and other automation technology is inversely related to the cost of labour: the more expensive the labour, the more likely a firm is likely to automate.

Now instead of a company sourcing production for the North American market in a country like China or Thailand with significantly lower labour costs, the use of more advanced automation technology could make such production in the United States more cost competitive.

The result would be a decentralization of production with more production being located in the markets it is intended to serve. This could at least be true in sectors where economies of scale and minimum factory sizes are not enormous and where there is some interchangeability of products in the marketplace.

For example, imagine that robotics improve and can cost-effectively play a key role in assembling athletic shoes. With these technologies, shoe manufacturers could find it cost effective to produce shoes in high wage nations.

Couple that with the fact that such automated production if it uses flexible automation technologies could enable more customization of products, at the same cost as mass production processes using low-cost labour.

To date industrial robots have primarily been deployed in the automotive, electrical and electronics industries. By contrast, in many labour-intensive industries, such as garment-making, widespread automation is not yet suitable.

But robotics and automation technology is improving, in part enabled by better software, including artificial intelligence, so the potential for the 'robotization' of more industries is certainly possible.

Such effects may be reinforced by combining robotization with other new automation technologies, such as three-dimensional (3D) printing. The latter lowers the costs of

prototyping and small volume production and could facilitate the initiation of manufacturing of new products, whose large-scale production could become economically feasible through the deployment of robots.

Indeed, additive manufacturing is becoming more common for product prototyping and some mass production, including by Ford, GE Aviation, Nike, Under Armour, and Siemens.

Some studies have predicted<sup>4</sup> that once high-speed 3D-printing is mass-adopted and cheap enough, global trade may decrease by as much as 25 percent, since 3D-printing locally can substitute for more centralized production that is shipped widely across the globe.

But while 3-D printing requires less labour and reduces the need for imports and is likely to grow in importance, given the complexity of most production and the inherent limitations of additive manufacturing, it's unlikely that it will be game-changing.

But for all the talk—some might even say hype—about robots, AI and automation, it's not clear just how capable automation technology will become in the next decade.

In other words, current manufacturing systems largely enable either high-volume, low-mix output (eg. producing large quantities of the same unit; mass production) or low-volume, high-mix output (eg. producing smaller quantities of different units; batch production). The latter are often located in lower-wage nations.

But convergence of digital technologies and manufacturing increasingly enables a new production paradigm: a high-volume, high-mix approach that will enable cost-efficient production in smaller factories more evenly distributed around the globe to serve local markets.

Indeed, Rauch, Dallasega, and Matt<sup>5</sup> have argued that these emerging technologies will enable more decentralized and geographically dispersed manufacturing systems. This could enable more reshoring of work now located in lower wage developing nations.

While increased and improved automation technologies could reverse the decades-long trend in offshoring of production from high-wage countries to low wage, it's not clear what the impact of digital trade—the cross-border transfer of products, services, and data over the internet—will be.

As Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella stated, we saw two years of digital transformation in 2 months. The development and now widespread use of easy-to-use network technologies like video conferencing, cloud computing, and online work management systems means companies will be even more able to and willing to distribute work geographically, including across borders.

Firms and customers can use their personal devices and the internet to find and access digital goods (like music and software) and services (like cloud storage and data analytics



services), many of which complement trade in physical things (whether manufacturing<sup>6</sup> or e-commerce packages).

Digital technologies have changed trade, especially by lowering costs and enabling trade<sup>7</sup>. Despite the popular misconception that data flows only benefit search engines and social networks, the reality is that most industries<sup>8</sup> rely on cross-border data flows.

Digital technologies and data flows are particularly critical to the automotive and transport sector. As Swedish commercial vehicle manufacturer Scania's Hakan Schildt told the *Financial Times*<sup>9</sup> in 2018, "[T]ransport is becoming a data business."

As connected devices, data-driven insights, and advancements in AI accelerate innovation in this sector, the ability to exchange data is crucial to improving the quality and safety of vehicles and transportation systems.

In addition, health research is increasingly an international endeavour that depends on the aggregation and sharing of personal data. The ability to transfer and share health data maximizes the potential for individual researchers and life sciences firms—regardless of location—to advance scientific knowledge.

Estimating the value of transatlantic data flows and digital trade is challenging<sup>10</sup>. For example, approximating value by the aggregate volume of data transfers has significant limitations. The value of data depends on its content. Some data flows may be non-monetized—representing intra-company transfers that are commercially valuable, but not captured in a formal transaction.

While precise, comprehensive, and consistent measurement of the value of data and digital trade in and between the United States and EU is not yet possible, there are a range of estimates that support what we know anecdotally—that data and digital trade represent an important and fast-growing part of the global economy.

In August 2020, the US Department of Commerce's report *New Digital Economy Estimates*<sup>11</sup> calculated that the digital economy accounted for 9 percent of US GDP in 2018.

Traditional trade statistics capture some of the EU-US digital trade relationship, but not all<sup>12</sup>.

The US Department of Commerce's ICT and potential-ICT based digital trade data provides the broadest, and most recent, estimate of transatlantic digital trade, which in total, was worth \$295 billion in 2018<sup>13</sup>.

Data flows and digital products and services should be able to flow seamlessly across borders to firms and consumers situated throughout the world.

Yet, countries are enacting a growing range of artificial barriers to global digital trade, including regulations on data, intellectual property, and digital platforms, to name just a few.

The problem is that international trade rules have not kept pace<sup>14</sup> with technological innovation to ensure these changes are used in this way.

To fully maximize the potential of free global digital trade, the world's leading digital economies need to put in place rules to protect it. Some 71 countries are trying to do this at e-commerce negotiations at the World Trade Organization.

Setting new rules on digital trade will not be easy, but there is a way forward. The United States, Japan, and their partners need to realize that they all share more in common than some of the political and trade tensions suggest and that they all stand to benefit from a deal. This most definitely applies to the EU, who is sadly absent in many digital trade debates.

The growing number of barriers that have been enacted in the last few years show that the alternative—a global internet and digital economy that is fragmented behind digital trade barriers—is a real and dangerous prospect that will become a near certainty if the world's leading countries can't come together to put in place new, high-standard digital trade rules covering data flows.

In summary, since the emergence of the first industrial revolution, technology has changed trade patterns and flows. Today is no different as digital technologies transform both goods and services production. ■

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# Is it time for a new theory to explain crossborder trade?

Can we imagine a world without crossborder movement of goods and services? If not, then it is imperative to know what determines the quantum and direction of cross-border flow of these products, argue Sanjay Kumar Mangla, Nikita Jain and Richa Gupta



Can we imagine a world without crossborder movement of goods and services? If not, then it is imperative to know what determines the quantum and direction of crossborder flow of these products.

Economic literature provides answers to these questions in terms of several trade theories such as Smith 1776, Ricardo 1817, Heckscher & Ohlin 1919, Stolper & Samuelson 1941 to name a few. However, these theories were written based on certain assumptions many of which are not observed in the modern times.

Major constructs of these theories provide reasoning to crossborder movement of goods and services in a world without transport cost where firms employ resources of their home countries only, enjoy constant returns to scale, operate in a perfectly competitive market, and ultimately foreign trade takes place in final goods only.

Further, there used to be a much less possibility of fragmentation of production process which primarily took place under the same roof. This might be due to several reasons, including unavailability of modern information and communication technology (ICT) among several stages of production, along with costly and time-consuming transportation mechanism to shift products across borders, especially between countries which do not share common borders.

However, availability of ICT, fast transportation mechanism and increasing globalization started in 1980s, and enabled companies to become global with fragmented production processes, and countries like China became the world's factory.

Since then, economists started to establish new postulates that defined international trade. Helpman and Krugman developed 'New Trade Theory' in the 1980s which studied crossborder trade in the settings of imperfect competition and increasing returns to scale accounting for intra-industry trade between countries with similar technology and resources.

The main limitation of all these trade theories is that they explain crossborder trade in, primarily, final goods and services and fail to address the international trade in value added products. This is despite the fact that today only 30 per cent of global trade takes place for final goods and services and 70 per cent happens for intermediate goods.

The first such theory explaining trade in intermediate products was 'Theory of Production Fragmentation' developed by Jones & Kierzkowski in 1990. The theory puts forward an outsourcing model along with a list of determinants of fragmentation process.

It postulates that companies will shift part of their production process to different places (both domestically as well as internationally) primarily based on productivity and cost levels; and crossborder outsourcing of production process is termed as off-shoring.

## “... what are actual motives of crossborder trade and do they differ according to the government, companies, and other types of organizations?”

The offshoring will increase fixed costs but will improve the overall productivity. Following the Theory of Production Fragmentation, Feenstra & Hanson (1996) empirically established the increase in trade in intermediate products.

Melitz built the ‘New New Trade Theory’ in 2003 which explained how heterogeneous firms could coexist and more productive firms would be able to export more than the less productive ones. The trade in intermediate products/value added goods was first discussed as Global Value Chains (GVCs) in the Rockefeller Foundation-sponsored Global Value Chains Initiative (2000-05), which was then crystallised by Gereffi, Humphrey, and Sturgeon (2005).

Trade in Value Added (TiVA) generates GVCs where production process is fragmented and a final good takes its shape after going through various phases in different parts of the world. GVCs are based on the employment of factors of production from other countries in manufacturing for both domestic and export products.

Baldwin (2006) referred crossborder trading in value added products as ‘unbundling economies’ while Grossman & Hansberg (2008) termed it as ‘trade in tasks’ to examine the benefits of offshoring.

GVCs enable businesses to operate at stage of increasing returns to scale (output increases in larger proportion than increase in inputs) which increases domestic factor earnings. There is no second thought about numerous gains obtained by firms through participation in GVCs as a majority of the companies are practicing globally.

However, it is important to know that what determines decisions of a company to decide which part of the production process should take place where. Probably, a company would choose a location where it can leverage the least cost combination of production factors along with favourable regulatory regimes.

Furthermore, the technical unbundling of manufacturing operations has intensified, with some portions being shifted across national borders to take advantage of cost differences.

Development has been proved as a valuable resource to better answer certain questions such as where the maximum value is added along the supply chain, what creates more income and employment, and how to improve bilateral trade imbalances among the others.

Despite of the significant progress in economic literature to predict international trade, all the existing trade theories including the latest ones on trade in intermediate products as mentioned above lack in addressing some of the significant issues including transport cost (which becomes more important in times of global uncertainty with highly fluctuating fuel prices and also constitutes a considerable part of the total cost of production), and influence of trade barriers, primarily non-tariff barriers, which are quite dynamic and varies among countries, impact of dynamic regulatory domestic as well as international socio-politico-economic environment etc.

Thus, the above discussion inspires someone to think that are the existing literature on forecasting global trade and its determinants account for all the factors or some are still left to be included.

Additionally, a bunch of interesting questions certainly demand for better answers such as what are actual motives of crossborder trade and do they differ according to the government, companies, and other types of organizations?

- what are the critical factor that are considered by firms while choosing offshoring locations and does the same factor receive varying importance among different geographical locations?
- is trade in value added driven by companies or countries?
- and how can the naturally rich regions be brought into the mainstream of international trade which have been deprived from its gain for a long time and what are the roles of technology, international organizations and governments here?

The answer to all these questions finally raises another question: is it time for a new theory to explain crossborder trade, especially in intermediate products in context where all assumptions of traditional trade theories become reality? ■

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GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA

# Destabilised supply chains





Shanghai, the world's biggest port, is returning to normal. Sarah Schiffling and Nikolaos Valantasis Kanellos argue that despite this supply chains will get worse before they get better

**S**hanghai is slowly emerging from a gruelling COVID lockdown that has all but immobilised<sup>1</sup> the city since March. Although Shanghai’s port, which handles one-fifth<sup>2</sup> of China’s shipping volumes, has been operating throughout, it has been running<sup>3</sup> at severely reduced capacity. Many shipments have either been cancelled, postponed or rerouted to other Chinese mega-ports such as Ningbo-Zhoushan.

With the city fully reopening, the port is going to be in overdrive as manufacturers try to fulfil backlogs, with serious knock-on effects around the world. It is an example of how global supply chains in 2022 have been destabilised in ways that were not apparent at the beginning of the year.

In January, we predicted ongoing disruption<sup>4</sup> as the world economy continued to recover from the pandemic. In fact, things have got worse.

Besides Shanghai, other major Chinese ports such as Shenzhen<sup>5</sup> have also been affected by lockdowns. And then there is Ukraine. The war has pushed up prices for goods and services even higher than predicted rises<sup>6</sup> for 2022, as well as adding to logistical difficulties.

According to the New York Federal Reserve’s global supply chain pressure index<sup>7</sup>, which takes account of issues such as freight rates, delivery times and backlogs, supply chains are under unprecedented pressure<sup>8</sup> – and have been getting worse recently.

**Ukraine and food**

Ukraine might not have been on many people’s radar as a key economic partner, but it was already seen as a major bottleneck<sup>9</sup> for food supply chains long before the war got underway.

This was due to poor port infrastructure and the large concentration of world maize and wheat supplies moving through. The war was therefore always going to have a devastating impact<sup>10</sup> on international supplies.

You can get a good sense of the ripple effect on prices<sup>11</sup> by considering a bag of fish and chips<sup>12</sup>. Sunflower oil for frying used to be imported from Russia and Ukraine. Flour for the batter came from Ukraine. Much of the fish used to be caught by Russian trawlers but is about to be affected by sanctions<sup>13</sup>. In all cases, this translates into shortages and/or raised prices.

Then there is electricity and gas<sup>14</sup>, whose prices have skyrocketed thanks to sanctions, affecting everything from deliveries to food production. And since Russia is a key player in the fertiliser market<sup>15</sup>, even domestically grown potatoes will become more expensive soon enough.

With Ukraine’s ports blockaded now for months, Russia is also being accused of holding food hostage<sup>16</sup> for millions around the world. Developing countries are being hit hardest<sup>17</sup>, while in richer nations, the poorest<sup>18</sup> are bearing the brunt.

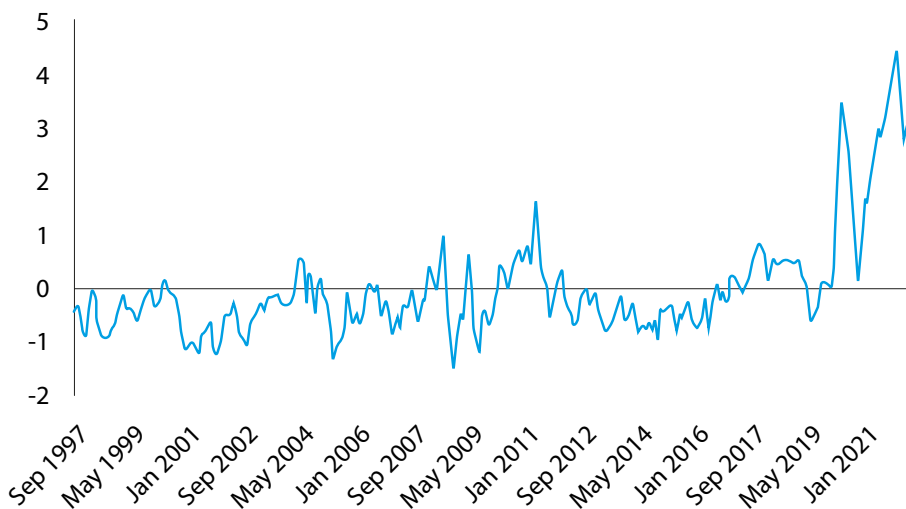
Even when the conflict ends, restarting food exports from Ukraine will not be easy<sup>19</sup>. Capacity on land transport is limited and the sea, in addition to the Russian blockade, is heavily mined.

**The double whammy**

Beyond food, the war’s impact on energy and fuel prices has made both production and transport more expensive across the board, exacerbating the effects from China’s COVID problems.

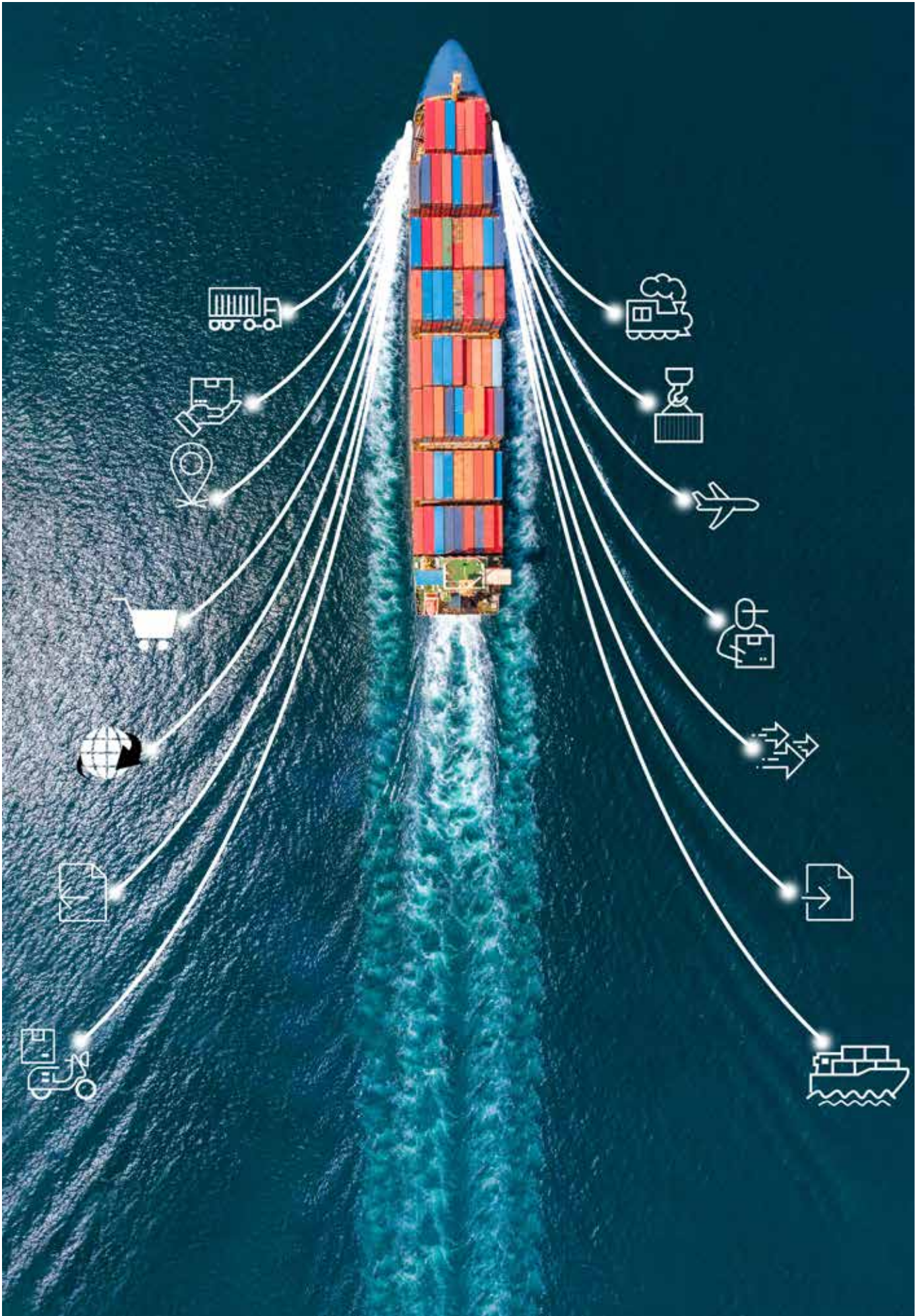
This has hit<sup>20</sup> major western players, including Apple, Tesla, Adidas, Amazon and General Electric. Easing restrictions in

**The global supply chain pressure index**



Note: Y-axis shows standard deviations from average value. Sources: NY Federal Reserve, based on data from various sources





*“Supply chains are going through their most turbulent period in many years, but learning lessons and adapting will hopefully mean that the worst can be avoided in future”*

China are now allowing some, such as Volkswagen and Tesla, to restart production, but logistics delays linger, with everything from healthcare to entertainment gadgets affected<sup>21</sup>.

Around the world, many major ports experienced congestion in 2021, with the US west coast ports<sup>22</sup> of Los Angeles and Long Beach enduring long periods with dozens of ships waiting to dock.

This eased noticeably<sup>23</sup> in early 2022, but Shanghai port’s return to normal operations is likely to lead to a torrent of products heading west as manufacturers do their best to clear order backlogs. This will probably mean<sup>24</sup> bottlenecks and delays at the western end in the coming weeks.

Meanwhile, the heightened demand for ships will potentially affect freight prices: these went up<sup>25</sup> at least five-fold in 2021

as suppliers struggled to deal with pent-up COVID demand, and even after reducing in 2022 they are still about four times the pre-COVID rate. Any further increases will put more pressure on consumer prices.

### **There is hope**

Even if there are no more China lockdowns and the Ukraine crisis does not spread, the global supply chain is clearly going to be under heavy pressure for the rest of the year<sup>26</sup>. According to one recent UK survey<sup>27</sup>, three-quarters of companies think 2023 will be tough too.

For smaller businesses in particular, a failure to adapt to the changing environment could threaten their survival. At a time when fears of a recession are already in the wind, this could make<sup>28</sup> longer-term economic recovery all the more difficult.

But for the medium term at least, there are reasons to be cautiously optimistic. For decades, most supply chains were focused on cutting costs.

Manufacturing was outsourced to specialist suppliers, ideally in countries with lower labour costs. Firms kept minimal inventories and used short-term contracts to be as flexible as possible.

The weaknesses<sup>29</sup> in this ‘just-in-time’<sup>30</sup> system were exposed by COVID and the US/China trade war, and now many companies are putting more emphasis on being resilient and



also having a clearer view of all the suppliers in the chain. In this 'just-in-case'<sup>31</sup> model, some inefficiencies are considered an advantage rather than a waste of money.

Cost is still of course a key consideration, but product quality and availability<sup>32</sup> are now seen as more important. Companies are also diversifying their supplier base<sup>33</sup> so that they are not as dependent on China (with the additional benefit of reducing their carbon footprints<sup>34</sup>).

US players such as Walmart, Boeing and Ford<sup>35</sup> are among those turning to locations nearer their home markets, while numerous UK<sup>36</sup> and mainland European companies<sup>37</sup> are following suit.

Shifts like these should at least make supply chains a bit more robust in future, even if this probably also leads to higher prices. At the same time, we see efforts to anticipate future crises.

The EU and US plan<sup>38</sup> to develop an early warning system to identify future global disruptions to semiconductor supply chains, which have affected everything from production to cars to video game consoles.

More broadly, a recent UK report<sup>39</sup> called on the government to establish a resilience task force and work with industry to increase visibility within supply chains.

That sort of approach would be well worth implementing. Supply chains are going through their most turbulent period in many years, but learning lessons and adapting will hopefully mean that the worst can be avoided in future. ■

#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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# Recovering from COVID

**Conrad van Gass is the Principal Investigating Officer for the COVID-19 Macroeconomic Policy Responses in Africa (CoMPRA) project and a Senior Research Fellow at the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA)**



## Executive summary

This policy insight synthesises the findings of six sub-Saharan African country case studies, analysing their government policy responses to the trade and employment shocks prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Vulnerability to the shock was most pronounced in the wealthier, more open, diversified and formalised economies (South Africa and Senegal); in Nigeria, where trade and government balances are very sensitive to oil price fluctuations; and in Uganda, which reacted with a strict domestic lockdown.

By contrast, growth decelerated only marginally in Benin and Tanzania, where government reactions were minimal or delayed. The capacity to offer a counter fiscal stimulus, liquidity support through loan guarantees and concessional debt, and an accommodative monetary policy depends on the income status of the economy, depth of financial markets, size of the government sector, and access to global development finance channels.

South Africa and Senegal were able to put into effect the most substantive stimulus packages, while Nigeria was constrained by having the smallest and most volatile tax base and a high bank liquidity profile.

Save for Benin and Uganda, which devoted half their stimulus package to health spending, most countries concentrated on industry support and tax relief. Here South Africa was an outlier, instead using 60% of its package for unemployment and social security benefits owing to a sharp rise in unemployment and food stress.

The key national policy challenges identified for the COVID recovery period include extending food security nets, adjusting infrastructure and industrial policy to accommodate climate risk mitigation and adaptation, removing intra-African tariffs and standardising non-tariff barriers to reinvigorate African economies, and diversifying government revenue bases.

Key global policy initiatives requiring a common African negotiating position pertain to persuading higher-income nations to donate their excess Special Drawing Rights (SDR) allocations to the relevant International Monetary Fund (IMF) facilities that on-lend concessional finance to bolster central bank reserve adequacy and boost development finance flows. The potential for a global debt restructuring initiative is explored, with a focus on official development aid (ODA) for food security.

## Economic development context

This policy insight is a synthesis of case studies of six middle- and low-income countries across sub-Saharan Africa, investigating the impact of, and policy responses to, the COVID shock of 2020–21. It also evaluates them against longer-term developmental objectives of social inclusivity and climate resilience. Comparative data analysis is undertaken with a view to developing financial capacity, climate-friendliness and vulnerability–inclusivity indices.

Policy recommendations are guided by the question of how to develop Africa’s resilience to shocks through the COVID recovery period (2021–2024) and beyond.

### Key country features

South Africa is sub-Saharan Africa’s (SSA) richest major economy with per capita incomes three times the sub-continental average. Roughly 85% of its labour force is dependent on formal sector employment, and the formal unemployment rate is 35%.

It is the only major African nation where gender parity in both formal and informal employment status is evident. As indicated by carbon emissions that are 10 times the sub-continental average, South Africa is also the most pervasively industrialised economy, but with legacy infrastructure that needs replacing or renovating.

It has a large services sector, contributing 61.4% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2020, compared to the SSA average of 48%. Finance, trade, information and communications, and government services are more important contributors to value added than elsewhere on the sub-continent.

Its financial markets are considerably deeper (offering a range of longer-term – including green – financial products unavailable elsewhere in SSA) and wider (with banking penetration rates nearly double the SSA average). The country has an independent currency that exchanges freely on global markets and is the core of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU)<sup>1</sup>.

Nigeria is SSA’s largest economy but, like most of the case study countries, is classified by the World Bank as lower-middle-income<sup>2</sup>. In contrast to South Africa, but in common with the rest of the sub-continent, only about 20% of its labour force is employed formally, and there is a clear employment gender bias in favour of men.

Owing to the subsistence nature of most informal employment, extreme poverty rates across SSA are more than double those of South Africa. The composition of value added is relatively typical of the sub-continent at 25% each to agriculture and industry and 50% to services.

**Table 1. Key analytical features for country comparisons**

Comparative socio-economic indicators	Financial capacity			Climate-friendliness	Vulnerability	
	GDP* per capita (Int\$)	Tradables as % of GDP	Trade & currency regime	CO <sub>2</sub> emissions per capita (tons)	Extreme poverty	% female labour force in formal employment
	2020	2020	2020	2018	2011-2018	2019
Nigeria	\$5,187	26.11	Federation	0.67	39.1%	14.5
South Africa	\$12,032	50.45	Core - SACU	7.50	18.7%	86.7
Uganda	\$2,574	41.68	EAC	0.14	41.3%	16.8
Benin	\$3,437	38.60	WAEMU	0.69	49.6%	6.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	\$3,926	44.27	AfCFTA	0.76	42.0%	18.6

Note: \* gross domestic product; SACU: Southern African Customs Union; EAC East African Community; WAEMU West African Economic and Monetary Union; AfCFTA African Continental Free Trade Area

Sources: International Monetary Fund, “World Economic Outlook Database” [<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2021/October>], October 2021; IMF, “AFR Regional Economic Outlook” [<https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/datasets/AFRREO>], October 2021; World Bank, “World Development Indicators” [<https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>], November 2021; International Labour Organization, “Data Explorer” [<https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorer9/>], November 2021

*“African nations should push for IMF membership quotas to take account of population [potential and need] in addition to its [primary] criterion of GDP”*

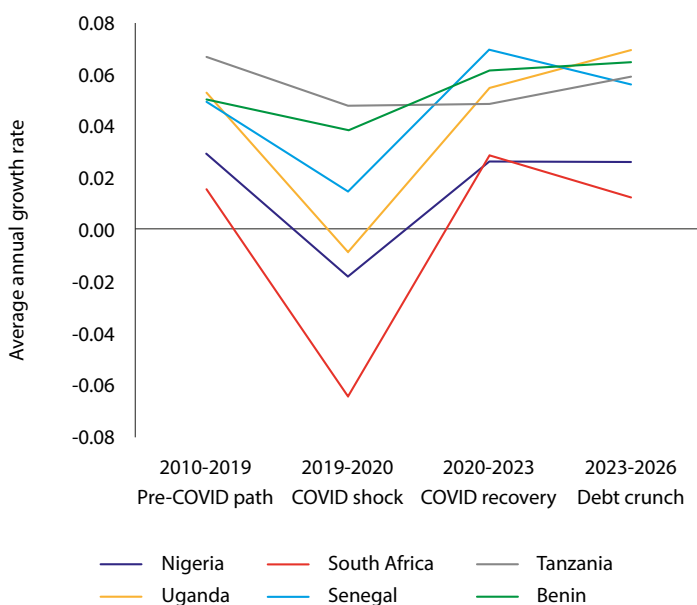
Of the case study countries, Nigeria is the least open to international trade and the most protectionist of domestic producers (with consequently high tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade). It is a member of the ECOWAS free trade agreement and has an independent currency with a fixed peg – a situation that is difficult to sustain.

Nigeria’s financial markets are also relatively shallow. Banking penetration rates are below average, and credit offerings are predominantly short term and operational. Liquidity ratios are unusually high and loan-to-deposit ratios unusually low.

The country has a small public sector with spending and revenue respectively constituting 12.1% and 6.3% of GDP in 2020. Balance of payments and government balances are unusually vulnerable to fluctuations in oil prices despite (or because of) protectionist policies<sup>3</sup>.

Senegal and Benin are members of WAEMU and share a common currency backed by the French Treasury. This backing offers several developmental advantages for these small economies, including access to concessional debt to maintain trade and investment balances, currency stability, the deepening of financial markets and, with it, the capacity of governments to raise debt finance.

**Figure 1. Real GDP growth, pre- to post-COVID (2010–2026)**



Source: IMF, “World Economic Outlook Database” [https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2021/October], October 2021

Senegal is notably more industrialised and financialised than Benin, with higher rates of formal employment, a lower gender employment gap and lower extreme poverty<sup>4</sup>.

The poorest segment in the country case studies cohort is two members of the EAC, Tanzania and Uganda. EAC member countries are broadly similar in terms of composition of value added. They are more agriculture and agro-processing oriented than average, the structure of the labour force has the highest gender employment gaps, and the depth of financial markets is low while the public sector is relatively small.

Membership of a customs, and incipient monetary, union is enabled by these similarities and is evidenced by a common restraint in terms of divergences in trade, fiscal and monetary policy<sup>5</sup>.

**Performance and prospects**

This section reviews the relative impact of the COVID shock on economic livelihoods, and the capacity and willingness of national governments to offer counter-cyclical support at the height of the pandemic in 2020. It also looks at the prospects for the medium-term recovery period (2021–24) and beyond (up to 2026) when Africa could face a debt repayment wall<sup>6</sup>.

**Vulnerability to COVID-induced trade and policy shocks**

The COVID shock was transmitted to Africa through disruptions to international trade and global supply chains, amplified, in varying degrees, by domestic restrictions on trade and employment. Thus one might expect the more open economies and those that are formal-employment intensive (notably South Africa and Senegal) to be most deeply and widely impacted.

Structural growth trends are also important in explaining why such divergent economic structures as South Africa and Nigeria were most deeply shocked into recession. Per capita incomes in South Africa have been in structural decline for the past decade, and in Nigeria, low real per capita growth has been prone to commodity price shocks.

Poor investor confidence around the energy transition and industrial refurbishment is also relevant in the South African instance. For Nigeria, the main structural constraints appear to be around trade diversification and liberalisation, industrial and agricultural export orientation, and government revenue enhancement<sup>7</sup>.

Domestic policy differences played a role in amplifying the global supply chain shocks. While Uganda quickly closed its borders and imposed a domestic lockdown, arranged for IMF concessional debt and issued a fiscal stimulus package, Tanzania decided that the (actual and opportunity) costs of lockdowns and stimulus packages were not worth the longer-term debt burdens.

Tanzania’s GDP growth decelerated from 6.7% (2010–2019) to 4.8% in 2020; while Uganda’s plunged from 5.3% to -0.8%<sup>8</sup>. Within WAEMU, where intra-regional constraints on trade and fiscal balances are more imposing, Senegal reacted faster and

more comprehensively than Benin. Senegal's growth in 2020 decelerated sharply from 5% to 1.5%, while Benin's dropped more modestly from 5.1% to 3.8%<sup>9</sup>.

When projecting into the COVID recovery period and the subsequent debt crunch, the IMF uses a return to structural growth trends in the medium term and a variable deceleration thereafter as its basis. Thus, the low-growth, core economies of South Africa and Nigeria, and the high-growth, semi-peripheral economies of WAEMU and EAC, are expected to rebound accordingly.

Certain national policy differences are taken into account. Notably, these include success with the energy transition in South Africa, thereby lifting real per capita growth into the positive and, at the same time, an expectation that Tanzania will suffer the consequences of its COVID denialism. This will see a prolonged recovery, compensated for by a longer-term uptick without the additional debt repayment burden.

### Capacity to effect fiscal stimulus

Whereas one might expect the width and depth of the tax base or access to domestic or foreign credit markets to be the main determinant of fiscal capacity to raise government deficits, this is only partially true (in the cases of South Africa and Senegal). National specificities in policy responses to countering the shock were also important.

While Uganda, like South Africa and Senegal, more than doubled its deficit, Tanzania lowered its spending, deficit and debt levels in 2020. While all the other countries managed to sustain or increase their tax-to-GDP ratios, Nigeria's extra deficit can largely be attributed to a loss of resource tax revenue from 10% (2010–2019) to 6.3% (in 2020).

Inasmuch as Nigeria's tax losses are the result of depressed commodity prices during 2020, so a reversal of fortunes in

2021 is evident as global supply chain re-openings boost producer demand and prices.

This reversal, however, was not foreseen in the IMF's projections of slow tax growth and spending austerity. In Tanzania, expectations are that delayed spending will raise its low deficits somewhat over the COVID recovery period. Elsewhere, a combination of tax revenue consolidation and spending austerity is expected to return deficits to trend through to 2026.

There are some discrepancies between the value of the fiscal stimuli announced and the actual funding that can be released (as indicated in Figure 3). Significant funding gaps are apparent for Senegal and, to a lesser extent, Nigeria. South Africa's actual and budgeted measures largely corresponded.

In Benin, Tanzania and Uganda, stimulus packages were lower in value than the change in government balance. These conservative spending responses reflected uncertainty about the extent of the tax shortfalls that the COVID shock might induce, and the full extent of the counter-cyclical spending required.

### Capacity to effect a financial stimulus

Some countries announced financial stimulus (or liquidity support) programmes mainly in the form of short- to medium-term loan guarantees or extensions of concessional loan schemes to stricken (tourism) or priority (industrial or agricultural) sector firms.

Countries with deeper financial markets and well-established concessional development finance channels (ie. South Africa and the WAEMU countries) have the greatest capacity to effect financial stimuli. These countries are also able to effectively tap global climate and development financing flows.

By contrast, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda will need to extend their financial sector capabilities into capital and insurance products if they are to activate these channels.

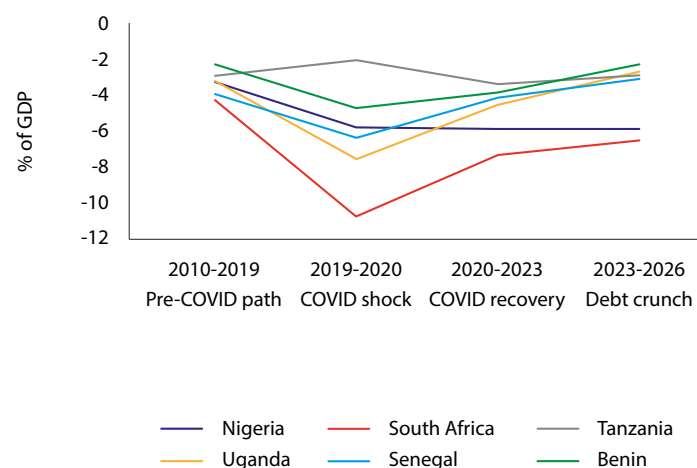
Strengthening and activating linkages between global, continental and national concessional finance channels are an integral part of institutionalising any long-term energy transitioning, industrial or agricultural development strategy. Deepening development finance channels can weaken defences against unsustainable debt accumulation.

The probabilities of guaranteed loan default, the estimation of implicit interest subsidies and the catalytic effect of direct equity or bond purchases of parastatal and public-private partnership stock are all difficult to measure.

Hybrid financial instruments create contingent liabilities (off balance sheet) that lie awkwardly between treasury and central bank remits. As such, they can complicate risk assessments of sovereign creditworthiness if not transparently recorded and actively managed.

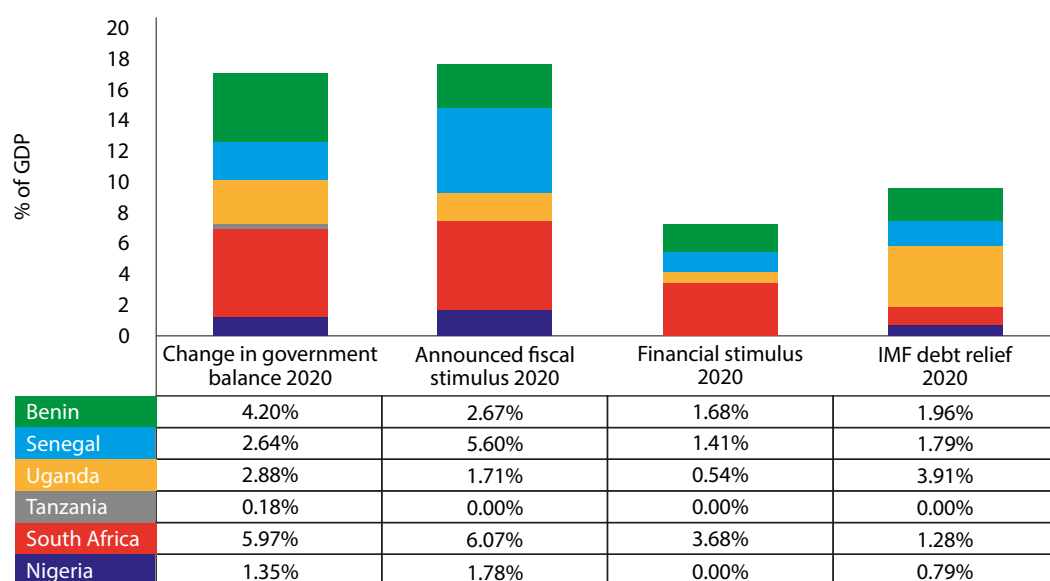
To some measure, take-up of these additional contingent liabilities was enabled by access to similarly concessional

**Figure 2. Government deficit as % of GDP**



Source: IMF, "World Economic Outlook Database" [<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2021/October>], October 2021

**Figure 3. Funding stimulus packages in 2020, as % of GDP**



Source: Authors collation from IMF, "Fiscal Monitor Database" [<https://data.imf.org/?sk=4be0c9cb-272a-4667-8892-34b582b21ba6>], October 2021

loans from the IMF. When central banks record less than three months of import cover, full coverage of external short-term debt, and 20% of M2 (cash, savings deposits and money market mutual funds) as a buffer against capital flight, they are eligible for progressively longer maturity, more concessional and conditional debt.

As an upper-middle-income country, South Africa is only eligible for the shortest-term Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI) funding, which comes without technical assistance or policy implementation requirements. South Africa is the only case study country that can supplement its financial stimulus packages with own funding. Nigeria has also taken out RFI funding but – seemingly – without the accompanying domestic liquidity support.

Senegal, Benin and Uganda have progressed to RCF and Extended Credit Facilities. These are longer-term facilities with commitments or conditionalities relating to social security net extension, capital and liquidity reserves for banks, and public finance management respectively. These country take-ups of concessional debt exceed any announced financial stimulus. Tanzania's heterodox approach is indicated by a refusal to accept IMF debt<sup>10</sup>.

Inasmuch as additional debt is required to recover from the COVID shock and build future resilience to shocks, and funds are spent cost effectively in terms of global and national policy objectives, raising the portion of concessional (multilateral or bilateral) official over private debt will ease the prospective debt burden.

IMF short-term debt will become repayable within two to five years from 2020 and is expected to contribute to an African debt servicing wall peaking in 2024. As Figure 3 shows, Uganda (with 3.9% of its GDP being IMF funded) is most exposed to this risk, and Nigeria and Tanzania least so.

### Capacity to effect monetary stimulus

It might be expected that a monetary accommodation will accompany fiscal and financial stimuli. As a government raises its deficit and debt levels, it will need to boost demand for its bonds. It does this by lowering bank reserve requirements, lowering the interest rate from central to commercial banks, and expanding the monetary base.

Most of the central banks in our case studies did indeed implement monetary measures in 2020, but only South Africa and Uganda accelerated growth of the money supply in line with their fiscal stimuli. While Tanzania remained unperturbed by the COVID reverberations, money supply growth decelerated in the West African countries.

For Senegal and Benin, monetary stimulus is outside their control, as the Central African franc is pegged to the euro. For Nigeria, the concern is that a monetary stimulus will quickly generate domestic inflationary pressures and a depreciation of the independent currency against efforts to stabilise it<sup>11</sup>.

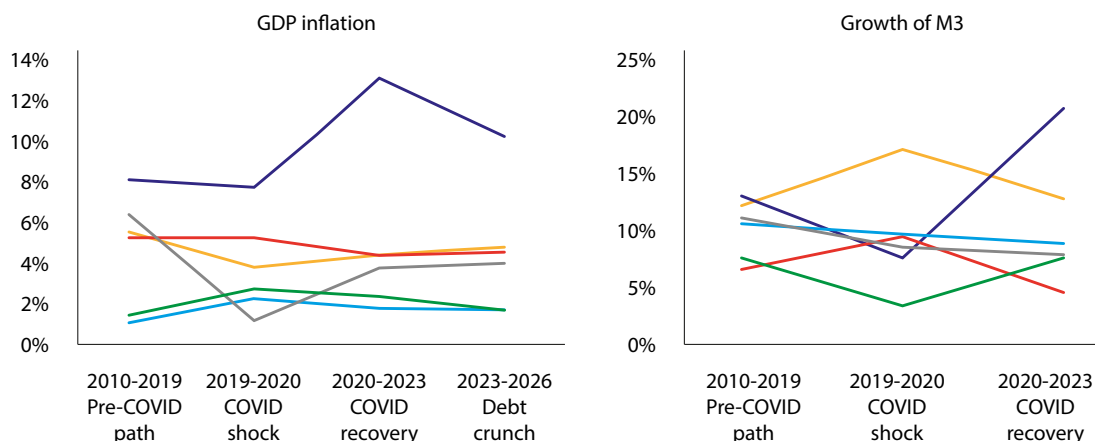
Nigeria has structurally higher inflation than the others, and it is expected to rise over the recovery period. South Africa has an independent currency prone to unrestricted depreciation and consequent exposure to imported inflation.

However, both the money supply and banking assets as a percentage of GDP (at 86% and 137% respectively in 2020) are much higher than elsewhere on the sub-continent<sup>12</sup>. This implies a far greater systemic capacity to affect the velocity of circulation and productive capacity utilisation, without causing price increases.

As such, the central bank's inflation targeting has been maintained within its limits of 3–6%, and it is expected to continue doing so through a gradual tightening of its monetary policy stance<sup>13</sup>. WAEMU countries are expected to



**Figure 4. Inflation and money growth, 2010–2024**



Source: IMF, “World Economic Outlook Database” [https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2021/October], October 2021; IMF, “AFR Regional Economic Outlook” [https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/datasets/AFRREO], October 2021

contain inflation through external constraints on monetary expansion, while Tanzania is expected to maintain tight monetary policies.

Whether or not demand-pull inflation is induced by accelerated monetary expansion, cost-push inflationary pressures are expected globally and Africa-wide during the recovery. This is owing to supply chain disruptions and restructurings, which tend to accentuate tendencies towards monopolistic supply and distribution channels.

While inflation may reduce the real value of debt, it disproportionately affects the real spending power of the poor. Consumer price inflation is usually higher than producer inflation and, with food being the most income-inelastic of commodities, food inflation premiums are even higher.

This is especially true for Nigeria, where the premium was an additional 4.3% in 2021. By exception, a food inflation discount of -1.3% is estimated for Uganda, where agricultural input subsidies and freer trade in agricultural commodities are promoted<sup>14</sup>.

### National policy responses

This section reviews the composition of announced stimulus packages as a reflection of both implementation capacity and policy choice in response to a (public health) shock. It evaluates these against the longer-term developmental criteria of building resilience by ensuring inclusivity and enabling the climate transition.

#### Inclusivity: employment and poverty

The West African countries devoted approximately one-third of their fiscal stimulus to industry support (salaries and operational costs) while Tanzania’s delayed COVID policy response was largely composed thereof.

South Africa and Uganda made substantial use of tax deferrals and subsidies (roughly one-quarter of their packages). Although aimed at protection, these measures

disproportionately benefitted business owners and core employees.

The COVID shock shed formal sector jobs in line with the depth of GDP recession induced. Between the end of 2019 and 2020, unemployment rates rose from 32.6% to 34.4% in South Africa, 27.1% to 33.3% in Nigeria and 16.7% to 22.6% in Senegal<sup>15</sup>.

In part, this was countered by an expansion and extension of unemployment benefits. South Africa devoted over 60% of its package to extending the social security net, and Senegal about one-third. Both countries introduced new grants for unregistered workers in the informal and domestic sectors in recognition that formal sector job losses swell the ranks of the under-employed, self-employed and unpaid.

While Nigeria’s social security net is undeveloped by African standards, the country devoted over half its stimulus package to labour-intensive public works programmes. In the other high-growth East African countries and Benin, where the impact on poverty from trade disruption-induced unemployment was far less pronounced, there were also less capacity and demand to extend social security nets.

A comparison of the changes to per capita GDP from the COVID shock and the proportions of GDP announced as counter-cyclical welfare measures suggests that economies that sustained economic growth (Tanzania and Benin) did not suffer welfare losses.

It also suggests that counter-cyclical measures alleviated nearly half the welfare losses in Nigeria and South Africa, and 15% of Uganda’s, and more than compensated for them in Senegal. The compilation of cross-country comparative data on poverty will enable better assessment of the effectiveness of these measures.

The third major component of the fiscal stimulus is health spending. Uganda and Benin allocated about half their





**Table 2. Policy priorities and composition of stimulus (2020–21)**

% GDP	Total stimulus	Additional or redirected spending			Reduced revenue	Financial stimulus	
		Health	Social security	Infra-structure	Industry support	Tax subsidies & deferrals	Loans, guarantees, concessions
South Africa	10.00%	0.80%	3.60%	0.00%	0.10%	1.40%	4.10%
Nigeria	2.40%	0.10%	0.10%	1.30%	0.60%	0.00%	0.30%
Tanzania	0.70%	*	0.10%	*	0.60%	*	*
Uganda	2.10%	0.90%	0.10%	0.35%	0.25%	0.50%	0.00%
Senegal	4.40%	0.60%	1.00%	0.25%	0.95%	0.35%	1.40%
Benin	4.40%	1.40%	0.20%	*	1.00%	0.20%	1.60%

Note: Discrepancies between sources on the size of the stimulus packages reflect different classification methods and variable delays in processing national-level data into globally comparative forms

Sources: Own calculations from Global Observatory on Social Protection and Economic Policy Responses, "UN Covid-19 Stimulus Tracker"; <https://tracker.unescwa.org/Resources/0?p=0>

**Table 3. Approximate net changes to welfare of the COVID shock**

Country	% change in GDP per capita (\$)	% of GDP on additional social security and public works	Potential welfare loss/gain
	2020	2020	2019
Nigeria	-3.11	1.40	-1.71
South Africa	-6.65	3.60	-3.05
Tanzania	3.00	0.10	3.10
Uganda	-3.05	0.45	-2.60
Senegal	-0.02	2.25	2.23
Benin	2.23	0.20	2.43

Source: IMF, "World Economic Outlook Database" [<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2021/October>], October 2021

packages to health, with underwhelming results in terms of vaccination rates (see Table 4).

Senegal devoted a fifth of its package to health, with marginally better effects. South Africa spent a seventh of its stimulus on health quite effectively in terms of vaccination coverage. Nigeria and Tanzania spent and received little.

With slow vaccination rates and rising unemployment and poverty, one can expect that, for the medium term, governments will continue their increased spending on health and social security, unless COVID-19 morphs into an endemic disease in the short term.

Coupled with inevitable increases in debt repayment requirements, these fiscal commitments will squeeze out spending on longer-term investments in education and infrastructure, as well as security services that may be needed to keep peace as economic deprivation fuels civil and border conflicts.

#### Climate transitions

Most country policy responses to COVID<sup>16</sup> have been reactive to the crisis rather than pro-active in either adjusting or fulfilling socio-economic development strategies. Little or no consideration was explicitly given to the energy transition in devising stimulus packages.

**Table 4. Comparative vulnerability to impoverishment shocks**

Comparative spending outcomes	Vaccination rates (% of population)	Social security net (% of population)	Food-GDP inflation rate premium	School closures (weeks)
	2021	2019-2020	2021	2020
Nigeria	7.0	11.0	4.25%	24
South Africa	33.0	49.3	0.57%	60
Tanzania	4.1	14.0	0.26%	15
Uganda	27.0	2.8	-1.29%	83
Senegal	8.2	20.0	2.47%	22
Benin	18.0	7.8	1.87%	15

Sources: Our World In Data, "Coronavirus (COVID-19) Vaccinations" [<https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations>], February 2022; ILOSTAT, "Statistics on Social Protection" [<https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/social-protection/>], August 2021; own calculations from Trading Economics, "Food Inflation" [<https://tradingeconomics.com/country-list/food-inflation>]; IMF, "World Economic Outlook Database" [<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2021/October>], October 2021; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Covid-19 Education Response: Total Duration of School Closures" [<https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse#durationschoolclosures>].

South Africa delayed its carbon tax implementation schedule (a climate-negative revenue measure) while Nigeria redirected fossil fuel subsidies to public works programmes (a climate-positive spending measure). Elsewhere and otherwise, industry and liquidity support measures can be considered climate neutral or indirectly negative<sup>17</sup>.

### National policy initiatives to build economic resilience

In search of common cross-country policy initiatives that both enhance African resilience to shocks and take account of variable financial and institutional capacity to implement them, the following themes are indicated as an agenda for using the COVID recovery to advance longer-term, restructuring objectives of an inclusive and just climate transition.

#### Food and social security grants

South Africa has the capacity to consider extending a food security grant to the remaining adult population that lives in poverty regardless of employment status. Any extension of food packages, institutional feeding schemes, social grants or small farmer agricultural input subsidies can be considered a more inclusive means of fostering fiscal trickle-down to the most vulnerable (disproportionately women) across all the countries in the case study cohort.

Effectiveness must be measured against alleviating food stress or crisis, and malnutrition. Revenue measures that can alleviate food stress include duty and VAT exemptions on basic foodstuffs.

#### Climate and development finance

In accordance with the Paris Agreement on setting national targets for carbon emission reductions (Nationally Determined Contributions, or NDCs), individual countries are expected to align their infrastructure and industrial development plans to

the green agenda of decarbonising energy and fuel supplies and recycling waste.

South Africa's dominant formal economy is nearly 80% dependent on coal resources. Decommissioning the coal industry and recommissioning the associated petrochemical complex will generate localised job losses and require major reskilling for a just transition.

Similar challenges apply to Nigeria's continued oil dependency, while all the other high-growth case study economies still have carbon fuel extraction projects in the pipeline. These adaptation challenges require a funding stream equivalent to those being established for mitigation through alternative energy production, grid extension, transport and industrial re-engineering.

#### Industrial and trade policy

African countries began trading under the AfCFTA in 2021. The AfCFTA's longer-term objectives are to remove intra-African tariff barriers and apply a common external tariff to the rest of the world.

It is also aimed at developing common standards for technical barriers to trade (rules of origin, sanitary and phyto-sanitary standards, licensing requirements, local content and ownership) and other non-tariff barriers (surtaxes, quotas, production subsidies and monopolistic/monopsonistic distributors).

These will be built on, and provide an alternative to, existing regional economic community arrangements, and will be negotiated on a product-by-product basis over the medium term and beyond. A dispute resolution mechanism serves to develop the institutional architecture on a case-by-case basis<sup>18</sup>.

**Table 5. Projected impact of intra-African trade liberalisation (2022–2035)**

% increase (2022 to 2035)	GDP	Exports	Imports	Intra-African exports	Intra-African imports
	2021	2019-2020		2021	2020
Nigeria	0.09%	1.97%	2.47%	28.36%	53.71%
South Africa	0.47%	1.93%	4.60%	15.25%	1.01%
Tanzania	0.66%	2.83%	3.15%	23.75%	37.12%
Uganda	0.33%	2.98%	4.99%	27.45%	15.59%
Senegal	1.27%	-0.97%	9.68%	23.00%	33.67%
Rest of West Africa (including Benin)	1.65%	3.45%	4.07%	60.88%	41.07%

Sources: Authors collation from European Union Joint Research Centre [<https://datam.jrc.ec.europa.eu/datam/mashup/AfCFTA/index.html>], November 2021

The associated aim is to promote intra-African export orientation in agricultural and industrial development, and to develop regional value chains connected to global ones.

Table 5 indicates the modelled impact of the AfCFTA tariff reduction schedule and a removal of non-tariff barriers to 2035 on intra-African trade, international trade and GDP.

The results presented are an average of four possible strategies guiding the choice of sensitive and excluded products, and the speed of liberalisation, namely tariff maximisation, food security enhancement, promotion of industrialisation and utilisation of comparative advantage.

#### Diversifying revenue sources

Many African governments are over-reliant on natural resource and international trade taxes. This locks in carbon fuel dependency and domestic protection, where the future challenges are to decarbonise and dismantle barriers to trade (or at least level the playing fields).

The easiest replacement is higher domestic sales taxes. Flat rate sales taxes are income-regressive in that poorer consumers spend greater proportions of their earnings than richer ones.

Exemptions or lower rates on food and medical items can ameliorate the distributional effects but may be administratively costly. Higher income, property and wealth taxes are the most income- progressive if they are graduated by income level.

Corporate profit taxes are considered the least market-distorting form of redistributive taxation<sup>19</sup>. It is not clear whether the recent G20 agreement on a minimum global corporate tax of 15% and base erosion and profit sharing will benefit African governments, where corporate income tax rates are generally higher than 15%, and complex intermediation between African regional and global supply chains is often designed with exploiting intra-African tax

avoidance loopholes in mind<sup>20</sup>. Carbon taxes are the most effective fiscal means of disincentivising carbon fuel usage.

#### Global policy initiatives

This final section addresses some of the global policy initiatives that African countries can collectively negotiate with and over to improve their resilience to shocks by accessing a more equitable share of global development finance flows, based on (greater) need and (lower) contribution to the climate crisis.

#### Concessional debt

In August 2021 the IMF issued \$650 billion worth of SDRs, thereby increasing their share of global reserve assets from 2% to 7%. These are allocated to countries primarily according to their share of world GDP, but also their openness, diversification and reserve holdings. SSA countries collectively receive 3.6% of the allocation.

Since they are intended to restore national reserve adequacies, and since African low- and middle-income countries are most at risk (rather than the advanced economies, which receive over 60% of the allocation), the IMF has asked that the richer countries voluntarily donate SDR allocations to the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT) for on-lending to low- and lower-middle-income countries. Thus far, a further 3.6% has been redirected to the PRGT<sup>21</sup>.

Proposals have been put forward to redirect \$50–100 billion into a Resilience and Sustainability Trust to support climate-vulnerable low- and middle-income countries with loans conditional on policies consistent with country NDCs.

The eligibility criteria for climate vulnerability favours Vulnerable 20 (V20) members and is thereby skewed towards smaller economies (with burdens affordable to advanced economies)<sup>22</sup>. Of our case study countries, only Senegal and Benin would be eligible.

#### Climate and development finance

Standard and Poor's estimates that current SDR allocations

would restore reserve adequacy in only five of 44 eligible emerging economies. To restore adequacy for all eligible countries would require high-income countries to redirect 42% of their allocations<sup>23</sup>.

The start of an African negotiating stance is indicated in the Declaration from the Summit on Financing of African Economies<sup>24</sup> of May 2021. The declaration proposes that advanced countries redirect 55% of their SDR allocations, half to low-income and half to middle-income African countries (including, therefore, all our case study countries).

The excess – over-restoring central bank reserve adequacy – should be directed via the existing development finance networks (the World Bank, the African Development Bank [AfDB] and other regional development finance institutions), in support of the Alliance for Entrepreneurship<sup>25</sup> in Africa to establish equity and venture capital facilities, and to micro-finance institutions.

The uses of these funds should be devoted two-thirds to expanding green energy infrastructure and the remainder to digitisation. Important catalytic innovations include policy and project guarantees, project bankruptcy procedures and political risk insurance<sup>26</sup>.

The climate finance component of this proposal can be seen as part of the effort to accelerate progress towards achieving the \$100 billion annual commitments made to redirect bilateral, multilateral and mobilised private finance into concessional loans, grants, guarantees and equity to mitigate climate change. As of 2019, \$79.6 billion had been raised (36% from bilateral, 43% from multilateral and the rest from private sources) and instrumentalised as 71% loans and 27% grants<sup>27</sup>.

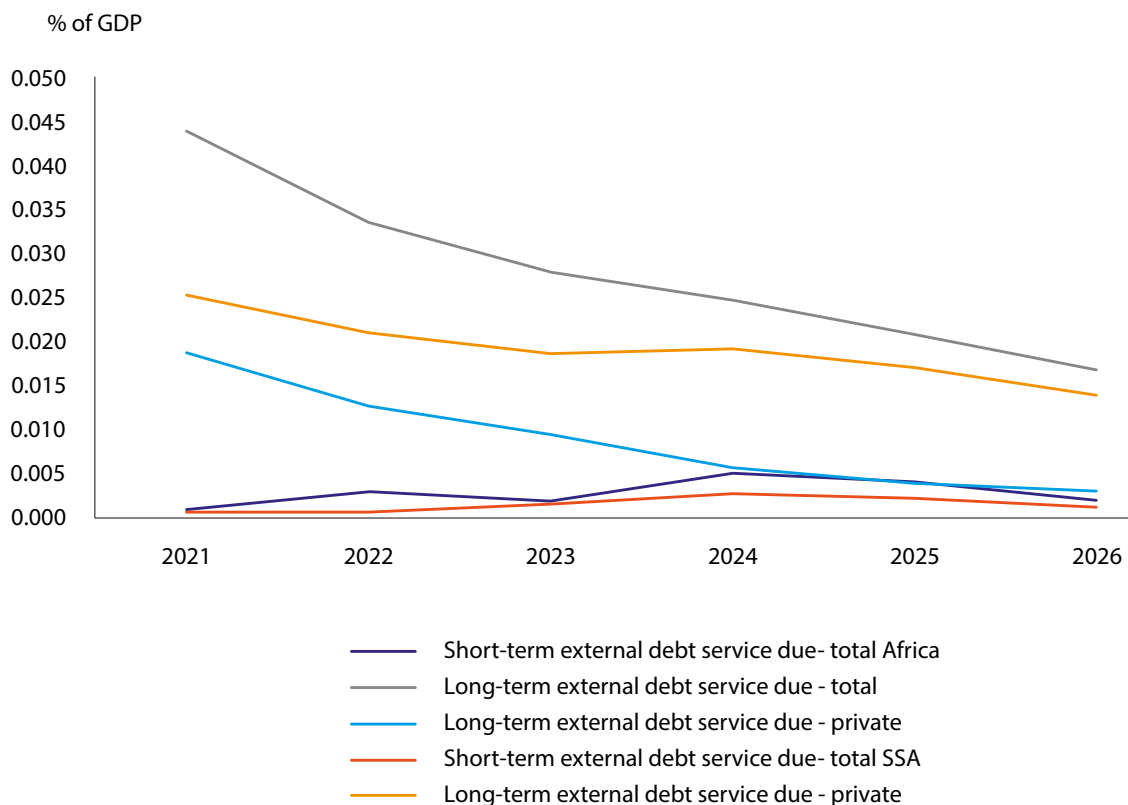
### Debt restructuring

Figure 5 illustrates projected debt service-to-GDP ratios for SSA to 2026. In respect of long-term external debt, the World Bank expects the relative burden to decline owing to a combination of a return to structural (high growth) trends, reduced take-up of new commitments and declining interest rates through monetary accommodation.

This is true for both public sector and publicly guaranteed private debt, at average interest rate of 1.56% and maturity of 27.8 years in 2020, but especially private non-guaranteed, at interest rates of 3.89% and maturity of 13.3 years.

Where official multilateral and bilateral lenders are more amenable to debt restructuring, the IMF can only exhort the private sector to offer rates and maturities at similar terms. In

**Figure 5. African external debt service due as % of GDP, 2021–2026**



Sources: African Development Bank, *African Economic Outlook 2021: From Debt Resolution to Growth – The Road Ahead for Africa* [<https://www.afdb.org/en/knowledge/publications/african-economic-outlook>] (Abidjan: AfDB, 2021), 61; own collation from World Bank, “International Debt Statistics” [<https://databank.worldbank.org/source/international-debt-statistics>].

late 2021 there were signs of slower recovery and monetary tightening, which may induce less optimistic projections.

Given the assessed vulnerability of African governments to debt distress, even slight monetary tightening can tip the balance. Of particular concern to the AfDB is an expected sharp increase in short-term external debt service due. Depending on source and jurisdiction, this burden is likely to increase between five- and seven-fold by 2024 before softening to more manageable levels.

While the AfDB expected termination of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) by the end of 2021, the World Bank appears more sanguine about an extension of this commitment to bilateral loan repayment deferrals to the end of 2022.

Thereafter, multilateral IMF concessional debt incurred during 2020, a surge of decadal Eurobond issues from the 2010s, and shorter-term Chinese and Arab lending come to maturation.

The T20's Task Force on International Finance proposed a World Recovery Fund, which would enable lower- and middle-income countries to swap expensive, short-term debt with cheaper, long-term debt guaranteed by richer country governments with better credit ratings. Collateral would be project-based and include any financial or physical asset.

Conditionality for climate risk mitigation and adaptation would be adopted<sup>28</sup>. In respect of legacy debt swaps (suitable for recommissioning), previous debt relief episodes suggest that creditors can expect up to a 30% haircut.

#### Aid and food security

The Declaration of the Summit on Financing of African Economies proposed that the advanced national economies commit 0.2% of their GDP annually to ODA for a variety of purposes and objectives.

Between 2019 and 2020, the proportion of Africa's population under food stress rose from 10.2% to 13.3%, dropping to 12% in 2021, while those in a state of food crisis, emergency or catastrophe rose from 5.4% to 7.3%<sup>29</sup>.

Where infrastructure and digitisation can be debt or equity financed, and security services the cause of food insecurity, the most effective target of ODA spending would be on extending national and continental food security systems (as outlined earlier).

#### Conclusions and recommendations

The concluding section makes some tentative policy recommendations for African governments endeavouring to align their domestic socio-economic developmental objectives to build future resilience to external shocks with South–South international dialogues and North–South negotiations for a just climate transition. The focus is on the intersect between financial capacity, inclusivity and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Where the poorer, secondary economic nodes (Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda) used their accumulating pre-COVID debt to invest, generate growth and reduce poverty, primary nodes (such as South Africa and Nigeria) have been constrained by their legacy dependence on coal and oil technologies, respectively.

Climate risk mitigation and adaptation will require further borrowing, which, in turn, helps deepen and diversify African financial markets.

Debt restructuring is an alternative to austerity, inflation or financial repression. The short- to medium-term constraints of rising short-term debt servicing can be alleviated by an extension and graduated withdrawal from the bilateral DSSI, a similar negotiation over multilateral debt relief secured during the COVID shock of 2020–21, and facilitation of private and domestic debt restructurings.

Other than exhorting creditor nations to act on their green finance pledges and donate their SDR allocations, African nations should push for IMF membership quotas to take account of population [potential and need] in addition to its [primary] criterion of GDP. They should also question sovereign credit rating methodologies, which give too little weight to the growth-enhancing and poverty-reducing impacts of debt incurred.

Domestic tax revenue mobilisation and diversification are a concomitant requirement for simultaneously meeting debt service commitments, extending the food security net, enabling mass vaccination and concessionalising green infrastructure finance.

Volatile natural resource taxes, customs and excises should be turned into counter-cyclical stabilisers where excess funds are accumulated to fund loan guarantee reserves and withdrawn in the event of project delay or failure.

Inasmuch as the new global deal on corporate income taxes raises African country revenues from this source, the excess should be used to subsidise the renewable energy and circular economy transition.

Given the low proportion of the labour force in formal employment, personal income tax bases in Africa are generally small, and appropriately used to extend unemployment benefit coverage during recessions.

The twin moral imperatives of extending food security and a mass vaccination programme are sufficient justification for increases in broad-based sales tax rates, suitably complemented with matching ODA grants.

Income progressivity can be enhanced with exemptions or lower VAT rates on foodstuffs and medical supplies. Other government services – but prioritising education – will have to suffice with improved tax collection and spending efficiency in the medium term. ■



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## About CoMPRA

The COVID-19 Macroeconomic Policy Response in Africa (CoMPRA) project was developed following a call for rapid response policy research into the COVID-19 pandemic by the IDRC. The project's overall goal is to inform macroeconomic policy development in response to the COVID-19 pandemic by low and middle-income countries (LMICs) and development partners that results in more inclusive, climate-resilient, effective and gender-responsive measures through evidence-based research. This will help to mitigate COVID-19's social and economic impact, promote recovery from the pandemic in the short term and position LMICs in the longer term for a more climate-resilient, sustainable and stable future. The CoMPRA project will focus broadly on African countries and specifically on six countries (Benin, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria and South Africa). SAIIA and CSEA, as the lead implementing partners for this project, also work with think tank partners in these countries. This project is supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The IDRC is a Canadian federal Crown corporation. It is part of Canada's foreign affairs and development efforts and invests in knowledge, innovation, and solutions to improve the lives of people in the developing world.

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## About SAIIA

SAIIA is an independent, non-government think tank whose key strategic objectives are to make effective input into public policy, and to encourage wider and more informed debate on international affairs, with particular emphasis on African issues and concerns.

# Fiscal support and monetary vigilance





Olivier Blanchard and Jean Pisani-Ferry consider  
the economic policy implications of the Russia-  
Ukraine war for the European Union



### Summary

For Europe, the war in Ukraine is a first-order economic shock. While the direct fiscal implications of taking care of refugees, increasing military spending and strengthening energy autonomy remain limited, the impact of elevated energy and food prices on national income and its distribution is potentially significant. This raises three macroeconomic challenges for policymakers:

- How best to use sanctions to deter Russia while limiting adverse effects on the European Union economy: in this respect, it is important to distinguish between oil and gas. For oil, Russia can diversify away from the EU market and, despite sanctions, sell on the world market where it operates as a price taker. For gas, the European Union has substantial leverage because Russia depends on the pipeline infrastructure linking it to the European market. However, gas supply from other sources is relatively inelastic.
- How to deal with cuts to real income because of the increase in the energy import bill: if governments want to protect buyers, they must decide on mechanisms and how to finance the extra spending. Fiscal support and thus some additional deficit finance may be needed, though debt should remain sustainable.
- How to deal with the increase in inflation as a result of higher energy and food prices: there is a need to avoid a de-anchoring of inflation expectations, which is even more challenging than usual given that inflation had already substantially increased before the war. Preventing this risk would call for a tightening of monetary policy. However, the loss of real income is likely to lead to weaker aggregate demand, implying a need to loosen policy.

Policymakers must cope with these conflicting objectives, ensuring that policy instruments complement each other. A combination of well-designed fiscal support to households and tripartite wage discussions may help soften the trade-off the central bank faces. However, the outcomes of the war in Ukraine are unpredictable, and policy must be able to respond quickly to changing circumstances.

## Introduction

Nobody can predict with much confidence how the war in Ukraine will evolve and what its geopolitical consequences will be over the next few months, let alone the next few years. Nevertheless, policymakers must think about the implications of the war and the appropriate responses, realising that they will need to be adapted as circumstances evolve.

Moreover, policymakers must think coherently about the joint implications of their actions, from sanctions on Russia to subsidies and transfers to their own citizens, and avoid taking measures that contradict each other. This is what we try to do in this Policy Contribution, focusing on the macroeconomic aspects of relevance for Europe.

We start by exploring the implications of the war. We review the various channels through which it is affecting macroeconomic perspectives. The upshot is that although demand, financial and wealth channels all enter into play, and although the direct budgetary implications of the war matter – because of increased defence spending and the cost of protecting refugees – the war's main impact on Europe is likely to be felt through energy prices and, to a lesser extent, food prices.

We then discuss the factors likely to determine the evolution of energy prices. What happens depends both on Russian actions, even in the absence of sanctions, and on the effect of potential sanctions on Russia's behaviour. In this respect, one must distinguish between oil (and coal) on one hand, and gas on the other.

For oil and coal, Russia is a quasi-price taker in a competitive world market. It faces a very elastic demand curve. For gas, because trade relies on a specific infrastructure, the market is the EU market, the demand is rather inelastic, and Russia can be regarded as a quasi-monopolist.

This has very different implications both for the likely behaviour of Russia in the absence of sanctions, and the effects of sanctions such as tariffs on prices and Russian exports. Given technical constraints, a full embargo on gas is not feasible. Tariffs, however, are feasible, they would be effective, and they should be considered, despite likely strong effects on consumer gas prices.

Our working hypothesis in the rest of this Policy Contribution is that energy prices are likely to increase relative to their pre-war levels, although there is considerable uncertainty about the size of the increase.

So far, both sides have de facto sheltered oil and gas trade from the fallout from the conflict. The large variations in the oil market and even more so in the gas market are due to expectations of Russian actions and sanctions. But the 'balance of energy terror' is precarious and cannot be taken for granted.

We then examine the implications of the war for EU fiscal and monetary policy. Leaving aside the various sources of spending – from defence to refugees to the need to adapt

*“The war's main impact on Europe is likely to be felt through energy prices and, to a lesser extent, food prices”*

the energy infrastructure to a changed supply of energy – the central fiscal policy issue is, to the extent that food and energy prices increase, whether and how to offset some of the loss in real income of households. Two main issues are involved.

The first issue is how best to do it: through subsidies, transfers or price regulation. The main question here is how the combination of such measures interacts with embargos or tariffs in determining the total effects of sanctions, the prices of energy imports and the implications for inflation.

The second issue is whether these measures, if taken, should be financed by taxes or by debt. While there is a strong political argument for levying an exceptional 'war' tax, the loss of real income due to the higher price of imports and the uncertainty associated with the war are likely to lead to weak aggregate demand; deficit spending may be needed to maintain or at least limit the decline in output. Debt, even if it ends up higher as a result, will remain sustainable.

Turning to monetary policy, the standard recipe in response to an increase in energy or food prices – namely, accommodation of first-round effects and tightening to limit further effects – must be re-examined.

On one hand, the additional inflation comes on top of already high inflation, raising the risk of a de-anchoring of inflation expectations. On the other, despite fiscal support, aggregate demand is likely to be weak and put downward pressure on inflation.

The first effect suggests tightening, the second suggests loosening. For the time being, the two indeed roughly cancel each other out, which suggests that monetary policy could roughly remain for the moment on its intended pre-war track, but should be ready to adjust one way or the other.

There is, in the current context, an important, and unusual, interaction between fiscal and monetary policy. The more fiscal policy protects the real income of workers, the weaker the demand for wage increases is likely to be in further rounds. The more a decrease in inflation becomes credible, the less the European Central Bank will have to tighten to achieve lower inflation. In effect, larger deficits can lead to a smaller output cost of fighting inflation.

A final and interesting question is whether this dampening role of fiscal support could be explicitly taken into account in wage negotiations. During the pandemic, government-financed furlough- and business-support schemes socialised

**Table 1. Main assumptions on the implications of the Russia-Ukraine war for the EU**

Item	Short term (1–2 years)	Long term (3–5 years)
Exports foreign direct investment (FDI), and financial linkages	Large inflow Immediate fiscal cost Capital losses for European companies	Restructuring of trade and FDI linkages
Refugees	Large inflow Immediate fiscal cost	No lasting effect as most refugees are likely to return or integrate into the labour market Fiscal cost of reconstructing Ukraine
Defence	Support to Ukraine (weapons)	Lasting increases in defence budgets
Efficiency		Increased emphasis on resilience Deglobalisation
Confidence	Precautionary saving	Potential risk premium on Europe, but also potential drive toward closer policy integration within the EU
Food prices	Significantly higher prices Spillover from adverse developments in developing countries	No lasting effect
Energy	Significantly higher prices Supply disruptions Additional cost of alternative sourcing	Change of sourcing Integration at EU level Accelerated transition to renewables (implying additional investment)

Source: Bruegel.

income losses and proved a very potent and cost-effective way to minimise economic and social disruption.

There is a case for a tripartite dialogue between governments, employers and employees and, ideally, for a quid pro quo of wage and price moderation in exchange for significant fiscal support.

We start in section 1 by looking at the channels through which the war will affect the EU economy. We review in section 2 the factors likely to determine the evolution of energy prices.

In section 3 we discuss the implications for both output and inflation in the European Union, and in section 4 the implications for EU fiscal and monetary policy. We draw conclusions in section 5.

## 1 The economic impact of the war

### Nature of the shocks

Our working assumption is that the conflict, which began with Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, will not be resolved in the short term. Over the next 12 months or so, we envision a stand-off, or a Russian occupation with Ukrainian resistance, or a ceasefire followed by acrimonious negotiations. We posit that reaching a permanent settlement will take longer.

In this context we assume the following:

- The breach of United Nations principles (which had been observed for three-quarters of a century on the European continent) will continue to cloud the horizon and affect confidence beyond the direct effects of the war.
- Most Ukrainian refugees will return to their hometowns, but only gradually as widespread destruction will prevent their relocation.
- The crisis will result in a lasting increase in European defence spending.
- Coming on the heels of the pandemic, this new shock will lead global firms to further reconsider their reliance on extended supply chains and just-in-time delivery schemes.
- The war will affect Ukrainian (and potentially Russian) agricultural crops and exports, reducing global supply and increasing world food prices.
- Beyond its immediate reaction to the war, the European Union will embark on an accelerated reduction and the eventual elimination of its reliance on Russian energy



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through alternative sourcing, and a faster transition to renewable energy.

- Sanctions will likely endure and escalate, leading to a substantial decrease in Russian exports of oil and gas, whether this is triggered by an EU decision or by a decision of the Russian government to restrict such exports. This is a major issue, both geopolitically and economically, and we investigate it in detail in the next section.

A major issue is whether the European Union will continue to respond in unified fashion to an unfolding crisis. While its initial common response was strong, divisions have emerged within the EU on the appropriateness of sanctions, especially in the field of energy.

Decisions on sanctions are part of foreign policy, where individual EU member states have veto power. Energy policy is largely a national prerogative and the EU does not have the legal means to settle differences by putting decisions to a qualified majority vote.

Our working assumption is nevertheless that the crisis will eventually trigger common responses and strengthen solidarity among its members.

Table 1 summarises our assumptions, distinguishing between short-term and longer-term effects. In this Policy Contribution we focus on short-term implications.

We intend to return to the long-term implications in another brief. Most of the assumptions are straightforward. Some hypotheses deserve deeper examination.

#### Exports, foreign direct investment, and financial linkages

Exports to Russia have dropped substantially and are likely to decrease further as a result of the combination of EU sanctions, restrictions imposed by the Russian government and delivery problems.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that, even in the absence of legal restrictions, European firms are already reluctant to trade with Russia, fearing legal and payment problems.

According to EU trade statistics<sup>1</sup>, exports of goods to Russia amounted to €89 billion in 2021; if they were to stop – a maximalist assumption – this would lead, other things being equal, to a decrease in aggregate demand for EU goods of 0.6 percent of 2019 GDP<sup>2</sup>. A 50 percent reduction in goods exports to Russia would cut 0.3 percent of GDP off aggregate demand.

The European Union also accounts for three-quarters of foreign direct investment in Russia, for a total of more than €300 billion at end-2019<sup>3</sup>.

Assuming half of the value of this investment will be lost, this would represent about 1 percent of EU GDP and less than 2 percent of its stock of outward FDI. Although significant for several banks and companies, such a loss cannot be considered to be of major macroeconomic relevance.

During the 2008 global financial crisis, links between financial institutions played a major role as default by one institution triggered default by some of its creditors.

Although Russia has made visible efforts to meet its external commitments and stabilise the economy, a default of the Russian government remains a distinct possibility.

The evidence suggests, however, that this is unlikely to lead to major problems for the EU financial system. Subsidiaries of Russian banks have already been closed and liquidated without putting the financial system in danger.

Non-energy and non-food imports from Russia and Ukraine are of minor economic significance. Their interruption may, however, add to the broader disruption of supply chains due to the pandemic.

#### Refugees

The flow of refugees from Ukraine has reached 4.6 million people (not counting 7.1 million displaced persons in Ukraine) at the time of writing, mostly women and children (UNHCR, 2022). The outflow continues (though at a slower pace), so that 5 million – and maybe more – is a plausible number.

This is a human drama of gigantic proportions and poses major problems of organisation and allocation across countries. Yet the likely macroeconomic costs appear relatively limited.

Estimates of the annual fiscal cost of providing shelter, food, healthcare and education to refugees vary from €9,000 to €25,000 per person per year<sup>4</sup>. On the assumption of a cost of €10,000 per refugee (per year), the cost of financing 5 million refugees for one year is €50 billion, or 0.35 percent of EU GDP.

Even this number overestimates the cost, because within a few months some refugees will return, some will find work, and some will emigrate from the European Union.

#### Food

Russia and Ukraine are major producers and, even more relevant, major exporters of food, wheat in particular<sup>5</sup>. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Russian and Ukrainian exports of wheat accounted in 2019 for 23 percent of world exports and 7 percent of world production.

In Ukraine, planting for the next harvest may be difficult. Distribution issues, given the fighting in the ports along the Black Sea, may further decrease exports. The market price of wheat has already increased nearly 50 percent from \$7.70 a bushel before the war to \$11, a level last seen for only a few days in 2008 (Macrotrends, 2022).

Because the European Union is a net exporter of agricultural products (in 2021 its trade surplus was close to €50 billion, according to Eurostat), the global price rise may well improve its terms of trade. Two important caveats are in order, though.

The first is that the loss to EU consumers (as opposed to the European Union as a whole, ie. producers and consumers



taken together) may be large, an issue to which we return in section 3.

The second is that elevated food prices are already having dramatic consequences for many emerging-market and developing countries, affecting their growth and macroeconomic stability, and potentially affecting the European Union in return.

## 2 The energy conundrum

Much of the economic interdependence between Russia and the European Union results from the fact that Russia is Europe's main supplier of fossil fuels. So far, both sides have mostly refrained from using energy as a vehicle for pressuring the other.

But on 8 April, the EU decided to ban imports of Russian coal, starting 22 August (Bown, 2022). Some EU countries have already gone further. On 30 March, for example, Poland announced its decision to stop importing any Russian energy by the end of 2022.

On 27 April, Russia discontinued gas shipments to Poland and Bulgaria, arguing that these two countries had failed to comply with the requirement that gas be paid for in rubles. This move triggered an immediate increase in the price for LNG.

In thinking about what may happen to energy prices, as a function of both Russian decisions and potential sanctions, it is important to distinguish between oil (and coal) and gas.

### Oil and gas

Energy data are easily confusing because of the heterogeneity of measurement units, so a short summary of the situation is a useful starting point.

The supply of energy in the EU27 (excluding the United Kingdom) essentially relies on oil (33 percent, virtually all imported), gas (24 percent, primarily imported) and coal (12 percent, primarily imported) (Figure 1).

Other sources include renewables (domestic), nuclear (essentially domestic, as the fuel itself is a small part of the total cost) and imported electricity. Russia is a major supplier of oil, gas, and coal.

Before the war, Russia's export price closely followed the global market price for Brent, an indication of high substitutability. Because Russia is one among many suppliers of oil to the European Union, we assume that lower EU imports from Russia can be replaced by imports from elsewhere. And lower Russian exports to the West can be partly offset by purchases by India and China.

Unlike oil, the market for gas is regional. There are, broadly speaking, three markets globally: Europe, North America and Asia. Prices on these markets are related, as liquefied natural gas (LNG) can be shipped to any of them, but they can differ significantly. Starting in 2021, high demand in Asia led to a major divergence between the North American gas price and the prices in Asia and Europe (Figure 2).

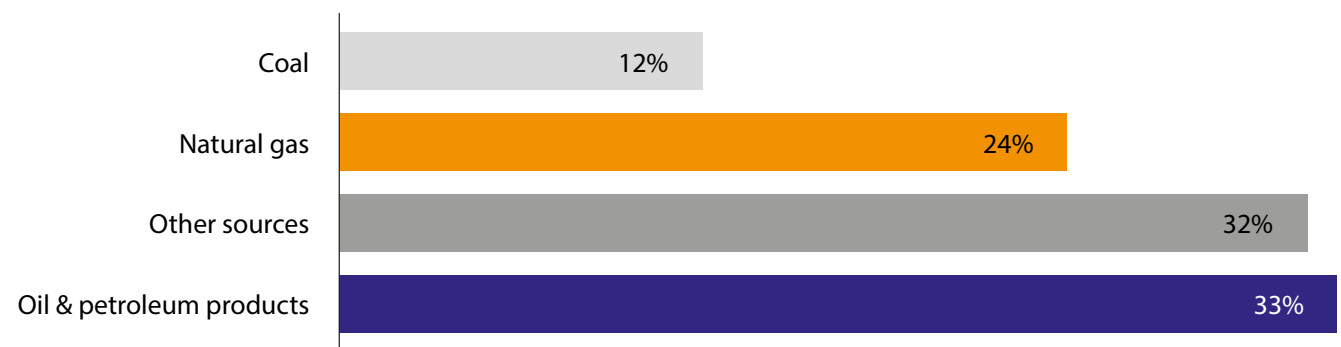
The relevant market for discussing the impact of an EU sanction is therefore the European market, not the world market. Gas is used in electricity generation (1/3), by industry and services (1/3), and by households (a smaller third).

It is very substitutable in some of its uses (gas-generated electricity can be replaced by electricity generated from other sources), much less so for some others (a gas-powered heating system cannot burn oil or coal).

On average, Russian gas accounts for 8.4 percent of primary energy supply in the European Union, but there are wide variations across member states. For example, Portugal does not import any gas from Russia, but in Hungary, Russian gas accounts for 28.5 percent of the supply of primary energy (Pisani-Ferry 2022).

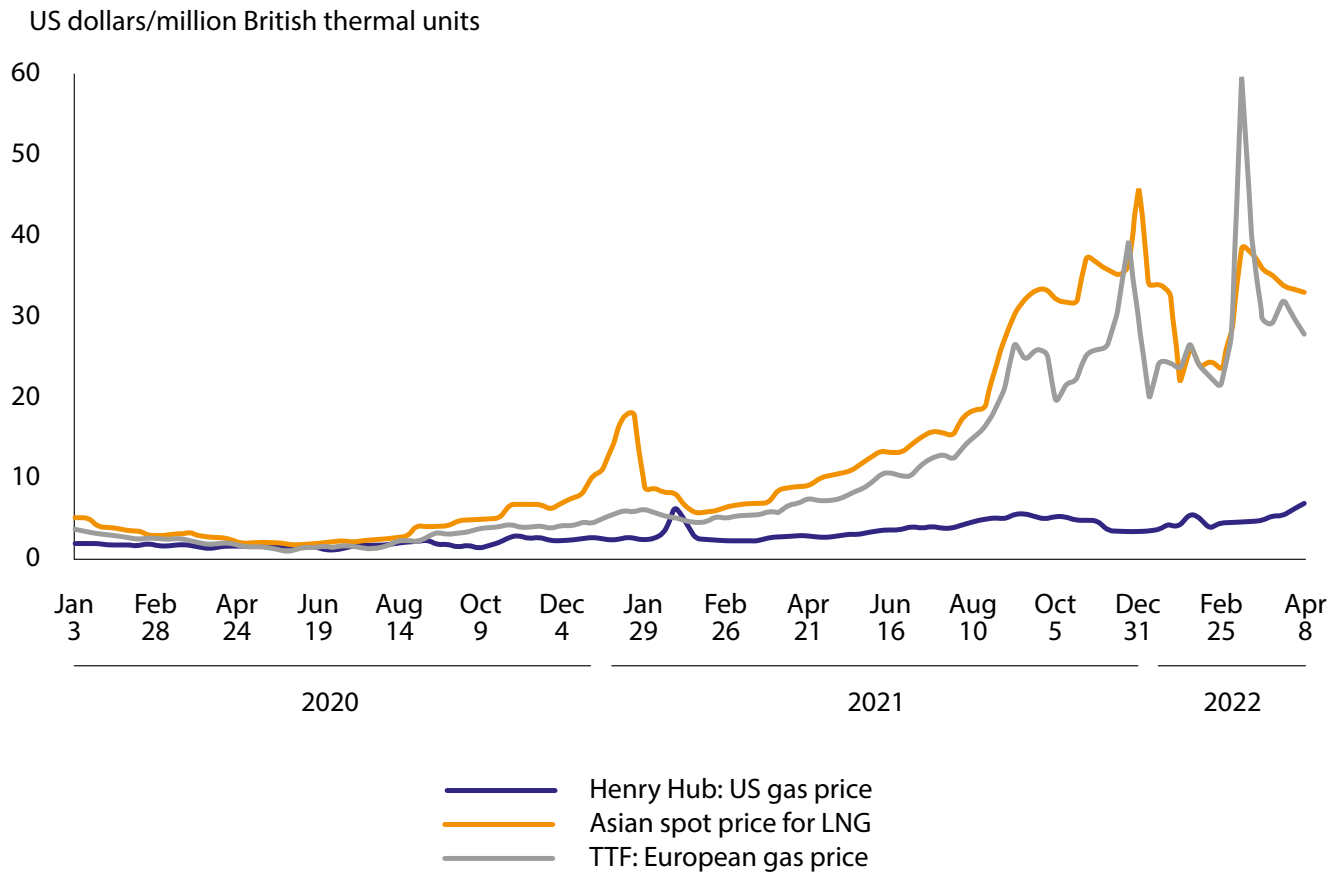
Although not entirely interconnected (Spain and Portugal, for example, have limited pipeline connections to Northern Europe), price differences in the European Union can be

Figure 1. Primary energy sources, EU27, 2019



Source: Authors' calculation based on Eurostat energy balances. Proportions are based on the energy content (Terajoules) of the various sources.

**Figure 2. Gas prices in Europe, Asia and the United States, January 2020 to April 2022**



Note: TTF = Dutch TTF natural gas hub price. Henry Hub refers to pricing of natural gas futures on the New York Mercantile Exchange. Source: Bloomberg.

largely arbitrated away through internal transactions on imports from the rest of the world, provided – which is not a given – there is political agreement to do it<sup>6</sup>. In what follows, we treat the EU market as one.

**Thinking about the determination of energy prices**

Even in the absence of sanctions, Russia may want to behave strategically in determining its oil and gas export policy.

In the case of oil, it may want to increase revenues to finance the additional spending associated with the war. This would lead to an increase in the world supply of oil and thus a decrease in the world price.

Russia, however, faces a series of constraints. Additional supply is currently limited by the difficulty of placing cargoes on the international market (which is reflected in the discount between the prices of Ural and Brent oil). Moreover, Russia is part of the OPEC+ coalition, which constrains its capacity to increase exports.

In the case of gas, a more subtle effect is relevant. The EU is scrambling to reduce its dependence on Russian natural gas, but its commitment to lowering imports by two-thirds

by the end of 2022 is optimistic<sup>7</sup>. On the supply side, some Russian gas can be replaced by gas from Norway, Algeria and Azerbaijan, but these countries have limited capacity.

The rest must be delivered by ships as LNG, but in the short run the number of LNG ships is fixed and additional supply can come only from diverting shipments destined to Asia. On the demand side, the ability to replace gas by alternative sources of energy is also constrained by existing equipment.

Recent research (IEA, 2022a; McWilliams *et al* 2022) concludes that the European Union cannot, over this year and next, fully replace imports of Russian natural gas<sup>8</sup>. In the short run, then, the EU demand for gas is relatively inelastic and, under plausible assumptions, the price elasticity of EU demand for Russian gas (total demand less imports from the rest of the world) may well be less than one.

Under standard monopoly assumptions, such a low elasticity would lead Russia to set a very high price, even in the absence of war<sup>9</sup>. The reason Russia did not do so in the past is that the long-run elasticity is surely greater than one, and so it faces an intertemporal trade-off: a very high price raises revenues in the short run but decreases them in the long run.

The war, however, has two effects on this computation. The first is an even greater need for higher revenues today, leading to an increase in the price. The second is that the anticipation of future sanctions, and the clear decision of the European Union to wean itself off Russian gas exports, reduces the effects of an increase in the price on future revenues, again leading Russia to increase the price while the demand is still there.

In short, ignoring sanctions, Russia may want to increase energy export revenues. But while for oil this would imply increasing the volume of exports (given the world price), for gas it would imply increasing prices (and therefore decreasing export volumes).

True, long-term gas contracts normally preclude such behaviour, as they specify the indexation of prices on the TTF (Title Transfer Facility) market price.

But Russia has some flexibility to shift part of its supply from deliveries within the framework of existing contracts to over-the-counter sales. More fundamentally, contracts can, after all, be revised or broken.

Turning to sanctions, whether embargos or tariffs, the market structure is again fundamental, and one must discuss separately the effects on oil and gas exports.

#### Sanctions: oil

To sanction Russia, the European Union could emulate the United States and United Kingdom and declare an embargo on Russian oil. This would be the most straightforward approach as a European embargo would strengthen the prevailing reluctance on the part of energy companies, shipowners, banks and insurers to take part in Russian exports.

Such a measure would not prevent Russia from exporting altogether – it would find alternative buyers, such as China, India or others, as it already does – but an embargo would certainly increase the discount on Russian oil, as already seen with the Ural price discount relative to the Brent price, at close to 35 percent at the time of writing.

In other words, the Western strategy would be (it largely is already) to keep Russian oil on the market, while finding ways to push its price down. If, on net, Russian exports decreased, the world price would go up, unless the drop in Russian exports was offset by the decisions of other producers, from Saudi Arabia to Iran to Venezuela, to increase production.

The rise in the world price would depend, in the end, on Russia's ability to find other buyers and on other countries' decisions to sell more. To get a sense of how the price impact would depend on the decrease in world supply, it is worth looking at history.

The 1973 OPEC embargo decreased global supply by 7 percent and led to an increase in the price of 51 percent. The 1978 Iranian revolution decreased global supply by 4 percent and led to a price increase of 57 percent. The 1980 Iran-Iraq war decreased global supply by 4 percent and led to a price

increase of 45 percent. The 1990 Gulf War decreased global supply by 6 percent and led to a price increase of 93 percent (Hamilton, 2022).

Russia accounted in 2019 for about 13 percent of world production and its exports for a similar proportion of world trade, so a large decrease in Russian supply, not offset by an increase in supply elsewhere, would have dramatic effects on the price (BP 2021)<sup>10</sup>.

History may not, however, be a reliable guide. The effects of lower supply depend on the elasticity of both non-Russian oil supply and world demand for oil. And both are different from what they were in the 1970s or even 1990s.

The price elasticity of supply has increased since the episodes cited above, especially as the United States has started exploiting shale oil. But it takes time before new drills start adding to output.

The price elasticity of demand may have declined as oil is increasingly used where substitutes are lacking, however (for example, for fuelling motor vehicles and airplanes).

And government measures to partly protect buyers, be they firms or consumers, from the price increases may further decrease the demand elasticity.

As discussed in section 4, in late 2021 and again since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, several governments have introduced energy-related transfers and subsidies. To the extent that they affect the price signal, such measures reduce the demand response.

This is of no importance if a small country subsidises in isolation: the effect on world demand is too small. But if many do – and this would be the case if the European Union joined the United States and the United Kingdom in offering subsidies – the result is bound to be a larger increase in the global market price.

#### Sanctions: gas

The market structure for gas can be viewed as consisting of a monopolist Russia facing a large number of EU buyers who can purchase gas from other sources but only at a sharply increasing cost.

As we have seen, even in the absence of sanctions, Russia might want to increase its price and reduce supply. The question here is what would happen if the European Union decided to use sanctions, most likely through a tariff on Russian exports<sup>11</sup>.

It would be a strong signal that EU member states stand ready to jointly confront Russia. A common tariff would preserve the freedom of private contracts and be legally implementable, as the European Union (as well as the United States and other countries of the coalition supporting Ukraine) has revoked Russia's most favoured nation status. We assume that, in response, private contracts would be either broken or renegotiated.

In that context, the effect of the tariff depends on the elasticity of the net demand for Russian oil (the demand for Russian gas minus the supply of non-Russian gas to the European Union). In general, a tariff will increase consumer prices, but less than one for one; equivalently, it will decrease the pre-tariff price, but less than one for one.

In the special case when the elasticity of EU demand is constant, theory predicts that Russia should keep its (pre-tariff) price unchanged, leading to a one-for-one increase in consumer prices and a decrease in demand. Russian revenues will decrease as demand decreases.

In the case of linear demand, the effect of the tariff on the consumer price will be less than one for one – Russia will decrease its pre-tariff price, but less than one for one.

Demand will decrease less than in the constant elasticity case. Russian revenues will decrease because of lower demand and lower pre-tariff prices.

Interestingly, a small tariff can actually increase EU welfare: while consumers pay more, the revenues from the tariffs exceed the extra spending, and so, properly redistributed, buyers can be better off.

The point is nicely made by John Sturm (2022), who showed the relationship to the welfare-improving tariff argument that is standard in international trade.

Larger tariffs will have an adverse effect on Russian revenues, but also on EU welfare. Assuming linear demand, Daniel Gros (2022) found that a 30 percent tariff on Russian gas would actually maximise EU welfare.

Beyond this rate, the tariff would decrease EU welfare but could substantially reduce Russian revenues. Gros found that a 60 percent tariff would reduce Russia’s gas export revenues by three-fourths, but at some welfare cost to the European Union.

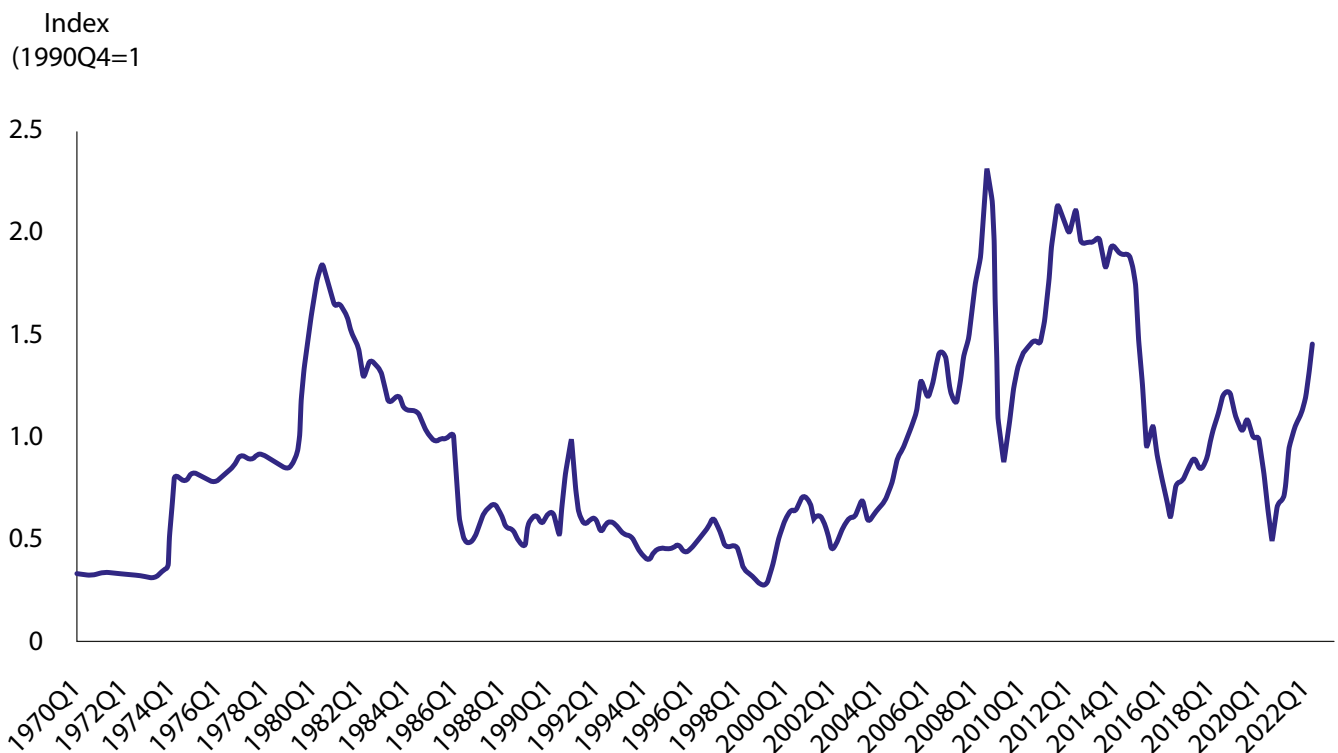
**3 Commodity price increases, inflation and real income**

The previous discussion has made clear that, depending on many factors, both those affecting Russian decisions and those affecting the choice and intensity of sanctions, there is substantial uncertainty about the future evolution of oil and gas prices.

We are less pessimistic than the latest joint forecast of the five main German institutes for economic research (BMWK, 2022), which, in its central scenario, has the price of Brent reaching \$135 per barrel and the price of gas in Europe roughly doubling to €200 per MWh.

In the rest of this Policy Contribution we assume – while realising the very large uncertainty associated with this assumption – that Russian decisions and more stringent sanctions will lead to an increase in both oil and gas prices of 25 percent relative to pre-war levels.

**Figure 3. Real price of oil, 1970Q1–2022Q1, index (1990Q4 = 1)**



Source: Authors based on OECD and US Bureau of Labor Statistics via Macrobond. World Brent price deflated by US consumer price index (CPI).



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Commodity prices have increased many times in the past. To take just oil prices: the Brent price went from \$10.27 a barrel in February 1999 to \$133 in July 2008, and then went from \$40 in December 2008 to \$123 in April 2011. It remained above \$100 until August 2014.

Given inflation since 2014, \$100 then would correspond to \$120 today, so the current real price of oil has not yet reached historical records (Figure 3). As a result, economists have a decent understanding of the effects of commodity price increases on the economy.

### Inflation

The immediate and most visible effect is indeed the effect on inflation. The effect can be quite large. Electricity, heating fuels, and transportation fuels accounted in 2021 for 9.6 percent of personal consumption expenditures in the euro area, and food on average represented 15.7 percent of the consumer basket (as per European Central Bank HICP weights for 2021). In total, the share of consumption that is vulnerable to the direct impact of price rises is high.

Empirical estimates generally indicate that the pass-through of commodity price rises onto consumer prices is partial but quick.

A 2010 detailed Eurosystem study (ECB 2010) found, for an oil price around \$100 per barrel, an elasticity of the energy component of the HICP (harmonised index of consumer prices) to the oil price of 0.4 (largely because of price-insensitive excise taxes), 90 percent of which was effective within a month.

These estimates are somewhat outdated, however, because they assume an indexation of the gas price on the oil price (which has been discontinued) and rigidity of the electricity price (which does not hold anymore) (ECB, 2010, table 9).

Let us then take 10 percent for the share of energy in private consumption and assume a 50 percent pass-through. The direct impact of the assumed 25 percent rise in prices is thus  $25 \text{ percent} \times 0.1 \times 0.5 = 1.25 \text{ percent}$ . For food, let us assume a 15 percent share, a 10 percent increase, and also a 0.5 pass-through. The impact is  $10 \text{ percent} \times 0.15 \times 0.5 = 0.75 \text{ percent}$ . This implies a 2 percent initial increase in the cost of a consumption basket.

These first-round effects can hardly be avoided, but they are just the beginning. Subsequent rounds reflect the responses by firms and workers.

Producers of goods that use energy or agricultural products as an input increase their prices to re-establish their markups. Workers whose wages lagged consumer prices in the first round ask for nominal wage increases to re-establish their real wage.

These lead to further increases in prices and wages. The strength of these further rounds depends on how hard firms try to re-establish markups, and how hard workers try to maintain their real wage.

Eventually, if commodity prices remain high, the pressure on inflation stops only when either the firms that use these commodities accept lower markups and/or workers accept lower real wages.

As we shall see, what happens to inflation and activity over time then depends on both monetary and fiscal policy, as we discuss later.

### Real income

These inflation dynamics are present whether or not an economy produces or imports these commodities. But whether the economy is a net importer or not makes a significant difference to what happens to aggregate real income.

Take the case of the United States, which roughly covers its energy needs domestically. An increase in the price of energy is reflected in a decrease in the real income of energy users (consumers and firms) and an increase in the real income of energy producers (and their shareholders).

The effect on the US real income as a whole is roughly equal to zero. The effect on aggregate demand depends on both energy users' and producers' marginal propensity to spend, and so may go up or down.

The European Union, however, imports nearly all the gas and oil it consumes, so an increase in prices leads to a decrease in the real income of energy users and an increase in the real income of foreign producers, who are unlikely to spend much on EU goods.

Thus a price increase in these commodities is likely to have a large adverse effect on domestic demand. In both cases, energy users, especially consumers, may be worse off. But the effect on aggregate demand depends on whether the country is a net importer or not.

It is useful to think about the implications of both oil and gas price increases for the EU real income and get a sense of magnitudes.

Start with oil. Oil markets appear to assume that the reduction in global supply will be limited. The Brent price was \$99 per barrel the day before the war started, up from \$78 at the start of 2022; it went up briefly to \$133 but, at the time of writing (mid-April 2022), was down to \$110.

Assume an increase in the price from \$78 to \$100, roughly 25 percent. Imports of oil (from Russia and elsewhere) by the EU27 were equal to 5,900 million barrels in 2021.

Such an increase in price would imply a decrease in real income for the European Union of  $5,900 \times 22/1.1$  (for the dollar-euro exchange rate), thus €118 billion, or 0.84 percent of 2019 GDP (oil import data from Eurostat).

Gas markets have also retreated from the elevated prices of February, but they remain high. Assume that the percentage increase in the average price of gas for the European Union

is the same as for oil, about 25 percent. Imports of gas (from Russia and elsewhere) were equal to €170 billion in 2021.

This implies a decrease in real income for the European Union of  $170 \times 0.25 \gg \text{€}42$  billion, or 0.3 percent of 2019 GDP.

Under these fairly moderate assumptions, the war-induced increase in oil and gas prices would take a little more than 1 percent of GDP off the real income of the European Union. But this would come on top of the effect of previous price hikes since 2019.

Overall – and disregarding the lockdown period in 2020 during which prices and quantities collapsed – EU imports of energy, which amounted to 2.6 percent of GDP in 2019, would have exceeded 5 percent of GDP had prices remained at their early 2022 level, and would increase to more than 6 percent based on our assumptions.

#### Distribution effects

Beyond the aggregate loss of real income for consumers, distribution effects are important. Consumption of gas, utilities, and food (as a share of total consumption) is higher for low-income than for high-income households – although there are clear differences across countries: based on Eurostat data, the difference is small in Scandinavian countries, for example, 26 percent for the bottom income quintile versus 25 percent for the top quintile in Denmark.

It is larger for France and Germany, 25 percent versus 21 percent in France, 26 percent versus 21 percent in Germany. It is even larger for poorer countries, for example, 31 percent versus 23 percent in Spain, and 50 percent versus 37 percent for Bulgaria<sup>12, 13</sup>.

Moreover, the consumption patterns of lower-income households are often more rigid, as a larger part of their income is pre-allocated to rents and other monthly payments they cannot easily modify.

Thus, apart from the aggregate effects on output and inflation, one must take into account that poor households suffer more than richer ones from an increase in commodity prices. This has clear implications for fiscal policy.

#### 4 Implications for policy

We finally turn to the fiscal and monetary policy responses. In the short run, the main issue, and the source of potentially large spending, is whether and how to protect consumers from the commodity price increases.

##### Tax and transfer measures

Under our moderate price increase assumptions, the median increase in the price of the consumption basket, given wages, is about 2 percent<sup>14</sup>. But the decrease in real income for the lowest income quintile in the most affected countries (eg. Slovakia) is twice as high, 4 percent.

This is a very large number, knowing that the dispersion of income effects among households even within an income bracket can be very large, depending on living conditions,

and recognizing that the increases in commodity prices may be larger than in our assumptions<sup>15</sup>.

The question, then, is how much and how best to protect households. Since energy prices started to ratchet up in late 2021, EU member states have been busy introducing a series of schemes intended to soften the shock. These schemes can be grouped under three headings<sup>16</sup>.

##### Temporarily lower energy taxes

A first possibility is direct across-the-board subsidies, for example, in the form of cuts or rebates on energy taxes, which are high in most EU countries.

France, for instance, introduced in February a 1-year cut in electricity taxes (at a cost of €8 billion or 0.3 percent of GDP) and on April 1 a reduction of gasoline taxes of 15 cents per litre for a period of 4 months, at an estimated cost of €2.2 billion, about 0.1 percent of GDP<sup>17</sup>.

This subsidy is presented as an emergency stopgap until a more targeted system is introduced in early summer. It is highly visible, a political advantage. Similar temporary cuts to excise taxes have been introduced elsewhere, notably in Germany where, on 23 March 2022, the gasoline tax was lowered by 30 cents per litre<sup>18</sup>.

##### Lump-sum transfers

An alternative approach is to provide transfers that are independent of the consumption of food, oil, and gas. Germany, for example, introduced on 23 March 2022 a universal lump-sum transfer (*Energiepreis-Pauschale*) of €300 per person plus supplements for children.

France introduced last year an *indemnité inflation* of €100, given automatically to people with an income no higher than €2,000 a month, at a cost of €3.8 billion, or about 0.2 percent of GDP<sup>19</sup>.

Such measures are unlikely to affect market prices for food, oil, and gas substantially (only to the extent that the additional income is spent on these goods), and thus have the effect that the transfers go mostly to consumers rather than commodity producers.

There may be feasible schemes to target transfers more accurately to better protect those who both have a low income and spend more of it on food, oil, and gas.

For example, in the case of electricity, one might make transfers proportional to a recent utility bill and, combining it with household income information, limit it to those with income below some threshold.

Or gasoline cheques – a given amount of money to be spent only on energy or gasoline – might be issued; indeed, an energy cheque exists in France and a gasoline cheque is being discussed in the United States.

To the extent that the cheque is less than what the recipient spends on energy, this measure does not affect the marginal

## “The war in Ukraine is a first-order economic shock that raises three macroeconomic challenges for policymakers”

price s/he faces and thus does not affect incentives to reduce energy consumption. Its political acceptability may however be lower than for across-the-board subsidies.

### Price regulations

Yet another approach is to decouple some prices, such as the electricity price, from their marginal cost. The issue has become particularly salient in the face of extremely large fluctuations in the market price of natural gas – which is the relevant marginal cost in the production of electricity.

Spain especially has been vocal in criticising the inflationary effect of electricity pricing, and in March it obtained EU authorisation to temporarily disconnect the Iberian Peninsula from the EU electricity market.

France has asked the country’s main electricity company to limit the price increase to 4 percent for 2022 and to satisfy demand at that price, thus asking the company to absorb a large part of the cost, leading to a large anticipated decrease in cash flows and a large decrease in market value.

This entails an inefficiency, as the price is less than marginal cost, but allows for a potentially large increase in consumer surplus – at the cost of a larger decrease in producer surplus. From a welfare viewpoint, the gain in real income of consumers may well dominate the loss in efficiency<sup>20</sup>.

### Potential perverse effects of subsidies

Two main objections can be raised against subsidies. The first is that they increase the demand for energy, thus contributing to keeping energy prices high<sup>21</sup>. The issue is familiar from the standard discussion of tax incidence.

Consider subsidies to the various uses of oil. The effect on consumer prices depends on what happens to the market price of oil. If only one country uses such subsidies and it is small relative to the world market, the world market price will not change and thus the subsidy will be reflected one-for-one in a lower consumer price.

If, however, all EU countries, and possibly other countries such as the United States, introduce such subsidies, then the relevant supply curve is the world supply curve, which is inelastic in the short run.

In the extreme, if the supply curve is fully inelastic, the effect will be to increase the market price one for one and leave the consumer price unaffected<sup>22</sup>. In other words, the subsidies will go to the oil producers, including Russia. In practice,

the outcome is likely to be less than a one-for-one effect of subsidies on market prices, but it is still unappealing.

The second, more specific but highly relevant objection, is whether subsidies may go against a possible future tariff and actually strengthen Russia’s hand in its confrontation with the European Union.

As discussed in the previous section, a tariff on gas would lower both the price and the volume of Russian exports, while the corresponding revenues could be used to soften the impact on consumers.

The question, however, is how this subsidy should be designed. A direct domestic gas price subsidy, such as a lowering of indirect gas taxes, would increase the demand for gas and the price charged by Russia, countering the effects of tariffs.

Governments should not use the revenue from a tariff on Russian gas to subsidise energy consumption in a way that lowers the marginal price of gas on the European market. They should rather rely on transfer schemes that do not affect the marginal price.

### Taxes versus debt finance

The next question is by how much fiscal measures should be financed through additional taxes versus debt finance. Tariff revenues may help, but, as we discussed earlier, tariffs are unlikely to yield much revenue for oil; they are likely to yield more in the case of gas.

Immediate discretionary fiscal spending essentially consists of defence procurements (including for the provision of weaponry to Ukraine), assistance to refugees, measures in support of households, and emergency investments to adapt the energy system.

Under our price assumptions, fiscal costs range from small to manageable: in 2022 they should not exceed one-sixth of a percentage point of EU GDP for defence, one-third for assistance to refugees, and, depending on the decisions of different member states, between half and a full percentage point for measures in support of households<sup>23</sup>.

A more challenging question is how much emergency energy investments may cost. We do not have a good estimate but assume that it should not exceed half a percentage point. Altogether, therefore, the discretionary fiscal cost of the war should remain within 1.5 to 2.0 percent of GDP.

This would be less than half the fiscal cost of the pandemic support measures, which in Europe typically amounted to 4 percent of GDP in 2020. Should this additional spending be financed through taxes or debt? On traditional public finance grounds, there are good arguments for relying partly on debt finance. Part of the increase in spending is likely to be temporary, thus justifying tax smoothing.

On political economy grounds, the notion of a war tax – a “Putin tax,” as President Biden has called it in the United



States, although he was referring to the decrease in real income rather than an explicit tax – may be less unpopular than in other circumstances and underscore the point that contrary to current perceptions in Western Europe a war, even an economic war, is not free.

On macroeconomic stabilisation grounds, the case for relying largely on debt finance is strong. The decrease in real income for the European Union is large and is likely to lead to lower consumption. Export demand from Russia is likely to be drastically lower.

Higher uncertainty, which played a large role in reducing consumption and investment during the COVID-19 crisis, may play a substantial role again. Fiscal support and reliance on debt finance rather than on a tax increase to offset the higher spending are likely to be needed<sup>24</sup>.

This raises the standard question about debt sustainability (a question one of the authors has addressed at length in other writings; Blanchard, 2023). While it may well be that slowing inflation will require temporarily higher real interest rates, the factors behind low neutral real rates have not changed, and – provided inflation remains under control, so that the inflation

risk does not start being priced in real bond rates – the neutral rate should, after a bump, remain low in the medium run.

The evidence so far is that 10-year benchmark bond rates have increased by 50 basis points only since the start of the war, a limited upward adjustment in view of the magnitude of the geopolitical and economic shock (Figure 4).

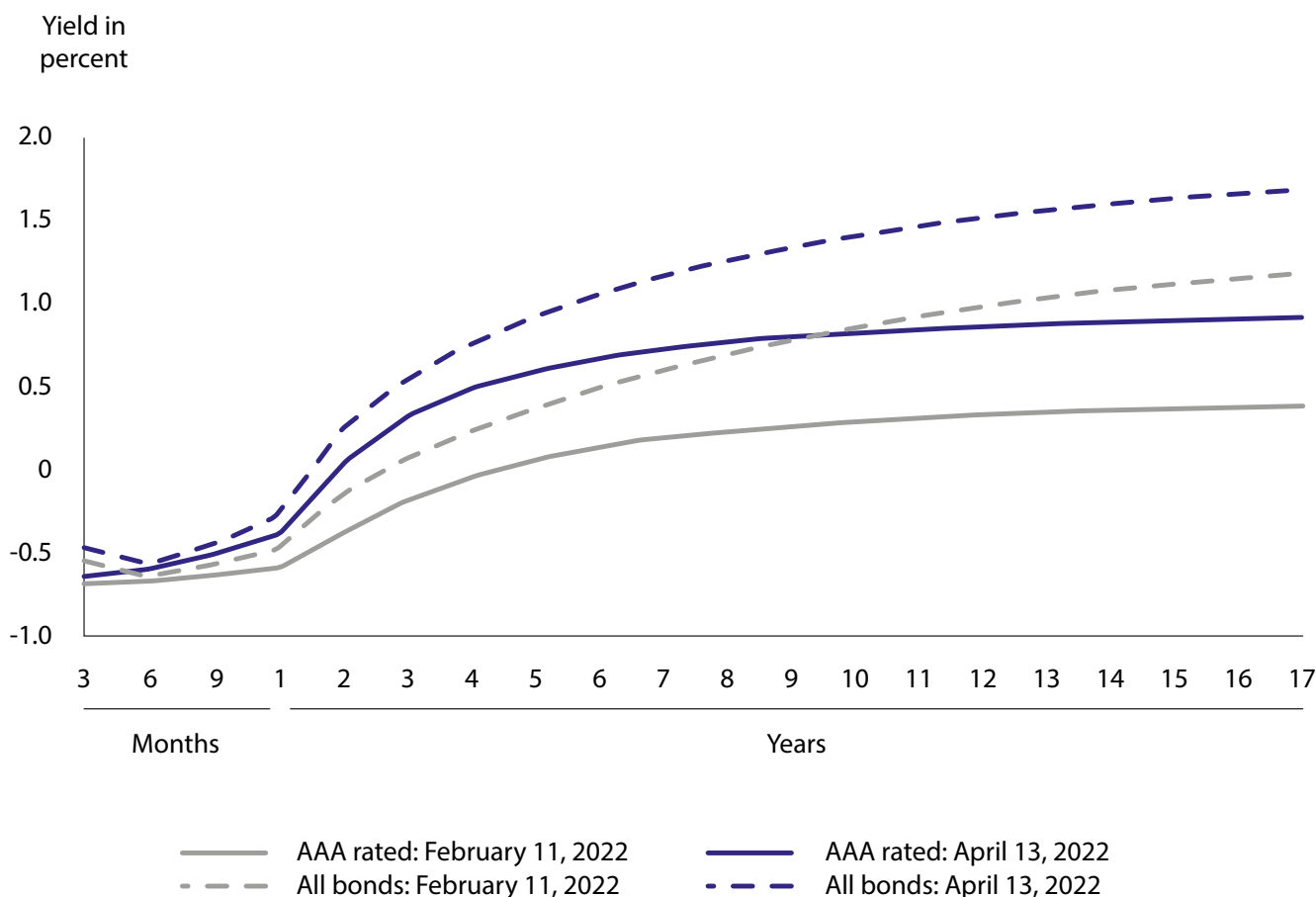
In the short run, debt dynamics are likely to remain extremely favourable. ECB (2022a) March forecasts of euro area real GDP growth, nominal policy rates, and inflation for 2022 are 3.7 percent, 0.8 percent (for the 10-year yield), and 5.1 percent.

This implies a value for  $(r - g)$  of  $(0.8 \text{ percent} - 5.1 \text{ percent} - 3.7 \text{ percent}) = -8 \text{ percent}$ <sup>25</sup>. Combined with a debt ratio of 98 percent, this would allow EU governments as a whole to run primary deficits of 8 percent while keeping debt ratios constant. Thus, there is substantial room to run temporary larger deficits if needed.

#### Monetary policy

The typical advice to a central bank hit with an increase in commodity prices is to accommodate first-round effects (it cannot do much about those anyway) and limit subsequent-

**Figure 4. Euro area yield curves, 11 February and 13 April 2022**



Note: The solid lines show the yield curve for AAA-rated sovereign bonds only. The dotted lines show the same for all euro area sovereign bonds. Source: European Central Bank. [https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/financial\\_markets\\_and\\_interest\\_rates/euro\\_area\\_yield\\_curves/html/index.en.html](https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/financial_markets_and_interest_rates/euro_area_yield_curves/html/index.en.html)

round effects, if necessary through lower output and higher unemployment, until inflation is back to target (Blanchard and Galí, 2007).

One can expect firms to eventually re-establish their markup. Thus, how much the central bank needs to lean in and slow activity depends very much on the behaviour of wages. Having suffered a decrease in their real wage in the first round, workers will want to catch up and will ask for a nominal wage increase.

And if they expect inflation to remain high, they will ask for higher nominal wage growth in addition. The strength of this first effect, workers' desire to catch up, depends, among other factors, on how much of a decrease in real income they suffer in the first round and how strong they are in bargaining, thus on the tightness of the labour market.

The strength of the second effect, expected inflation, depends on the credibility of the central bank strategy and its commitment to return inflation to its target.

There is in this context an important interaction between fiscal and monetary policy. To go back to the various protection measures governments may use, price subsidies – to the extent that they mechanically reduce the increase in consumer prices – or price ceilings (as in the case of the delinking of the electricity price from its marginal cost) decrease first-round inflation and thus limit the initial decrease in the real wage.

This in turn decreases wage pressure in subsequent rounds, making it easier for the ECB to reduce inflation over time. Transfers do not affect first-round inflation, but they limit the initial decrease in real income, thus potentially reducing wage pressure in second and subsequent rounds.

To put it strongly, more protection and higher deficits reduce the need to tighten monetary policy to return inflation to its target. There is therefore a clear trade-off: from an efficiency perspective as well as to ensure the effectiveness of sanctions, governments should avoid income support measures that weaken the price signal and may in fact benefit Russia.

But from an inflation control perspective, they should rely on measures that have a direct, measurable impact on consumer prices. Some measures qualify on both accounts (as indicated, this is the case of transfers based on past energy consumption, if the lower average price paid by consumers is reflected in the construction of the CPI, which in principle it is). But many of the measures introduced so far do not pass the test.

#### Tripartite wage discussions

One can go a step further and make the case for tripartite discussions, if not negotiations, between firms, workers, and the state. So long as commodity prices remain higher, real wages and/or markups must be lower.

As we have discussed, the state can limit the decrease in the real income of workers through subsidies, transfers, and price regulations, financed by a mix of taxes on the better off, or debt finance, shifting some of the burden to future taxpayers.

Inflation is an extremely inefficient way of reaching an outcome, relying on either workers or firms to give up and accept lower real wages or lower markups. A negotiation in which workers, firms, and the state agree on a better outcome and, by implication, smaller second and subsequent rounds of inflation is clearly desirable.

Is it achievable? The role of such social negotiations has long been debated, and the usual answer is that it requires an unrealistic degree of coordination across firms and across unions. This time may be different, and tripartite negotiations, or at least discussions, should be an option that governments consider.

Any success in reducing the size of second-round effects allows for a more relaxed monetary policy. Two other factors are relevant here, although they move desirable monetary policy in opposite directions.

#### Potential de-anchoring of expectations

Inflation due to the commodity shock comes on top of an inflation rate substantially higher than what was forecast for 2021. Even before the war, this had led to concern about a de-anchoring of inflation expectations, which would make the job of the ECB more difficult.

Based on the *ECB Survey of Professional Forecasters* (ECB, 2022b), long-run expectations of inflation have started to increase, with the average forecast going from 1.8 percent at the start of 2021 to 2.1 percent in April 2022 (Lane, 2022)<sup>26</sup>.

This was initially a welcome development after years during which inflation was expected to undershoot the target, but the worry now is that the additional first-round inflation due to the war will lead to outright de-anchoring.

As recently pointed out by Isabel Schnabel (2022) of the ECB Board, this argues for a tougher monetary policy stance in subsequent rounds than would be the case in the absence of higher previous inflation.

#### Potential weakness of private demand

The other relevant factor is the effect of the war-related shocks on aggregate demand. The reduction in real income even partly compensated by subsidies and transfers, diminished exports, investment losses, and a dent in overall confidence are good reasons to think that, even with fiscal support, aggregate demand will be weaker, apart from any monetary tightening.

This suggests less need for tighter monetary policy than was the case before the war and, other things equal, argues for looser monetary policy.

Which of these factors will dominate and whether ECB monetary policy will have to be tighter or looser than was intended before the war is difficult to assess at this point.

The size of the shocks, the strength of second-round effects, the anchoring of inflation expectations, and the weakness of aggregate demand are all uncertain.

Markets have a hard time assessing what the net effect should be on monetary policy: the euro yield curve went sharply down as the war started, but is now a bit higher than before the war (see Figure 4)<sup>27</sup>.

The current ECB stance of no major adjustments due to the war appears to be the right one at this point<sup>28</sup>. But the ECB will have to adjust its stance and be unusually nimble to avoid either lasting inflation or a recession.

## 5 Conclusion

For Europe, the war in Ukraine is a first-order economic shock. While the direct fiscal implications of taking care of refugees, increasing military spending, and strengthening energy autonomy remain limited, the impact of elevated energy and food prices on national income and its distribution is potentially large.

It would get larger if future European sanctions affect the global oil market or the supply of gas to the EU market. This raises three macroeconomic challenges for policymakers.

The first is how best to use sanctions to deter Russia while limiting adverse effects on the EU economy. In this respect, it is important to distinguish between oil and gas. For oil, Russia can diversify away from the EU market and, despite sanctions, sell on the world market where it operates as a price taker.

The implications are that the spillback from EU sanctions is global and that a European embargo or tariffs on oil may have limited effects on consumer oil prices. For gas, the European Union has substantial leverage because Russia is almost completely dependent on the pipeline infrastructure linking it to the European market.

But because supply from other sources is relatively inelastic, Russia faces a sharply downward sloping demand curve and enjoys significant market power. Given technical constraints, and this strategic game, an embargo on gas is not feasible.

Tariffs, however, are feasible; they would be effective, and they should be considered, despite likely strong effects on consumer gas prices.

The second challenge is how to deal with the decrease in real income due to the increase in the energy import bill. Here, two issues require policy clarity.

First, if governments want to partly protect buyers – consumers and firms – from the increase, they have choices among measures, from direct subsidies to targeted transfers, regulations, and price caps. For gas and to a lesser extent oil, subsidies – especially across-the-board tax cuts – may partly offset the effect of sanctions and as such are undesirable.

Lump-sum transfers that do not affect the marginal price, and consequently do not diminish incentives to reduce demand, are preferable, especially if directed to low-income and other most affected households.

Second, governments must decide how to finance the extra spending. Because some of the spending is temporary and because of uncertainty, the loss of real income, and lower exports to Russia, all leading to weak aggregate demand, fiscal support and thus some additional deficit finance may be needed.

Even if deficits are larger, given high inflation and the still low nominal rates, debt ratios are likely to decrease over the next one or two years, and debt will remain sustainable.

The third macroeconomic challenge is how to deal with the increase in inflation as a result of higher energy and food prices. Two forces are at work.

The first is the need to avoid a de-anchoring of inflation expectations, more of a challenge than usual given that inflation had already substantially increased before the war. Preventing this risk would call for a tightening of monetary policy.

The second factor is that the loss of real income is likely to lead, even with some fiscal offset, to weaker aggregate demand, implying a need to loosen policy.

The challenge for policymakers is to cope with these conflicting objectives. In this context, policy instruments complement each other. A combination of well-designed fiscal support to households and tripartite wage discussions may help to soften the trade-off that the central bank is facing.

In each of these three dimensions, there is considerable uncertainty as to the outcome. Energy prices may increase much more than they have so far, or instead return to pre-war levels.

By implication, the loss in real income and the inflationary pressure may be much larger, or instead be less of an issue than currently forecast. This leads to our last conclusion. Fiscal and monetary policy should be nimble, consisting of measures easy to adjust as the need may be. ■

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## Endnotes

1. See [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb\\_results/factsheets/country/details\\_russia\\_en.pdf](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb_results/factsheets/country/details_russia_en.pdf)
2. Nominal GDP of the EU27 was €14,017 billion in 2019 (Source: Eurostat).
3. European Commission, Russia fact sheet; see [https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/russia\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/russia_en)
4. See the recent survey by Darvas (2022). The upper estimates are based on Swedish data. Pisani-Ferry (2022) used a €10,000 estimate based on the cost of the 2015 wave of refugees to Germany. Costs are bound to be lower in Poland and other frontline countries than they were in Sweden. We, therefore, stick to the €10,000 estimate.
5. For more detail on the implications of the war for food prices, see FAO (2022). See also Ritchie (2022).
6. For example, LNG imports from the rest of the world can be directed to countries where excess demand is the highest.
7. See the European Commission (2022) communication of 8 March 2022.
8. For more discussion of the underlying elasticity of substitution between gas and other sources of energy, and its implications for GDP if there were a full embargo on gas, see Bachmann et al (2022), Baqaee and Moll (2022), and Moll (2022).
9. We think of Russia as a monopolist facing a large number of buyers. In the presence of a tariff, and coordination among buyers, it may then become more appropriate to think of the European Union as a monopsonist. In this case, the right conceptual frame is to treat the outcome as the outcome of a game between the two players. Because European coordination is still lacking, we have not explored the implications of this alternative way of thinking about the market.
10. Here and elsewhere, unless specified otherwise, we are using 2019 data as a benchmark, because 2020 data were affected by the COVID-19 shock and 2021 data are not always available.
11. There is a legal debate as to whether such an action would require unanimity within the European Union. Sanctions are decided by unanimity on the basis of Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union, but implemented by a qualified majority. Trade policy decisions are taken by a qualified majority. And in the field of energy, each member state has the right to determine “the general structure of its energy supply” (Article 194 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU).
12. These numbers are constructed as the ratio of food consumption (CP01) plus electricity, gas, and other fuels (CP045) plus operation of personal transportation (CP072) to total consumption, for each quintile. Numbers are from Eurostat-data.xlsx.
13. Some of the numbers that have been published appear much higher. For example, BLS data for the United States for 2020 give a ratio of consumption of food, transport, and utilities to disposable income of 74 percent for the bottom quintile versus 20 percent for the top quintile. But this reflects, partly, different definitions of what is included in the smaller consumption basket and, mostly, the fact that the analysis looks at the ratio of consumption of gas, utilities and food to disposable income rather than to consumption. In the lower quintile are many individuals and households who are dissaving and for whom disposable income is small relative to consumption.
14. Building on the previous discussion of inflation, to the extent that final goods producers do not fully reflect the increase in commodity prices and accept a decrease in their markup, the effect in the initial round will be smaller than the number in the text. But, if they re-establish markups over time, the number in the text is the relevant one.
15. In the French case, Douenne (2019) provided evidence of the vertical and horizontal dispersions of the effects of a carbon tax.
16. In October 2021 the European Commission introduced a toolbox of measures to tackle the energy situation, as feasible options for member states to consider. See [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_21\\_5204](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_5204)
17. For details about the French measures, called bouclier tarifaire, see Gouvernement français (2022).
18. See the 23 March German government measures (see <https://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/DE/Downloads/2022-03-23-massnahmenpaket-bund-hohe-energiekosten.pdf>). Another set of measures in support of affected business was introduced 8 April (see <https://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/DE/Downloads/schutzschild-fuer-vom-krieg-betroffene-Unternehmen-massnahmenueberblick.pdf>).
19. This payment was introduced in 2021, thus before the Russia-Ukraine war, to offset the already large increase in many commodity prices in 2021.
20. For more on the measures taken by EU members, including subsidies, transfers, and price regulations, see Sgaravatti et al (2022).
21. They also go against the need to decarbonise the energy system.
22. The slope of the supply curve was the subject of a Twitter discussion between Paul Krugman and Jason Furman (<https://twitter.com/jasonfurman/status/1496483717027618826?s=20&t=Q1d9Glf5i7J1c9T9Xa10UA>).
23. The German support programme consists of two packages of about €15 billion each.
24. It is interesting in this respect that Germany decided to combine both approaches by financing a defence fund through debt at 3 percent of GDP, while committing to finance the permanent increase in military spending through taxes.
25. The ECB also gives two other scenarios, one adverse and one severe. In the severe scenario, growth is 2.3 percent, the 10-year yield is 0.8 percent, and inflation is 7.1 percent, implying a value for  $(r - g)$  of  $-8.6$  percent.
26. The increase from 1.8 to 2 percent was desirable; the issue is whether it would stop there.
27. See, for example, the ECB's yield curves for 23 February, 3 March and 17 March ([https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/financial\\_markets\\_and\\_interest\\_rates/euro\\_area\\_yield\\_curves/html/index.en.html](https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/financial_markets_and_interest_rates/euro_area_yield_curves/html/index.en.html)).
28. We thus largely agree with the analysis and conclusions of Isabel Schnabel (2022) in her 2 April speech.

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# Climate capital

**Sam Woods is Deputy Governor of the Bank of England and Chief Executive Officer of the Prudential Regulation Authority**

**C**limate change is now firmly in the focus of prudential regulators across the globe. In that context, I want to outline the results of our first exploratory scenario exercise on climate risk – the ‘CBES’<sup>1</sup> – which were published 24<sup>th</sup> May.

But before that, I want to put those results in context, and set out how I see climate risk fitting within the Prudential Regulation Authority’s (PRA’s) wider mission<sup>2</sup>.

## **The role of prudential policy**

Tackling the threat from climate change will involve efforts by governments across the globe, as well as by many other organisations and individuals.

In the UK, the effort to get to net zero greenhouse gas emissions is being led by government, with a wide range of other public bodies doing their part. Where does prudential policy fit into this effort?

The role of prudential policy is to ensure the safety and soundness of banks and insurers, so that they can continue to provide vital financial services to the real economy. Getting our core job right, and so maintaining financial stability, is far and away the most important thing we can do to support the fight against climate change.

Achieving net zero will not be possible unless our societies make considerable investments in developing and disseminating new technologies, and will require major changes across the economy. A stable financial system can support households and businesses through these changes, and channel investment where it needs to go to support the transition.

Transitioning to net zero will be a major challenge for our institutions and societies even in a benign economic environment – doing so without confidence in the basic functioning of the financial system would be near impossible.

It is therefore vital that firms can withstand risks to their safety and soundness, including those that arise as a consequence of climate change – both ‘physical’ risks like flooding and extreme weather events, and ‘transition’ risks that arise as the economy moves away from carbon-intensive activities.

Firms therefore need to understand, at a granular level, how their balance sheets and business models are exposed to both present and future climate risks, so that they can take the right risk management actions today.

This includes investing in their data and modelling capabilities, and carefully scrutinising the data they get from third parties. It means ensuring Boards and senior executives see climate risk as a strategic priority<sup>3</sup>. And ultimately, it means ensuring firms hold sufficient financial resources to absorb losses arising from climate change.

## **Climate and capital**

Should climate risk be captured in capital requirements?<sup>4</sup> In one sense, the answer is an obvious yes. Climate change will inevitably drive losses for banks and insurers – even in a scenario where governments around the world take swift and early action to bring us to net zero.

Just as with any other risk, PRA-regulated institutions must have the resilience to keep serving the real economy in the face of these losses. Capital requirements are an important part of how we deliver that resilience.

That said, while capital can address the financial consequences of climate change, we don’t think it is the best tool to address directly the causes of climate change – for example by reducing capital requirements to subsidise ‘green’ assets, or increasing them to penalise carbon-intensive ones. How to address the causes of climate change is a decision for governments and parliaments, not financial regulators<sup>5</sup>.

For one thing, by diverting the capital framework from its core goal of keeping the financial system standing, such interventions carry significant risks. At worst, we might end up under-capitalising banks and insurers for the risks they face, raising questions about their overall resilience. Or we could end up over-capitalising them inefficiently, reducing their ability to support the economy through the transition.

And there is little evidence that fine-tuning capital requirements in this way would actually achieve its intended goals. In the EU, changes made to the bank capital framework with the aim of supporting SME lending have had little demonstrable impact<sup>6</sup>.

In the absence of evidence that capital requirements actually work as a way of directing lending, it seems unwise to incur these costs – particularly when we have not been given any mandate to do so.

Our focus is therefore on ensuring the financial system can withstand the risks arising from climate change. This raises some fundamental questions. How can we tell whether the capital regime is effectively capturing climate risks? There are two kinds of gap we might need to fill.

The first is ‘regime gaps’. These occur when the design, methodology or scope of the capital framework does not adequately cover risks from climate. To give one example: some aspects of the Pillar 1 capital framework for banks use a one-year time horizon for calculating potential unexpected losses.

Of course, as policymakers, we do not have a one-year time horizon: we will need a viable banking and insurance sector right through the transition and beyond. The one-year horizon is, in effect, a modelling assumption.

It may be reasonable for many risks, but seems particularly ill-suited for climate change, a risk which is structurally building over time and will not fully crystallise in a one-year horizon<sup>7</sup>.

The second type of gap takes the form of ‘capability gaps’. Even if we were satisfied that climate risk was captured by the regime in theory, do firms and regulators have the data and modelling abilities to ensure it is captured in practice?

This is a major challenge: climate risk is very different from traditional financial risks, and we cannot rely on historical data to size it. Another factor that makes this difficult is the need for banks and insurers to understand the carbon impacts of the real economy firms they finance.

It can be hard to judge where real economy firms are, never mind where they are going – and it is the latter that is most important when thinking about future risks.

### **The Climate Biennial Exploratory Scenario (CBES)**

The Bank’s exploratory climate scenario exercise – which we call the ‘CBES’ – was launched last year and is intended to help address these capability gaps.

For the largest UK banks and insurers, we asked for granular analysis of the risks they might face, and their strategic responses, in three stylised 30-year scenarios:

- An ‘early action’ (EA) scenario where climate policy is ambitious from the beginning, with a gradual intensification of carbon taxes and other policies over time.

As a result, global warming (relative to pre-industrial levels) is successfully limited to 1.8°C by the end of the scenario, falling to around 1.5°C by the end of century. You could view this as a reasonable best-case scenario for climate risk.

*“More generally these results bring home the fact that uncertainty around the impact of climate change – even given a pre-determined scenario – remains extremely high”*

- A ‘late action’ (LA) scenario where policy measures are delayed by a decade, and then are implemented in a sudden and disorderly way, leading to material economic and market disruption.

Ultimately, global warming is still limited to 1.8°C by the end of the scenario (2050) relative to pre-industrial levels, but then remains around this level at the end of the century<sup>8</sup>.

- A ‘no additional action’ (NAA) scenario in which governments around the world fail to enact policy responses to global warming, other than those actions already taken. As a result, global temperature levels continue to increase, reaching 3.3°C higher relative to pre-industrial levels by the end of the scenario.

In the scenario this leads to serious environmental impacts, including extreme weather events, destroyed ecosystems and rising sea levels. In some cases these changes are irreversible.

While these changes take longer to manifest, they give rise to increasing and irreversible shocks that continue to grow beyond the scenario: UK and global GDP growth are permanently lower and macroeconomic uncertainty increases.

Broadly speaking, the first two scenarios focus on risks from the transition to net zero, whereas the third one focuses on physical risks from climate change. And to reiterate a theme I will come back to later, the risks from climate change have been managed by the end of the first two scenarios – whereas in the third they continue to build.

### **CBES headlines**

The results of the CBES have been published, and I would encourage anyone with an interest in this topic to read them in full. For me the main headlines from the results publication are:

- The stylised scenarios used in this exercise are illustrations of possible paths for climate policy and global warming, not forecasts. The projections made by banks and insurers are uncertain, but suggest that overall costs will be lowest with early, well-managed action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and so limit climate change.







- UK banks' and insurers' projections suggest that they are likely to be able to bear the costs of transition that fall on them. In part, that is because a significant portion of these costs may ultimately be passed on to their customers.
- In the No Additional Action scenario, households and businesses vulnerable to physical risks would be particularly hard hit, as general insurers would pass on the cost of higher claims into premiums, or otherwise refuse to renew insurance for some customers.
- Governments set public climate policy, which will be a key determinant of the speed and shape of changes in the global economy. Banks and insurers have a collective interest in managing climate-related financial risks in a way that supports that transition over time. They will need to improve their management of these risks in order to be able to do so.

Within this, I wanted to pick out a few particularly interesting lessons.

The first key lesson from this exercise is that over time climate risks will become a persistent drag on banks' and insurers' profitability – particularly if they don't manage them effectively. While they vary across firms and scenarios, overall loss rates are equivalent to an average drag on annual profits of around 10-15%.

These are big numbers, and the limits of the exercise mean the actual impact could well be larger due to some significant exclusions<sup>9</sup>. But it bears repeating that based on this exercise the costs of a transition to net zero look absorbable for banks and insurers, without a worrying direct impact on their solvency.

By themselves, these are not the kinds of losses that would make me question the stability of the system, and they suggest that the financial sector has the capacity to support the economy through the transition.

But any positive message needs to be taken with a major pinch of salt: both because there is a lot of uncertainty in these projections and because this drag on profitability will leave the sector more vulnerable to other, future shocks. A world with climate change is a riskier one for the financial system to navigate.

A second key lesson is that how and when we transition makes a big difference. Costs to the financial sector will be substantially lower if early, orderly action is taken. For example, projected climate-related bank credit losses were 30% higher in the LA scenario than the EA scenario.

Among other factors, this reflects that in the scenario, adjusting late and abruptly to climate risk triggers a messy recession – with rising unemployment as the corporate sector adjusts.

So early action is important to lower the cost of the transition. If we are ever to reach net zero, a number of sectors are going

to have to adapt their business models on a fundamental level.

As the report sets out, it will be in the collective interests of financial institutions to support counterparties that have credible plans to adapt – and ultimately reduce their exposures to those sectors of the economy that are inconsistent with a net zero policy<sup>10</sup>.

At the same time, the financial sector cannot run ahead of the real economy: we need real change to make the economy more energy efficient and expand the provision of renewable energy. While that process takes place, banks and insurers need to provide finance to more carbon-intensive sectors of the economy, precisely in order to allow them to invest in the transition.

Cutting off finance to these corporates too quickly could prove counterproductive, and have wide-ranging macroeconomic and societal consequences, including through elevated energy prices – potentially akin to those whose negative effects we are experiencing today.

Another key point for me is that no action on climate delivers the worst outcome from our scenarios. A naïve comparison of loss rates in the two net zero scenarios and the NAA scenario might suggest otherwise; in fact for banks, credit losses were lower under no action than for late action.

But this is misleading because of the very different endpoints of the scenarios. Under both the LA and EA scenarios, climate change has broadly been brought under control by the end of the 30-year period.

By contrast, with no additional action the impacts will persist well beyond the 30 years of our scenario – incurring substantial economic costs not captured in these estimates<sup>11</sup>.

Even sticking within the 30-year bounds of the scenario – and focusing on financial sector impacts – the NAA scenario is pretty grim. Projected impairment rates for banks are up 50% compared with normal levels. And whereas the ‘transition’ scenarios offer clear opportunities for banks to increase their profits by investing the transition, the ‘no action’ scenario offered no such opportunities.

Instead, the world gets poorer and more uncertain for all sectors, particularly those directly exposed to physical risks. The ‘no action’ scenario is particularly unpleasant for life and general insurers – even sticking to the 30-year window, their losses in this scenario were worse than in the transition.

For instance, UK and international general insurers, respectively, projected a rise in average annualised losses of around 50% and 70% by the end of the NAA scenario. It’s worth emphasising that these costs would be mostly passed on to consumers through higher premiums.

Ultimately, in a ‘no action’ scenario, we would see a reduction in access to lending and insurance for so-called ‘climate vulnerable’ sectors and households.

To give an example of what this means, homes at risk of flooding would likely become prohibitively expensive to insure or borrow against.

Like so many of the impacts of climate change, this cost would be borne unequally: 45% of the mortgage impairments in the scenario are accounted for by just 10% of the country<sup>12</sup>.

And there is evidence that in areas particularly at risk of flooding, many homes could become uninsurable.

Finally, the CBES exercise is a measure of the progress banks and insurers are making in their climate risk management. Overall, this is a good news story: we were encouraged by the progress firms have made. But there is still much more to do. We will give firm-specific feedback to participants, but key themes include:

- The need for more data on, and understanding of, customers’ current emissions and transition plans. This can include looking through complex chains of financial relationships between clients and counterparties to see the underlying emissions.
- The need to invest in modelling capabilities and doing more to scrutinise data and projections supplied by third parties.
- The need for some firms to consider more deeply how they would respond strategically to different scenarios, including thinking through the implications of different paths for climate policy.

More generally these results bring home the fact that uncertainty around the impact of climate change – even given a pre-determined scenario – remains extremely high. As you will see if you read the report, the error bands around all these estimates are very wide<sup>13</sup>.

This presents a challenge when considering implications for policy – and highlights the importance of continuing to plug the kinds of capability gaps I discussed earlier. As the results publication sets out, the Bank will engage with firms individually and collectively to help them target their efforts, and share good practices identified in this exercise.

### Implications for policy

I hope it’s clear by this point that the CBES will be a valuable tool for helping us and financial firms to understand the challenges ahead. This exercise is not going to be used to set capital requirements for banks and insurers. But it clearly sheds light on that debate.

The CBES results make clear that climate risk is a first-order strategic issue for the firms we regulate. But in my view it is not yet clear that the magnitude of transition costs require a fundamental recalibration of capital requirements for the system<sup>14</sup>.

A persistent drag on profitability would be very nasty for firms, but so long as they are able to continue to make sufficient

profits to maintain their capital buffers, its impact on safety and soundness might be less material. Had the results of this exercise suggested a fundamental threat to the solvency of these firms, our response would of course have been quite different.

Set against that high level view, though, a world with climate change is without doubt riskier than one without. And so I see a number of challenges which underline the need for further work:

- To the extent that climate change makes the distribution of future shocks nastier, that could imply higher capital requirements, all else equal.

So a key judgement will be: are current capital levels sufficiently high to guard against unexpected shocks during the transition?

- Even if capital levels are appropriate in aggregate, that does not mean that the capital is held in the right places. As we have seen, some of these risks are highly concentrated in particular sectors.

A second key judgement will therefore be: does the framework of capital requirements capture climate risk at a sufficiently granular level?

- We also need to ensure firms have the right incentives

to continue to improve their capabilities and meet our expectations.

The CBES results show that while progress has been made, there is still much to do. From the point of view of capital, this suggests a third key judgement: are we satisfied that firms are building the capabilities they need – and if not, do we need to introduce more incentives?

Most fundamentally, the CBES results are a snapshot – based on current data and modelling capabilities and focused on a specific set of scenarios and risks. I have highlighted the significant uncertainty as well as the gaps that underlie these results.

To my mind the most notable exclusion is traded or market risk for banks, which might be where a transition shock would be most likely to manifest – indeed current and recent stresses in energy and commodity markets illustrate this point.

As we build capabilities, we will be better able to size the risk and its potential policy implications. We will also learn over time whether the real world looks more like the EA scenario, or if we are living in a ‘late’ or ‘no’ action world.

All of this will inform the PRA’s judgements about capital requirements and any other responses to climate risks. Today’s publication is important step forward, but it is not the last word. ■

#### Endnotes

1. *Climate Biennial Exploratory Scenario* [<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/stress-testing/2022/results-of-the-2021-climate-biennial-exploratory-scenario>].
2. *For the purposes of this speech, I focus on the prudential regulation and financial stability aspects of climate risk, as opposed to the Bank of England’s other responsibilities as a central bank.*
3. *The PRA’s supervisory statement on enhancing banks’ and insurers’ approaches to managing the financial risks from climate change* [<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/-/media/boe/files/prudential-regulation/supervisory-statement/2019/ss319>].
4. *The PRA Climate Change Adaptation Report 2021* [<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/prudential-regulation/publication/2021/october/climate-change-adaptation-report-2021>] set out some of these issues in more detail.
5. *My colleague Sarah Breeden also reflected on the role of government, central banks and financial firms in the economy’s transition to net zero in a recent speech: Balancing on the net-zero tightrope* [<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/speech/2022/april/sarah-breeden-thecityuk-international-conference>].
6. *For example, EBA research on the ‘SME supporting factor’ introduced as part of CRR found no evidence that it was effective in reducing pricing or increasing lending. EBA-Op-2016-04 Report on SMEs and SME supporting factor.pdf* [<https://www.eba.europa.eu/sites/default/documents/files/documents/10180/1359456/602d5c61-b501-4df9-8c89-71e32ab1bf84/EBA-Op-2016-04%20Report%20on%20SMEs%20and%20SME%20supporting%20factor.pdf?retry=1>].
7. *That said, there is a legitimate question about how far the current capital framework should capture risks 20+ years in the future. I return to this point later on.*
8. *You may find it counterintuitive that the 2050 temperature outcomes do not differ wildly across these two scenarios – but that reminds us that changes in climate policy take a long time to feed through to climate outcomes.*
9. *Risks outside the scope of the exercise include traded risk for banks, and mortality risk for life insurers. It is worth noting that the impact could also be lower, most obviously because the modelling constraint of a fixed balance sheet in the CBES limited firms’ room to adapt to evolving risks.*
10. *Within the corporate sector, the industries with biggest losses from the transition are mining (including extraction of petroleum and natural gas), manufacturing, transport and wholesale & retail trade. The cumulative impairment rate on lending to these sectors averaged 35%. Insurers projected heavy corporate bond and equity losses in similar sectors, especially oil and gas.*
11. *It’s also probably fair to say that our ability to model the NAA scenario is more incomplete than the EA and LA scenarios – so there are greater risks of uncaptured or unanticipated losses in that scenario.*
12. *Based on analysis on the location of impairments within the four-digit postcodes analysed.*
13. *And we know there are gaps. Since this was our and the firms’ first exercise we deliberately chose not to capture all possible sources of risk.*
14. *But this is something that the Bank will be exploring further, and where we have invited external analysis and research to inform our views. We will be holding a conference later in the year to discuss.*

*This article is based on a speech given at a webcast hosted by the Global Association of Risk Professionals, May 2022.*



# For a few cryptos more: the Wild West of crypto finance

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**1** 70 years ago Americans pushed westward across the frontier to seek their fortune in the gold rush. Greed and lawlessness turned this promised land into the Wild West, where the few exploited the dream of the many.

Fast-forward a century and a half and, amid the global financial crisis, growing distrust of banks, coupled with technological innovation, gave rise to a new dream – a digital gold rush beyond state control.

Satoshi Nakamoto – or rather the software developers using that pseudonym – created the source code of what they thought could be decentralised digital cash. Their 2008 white paper<sup>1</sup> shows a great fascination with technology, notably cryptography, but not necessarily an in-depth understanding of payment and money issues. They aspired to realise an anarchistic utopia of a stable currency free from public scrutiny.

Almost 15 years on, cryptoassets are what everyone's talking about. Crypto enthusiasts marvel at the rise of the crypto market, with many feeling they should take their chances on the crypto gamble. An ecosystem has emerged, from miners to intermediaries, all seeking to expand into digital finance.

Crypto evangelists promise heaven on earth, using an illusory narrative of ever-rising cryptoasset prices to maintain inflows and thus the momentum fuelling the crypto bubble.

But appearances are deceptive. Satoshi Nakamoto's dream of creating trustworthy money remains just that – a dream.

Cryptoasset transfers can take hours to process. Their prices fluctuate wildly<sup>2</sup>. The supposedly anonymous transactions leave an immutable trail that can be traced<sup>3</sup>. A large majority of crypto holders rely on intermediaries, contrary to the avowed philosophy of decentralised finance. In El Salvador, for instance, which is the first country to adopt bitcoin as legal tender, payments are carried out via a conventional centrally managed wallet.

Cryptoassets are bringing about instability and insecurity – the exact opposite of what they promised. They are creating a new Wild West<sup>4</sup>. To quote Littlefinger from Game of Thrones, 'chaos is a ladder'. The story does not end well for this

character. However, it only takes a few to climb high on the ladder – even if their gains are only temporary – to convince many others that they are missing out.

Indeed, the crypto market is now larger than the sub-prime mortgage market was when – worth \$1.3 trillion – it triggered the global financial crisis<sup>5</sup>. And it shows strikingly similar dynamics.

In the absence of adequate controls, cryptoassets are driving speculation by promising fast and high returns and exploiting regulatory loopholes that leave investors without protection. Limited understanding of risks, fear of missing out and intense lobbying of legislators drive up exposures while slowing down regulation.

We must not repeat the same mistakes by waiting for the bubble to burst, and only then realising how pervasive crypto risk has become in the financial system. And while some may hope to be smarter and get out in time, many will be trapped.

Now is the time to ensure that cryptoassets are only used within clear, regulated boundaries and for purposes that add value to society. And it is time for policymakers to respond to the people's growing demand for digital assets and a digital currency by making sovereign money fit for the digital age.

I will argue that at present cryptoassets are not only speculative and high-risk investments, but they also raise public policy and financial stability concerns. I will then discuss some elements of the public policy response which is necessary in order to protect investors and preserve financial stability without suffocating innovation.

## **The rise of cryptoassets**

Let me start with the underlying drivers of cryptoassets. At their root, cryptoassets are the result of advances in cryptographic methods and distributed ledger technology. Innovation has made it possible to create an asset that lacks any underlying claim.

In the initial set-up of what we today call 'unbacked cryptoassets', nobody is liable, nor are these assets backed by any collateral or managed by a trustworthy operator. This makes them purely speculative in nature, and hence highly volatile.

To address the risks of unbacked cryptos, ‘stablecoins’ have emerged, with their value linked to one or more low-risk assets. But, if left unregulated, they are stable in name only. In fact, they can be low-risk but not riskless, and cannot guarantee redeemability at par at any time<sup>6</sup>.

They do not benefit from deposit insurance, nor do they have access to central bank standing facilities. They are therefore vulnerable to runs<sup>7</sup>. They are often purely speculative assets, exposed to high financial and operational risks: research finds that one-third of stablecoins launched in recent years have not survived<sup>8</sup>.

In spite of these weaknesses, the number of cryptoassets has expanded significantly, with around 10,000 available on the market today<sup>9</sup>. Driving this growth is a complex and opaque crypto ecosystem made up of cryptocurrency miners and service providers, such as exchanges or wallets, that are largely unregulated and insufficiently supervised or overseen.

Within that market is a fast-growing segment of decentralised finance, which uses smart contracts to support trading, lending and investment in cryptoassets – supposedly without relying on intermediaries<sup>10</sup>. This supply of cryptoassets has been met with strong demand from both professional investors and the public. In 2021 around 16% of Americans<sup>11</sup> and 10% of Europeans<sup>12</sup> invested in cryptoassets.

This strong appeal of cryptoassets, especially unbacked ones, is a cause for concern given the lack of fundamentals, the number of recent scandals<sup>13</sup>, their use in illegal activities and the high volatility of their prices. All this points to unsound underlying market dynamics.

For one thing, the market is highly concentrated: for example, retail investors holding less than 10 bitcoins own one-tenth of bitcoin supply, while professional investors and high-net-worth individuals hold almost two-thirds<sup>14</sup>.

Vested interests of large investors naturally lead to increasing lobbying activities<sup>15</sup>. In the United States, for example, crypto firms spent around \$5 million lobbying the Senate in the first nine months of 2021 alone.

Rising prices are fuelled by extensive news reports and investment advice on social media, highlighting past price increases and features such as artificial scarcity to create the fear of missing out. As a result, many invest without understanding what they are buying<sup>16</sup>.

Like in a Ponzi scheme, such dynamics can only continue as long as a growing number of investors believe that prices will continue to increase and that there can be fiat value unbacked by any stream of revenue or guarantee. Until the enthusiasm vanishes and the bubble bursts.

### **Cryptoassets and public policy concerns**

Meanwhile crypto enthusiasts will argue that cryptoassets are different and that to regulate them is to stifle innovation. We have heard it all before. But do cryptoassets really generate value for the payment system?

*“The crypto market is now larger than the sub-prime mortgage market was when it triggered the global financial crisis. And it shows strikingly similar dynamics”*

Unbacked cryptoassets cannot fulfil their original objective of facilitating payments. They are simply too volatile to perform the three functions of money: medium of exchange, store of value and unit of account<sup>17</sup>.

For example, between November 2021 and January 2022, bitcoin prices fell from roughly USD 68,000 to about \$38,000. Their three-month volatility was 60%, almost five times higher than gold and four times higher than US stocks<sup>18</sup>.

Such high volatility also means that households cannot rely on cryptoassets as a store of value to smooth their consumption over time. Similarly, firms cannot rely on cryptoassets as a unit of account for the calculation of prices or for their balance sheet.

And this is just as true for stablecoins, given the poor consumer protection and the vulnerability to panic selling that characterise them in the absence of appropriate regulation and supervision. When adequately regulated and supervised, stablecoins are nothing more than e-money arrangements. This is something we have known for many years<sup>19</sup>.

So cryptoassets, especially unbacked ones, are not useful as money. But do they at least perform other worthwhile social or economic functions, such as funding consumption or investment, or helping to combat climate change? There is reason to believe that they do the exact opposite.

Cryptoassets are widely used for criminal and terrorist activities. It is estimated that the amounts of cryptoassets exchanged for criminal purposes are substantial, exceeding \$24 billion in 2021<sup>20</sup>. Research suggests that as much as \$72 billion per year, or about 23% of all transactions, is associated with criminal activities<sup>21</sup>. Ransomware attackers usually demand crypto payments.

Cryptoassets may also be used for tax evasion or to circumvent sanctions. For example, North Korea has actively tried to recruit cryptocurrency experts over the past few years<sup>22</sup>. More recently trading volumes in cryptoassets using the rouble increased after sanctions were imposed on Russia<sup>23</sup>. While we cannot be sure that cryptoassets are actually being used by sanctioned persons or businesses, it nonetheless shows that they provide a potential means to circumvent sanctions<sup>24</sup>.

Cryptoassets based on proof-of-work (PoW) blockchains can also cause huge amounts of pollution and damage to the

environment. They are created in a decentralised mining process which consumes an enormous amount of energy and computing hardware. It is estimated that mining in the bitcoin network uses up about 0.36% of the world's electricity – comparable to the energy consumption of Belgium or Chile<sup>25</sup>.

Worse still, efforts to reduce energy demand may prove futile. The networks' hunger for energy is potentially limitless, since the validation process encourages miners to keep upgrading their computing capacity to ensure system security.

And even where crypto mining uses clean energy or less energy-intensive techniques, this is energy that is not available for other purposes, increasing the consumption of fossil fuels and impeding the fight against climate change.

So cryptoassets are speculative assets that can cause major damage to society. At present they derive their value mainly from greed, they rely on the greed of others and the hope that the scheme continues unhindered. Until this house of cards collapses, leaving people buried under their losses.

### **Cryptoassets and financial stability risks**

Let me now turn to the risks that cryptoassets pose to financial stability. Cryptoassets still comprise a small share of

total global financial assets (about 1%). But, as I mentioned, they already have a larger market than sub-prime mortgages had before the global financial crisis started. We cannot afford to ignore them.

Indeed, the popularity of cryptoassets is spreading beyond their core supporters.

The launch of the first bitcoin exchange-traded fund in the United States last October is a sign of increased institutional activity in these assets, largely in response to demand from customers<sup>26</sup>.

The retail segment is also growing, with retail investors often attracted by misleading advertisements that fail to clearly set out the risk involved in these products<sup>27</sup>.

Big payment networks have stepped up their support services for cryptoassets<sup>28</sup> and intermediaries are seeing a significant increase in retail holdings. For example, Coinbase, which is the biggest US cryptoasset exchange, now has 56 million users – an increase of 65% since March 2020<sup>29</sup>.

Cryptoassets pose financial stability risks through three main channels.



First, stress in cryptoasset markets could spill over to players in the wider financial system through direct asset holdings or ownership of service providers.

One measure of such linkages is the correlation between changes in the prices of cryptoassets and of equities, which has been positive since 2020<sup>30</sup>.

Second, a fall in the value of cryptoassets might have an impact on the wealth of investors, with knock-on effects on the financial system.

Third, a loss of faith in the value of cryptoassets – for instance because of operational failures, fraud, price manipulation or cybercrime – could lead to a sharp deterioration in investor confidence<sup>31</sup>, which could spill over to broader financial markets.

Linkages through these three channels are as yet still limited. But they could increase rapidly if cryptoassets are widely adopted by institutional or retail investors. Such a scenario is not far-fetched. For example, high-net-worth investors, financial advisors and family offices are now leading the charge to invest in cryptoassets<sup>32</sup>.

More importantly, big tech players could launch global stablecoins for retail use<sup>33</sup>. We have seen the example of Diem, a cryptocurrency project by Meta, and now Meta's new endeavour<sup>34</sup>.

By exploiting their large customer bases and bundling payments and other financial services, big tech firms could significantly strengthen linkages between the cryptoasset ecosystem and the broader financial system.

In a stress situation, a sudden surge in redemptions by stablecoin holders could lead to instability in various market segments. For example, Tether, one of the most popular stablecoins, promises 'stability' by investing in low-risk assets, such as commercial paper, and holds a large proportion of the stock of these instruments in circulation<sup>35</sup>.

Large-scale sales of these assets in response to a sudden increase in redemptions could generate instability throughout the commercial paper market.

This phenomenon could spread to other stablecoins and related sectors, eventually finding its way to the banks that hold the stablecoins' liquidity.



Such extreme scenarios might not be just around the corner. But the longer we wait, the more exposures and vested interests build up. And the harder it will be for policymakers to act.

### Regulating cryptoassets

This brings me to the issue of regulation. Policymakers should not allow cryptoassets and the associated risks to proliferate unchecked. We must decide how to regulate them, following a rigorous risk-based approach tailored to different instruments<sup>36</sup>.

The current regulatory approaches differ across countries. Some countries have banned cryptoassets outright while others have restricted their use<sup>37</sup>. This situation is clearly unsatisfactory, as cryptoassets are a global phenomenon and their underlying technologies can play an important role, not only in finance.

We need globally coordinated regulatory action to address issues such as the use of cryptoassets in cross-border illicit activities or their environmental footprint. Regulation should balance the risks and benefits so as not to stifle innovation that could stimulate efficiency in payments and broader applications of these technologies.

Progress is being made in Europe and worldwide, but not swiftly enough to keep pace with the emerging challenges. We need to see faster progress on many fronts. Four of these are particularly relevant.

First, we need to hold cryptoassets to the same standards as the rest of the financial system. This means swiftly implementing all rules to prevent the use of cryptoassets for money laundering and terrorist financing, based on the standards set by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), and enforcing them effectively<sup>38</sup>.

These efforts should also aim to bring peer-to-peer cryptoasset transfers within the scope of the standards for anti-money laundering (AML) and countering the financing of terrorism (CFT).

Second, we should consider how to adequately tax cryptoassets. Currently the tax treatment of cryptoassets is minimal: we know very little about who really owns them, and about the size<sup>39</sup> and the distribution of the capital gains.

By its very nature, the cryptoasset market makes it very difficult to identify tax-relevant activities because it relies less on traditional financial intermediaries, who typically provide information for tax purposes<sup>40</sup>.

We should bring taxation on cryptoassets into line with the taxation of other instruments and aim for alignment across jurisdictions, given the global nature of the crypto market.

The introduction of reporting obligations for transactions above certain thresholds, as just recently proposed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), would enhance transparency and combat tax

evasion<sup>41</sup>. There could also be a case for higher taxation of some cryptoassets – such as those based on PoW – above and beyond the taxation of other financial instruments.

Negative externalities that lead to sunk costs for society, such as high pollution, could be factored into appropriate taxes levied on participants in crypto markets (issuers, investors and service providers).

Third, public disclosure and regulatory reporting need to be strengthened. The current practice observed in the crypto industry – for example, the disclosure of reserve assets backing stablecoins – is highly problematic<sup>42</sup>.

It is not sufficient and differs across products, and can even be misleading to investors and policymakers, mandatory disclosure requirements for financial institutions are necessary to pinpoint where risks emanating from cryptoassets are concentrated.

At the same time, public authorities (central banks, supervisors and AML authorities) need to further improve their data capabilities in order to detect illicit trades and emerging threats to financial stability.

Fourth, given the crucial unanswered questions on issues such as operational risk, volatility and liquidity, regulators should introduce strict transparency requirements and set out the standards of conduct to be followed by professional operators in order to protect unexperienced retail cryptoasset investors.

Europe is leading the way in bringing cryptoassets into the regulatory purview. The finalisation of the Regulation of Markets in CryptoAssets (MiCA) will harmonise the regulatory approach across the European Union (EU).

In a similar way, the European Commission's legislative proposals to create an EU AML/CFT single rulebook will bring all cryptoasset service providers within the scope of the relevant EU framework, which will also provide the basis for a harmonised European approach to supervising them.

Moreover, the proposed Regulation on information accompanying transfers of funds and certain cryptoassets (FCTR) will aim to ensure that cryptoasset transfers which include at least one cryptoasset service provider can be traced and that suspicious transactions can be blocked.

Swift negotiations by the European Commission, European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, together with thorough enforcement by competent national authorities, are necessary given the rapid growth of the crypto market.

Europe's regulatory measures need to go further. We need to focus more on unbacked cryptoasset activities that are undertaken without service providers. In addition, we cannot afford to leave on-chain peer-to-peer payments unregulated, as they can be used to circumvent any regulation.



Finally, if we really want to harmonise supervision significantly across all EU member states, the new European AML Authority should supervise the riskiest cryptoasset providers. But our measures can only be effective if they are matched by ambitious measures implemented by our international peers.

The United States is taking action on this front<sup>43</sup>, while the Financial Stability Board (FSB) has made progress in advancing a global agenda of work on cryptoassets<sup>44</sup>, in cooperation with other international bodies such as the Committee on Payments and Market Infrastructures, the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision and the FATF<sup>45</sup>.

We should build on this momentum and not wait for a crisis to occur before creating a dedicated global policy forum that brings together the key actors needed to address the risks arising from cryptoassets<sup>46</sup>.

### Conclusion

The westward expansion of the United States in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century broadly coincided with a period when some states passed free banking laws which eased the requirements for opening a bank, facilitating the emergence of so-called wildcat banks<sup>47</sup>.

These banks were typically located in remote areas where wildcats roam, so they were able to get away with issuing their own banknotes to the public, backed by questionable assets, with no intention of honouring them. Many of them defaulted, undermining public confidence in banks.

We should not permit such a situation to happen again in the digital arena with cryptoassets. We need to make coordinated efforts at the global level to bring cryptoassets into the regulatory purview. And we need to ensure that they are subject to standards in line with those applied to the financial system.

In doing so, we will have to deal with complex trade-offs, balancing the goals of promoting innovation, preserving financial stability and ensuring consumer protection. We should make faster progress if we want to ensure that cryptoassets do not trigger a lawless frenzy of risk-taking.

But this is not enough. The growth of cryptoasset markets reveals society's growing demand for digital assets and instant payments. If the official sector – public authorities and intermediaries – does not satisfy this demand, others will step in.

Central banks must engage even more with digital innovation by upgrading wholesale financial infrastructures, operating fast retail payment systems and preparing for the issuance of central bank digital currencies.

The ECB is at the forefront of work in all these areas. We are focusing on a digital euro, in order to allow citizens to use sovereign money to make payments anywhere in the euro area, while protecting its role as an anchor for the payment and monetary system<sup>48</sup>. ■

#### Endnotes

1. Nakamoto, S (2008), *A Peer-to-Peer Electronic Cash System*, Bitcoin.org.
2. The cryptoasset market quadrupled in 2021 alone, reaching nearly USD 3 trillion in market capitalisation in November, before halving within just three months.
3. Holders can choose to be anonymous through encryption, but the blockchain is transparent in terms of what addresses hold which amounts of coins, and the related transaction flows.
4. Gensler, G (2021), *Remarks Before the Aspen Security Forum*, US Securities and Exchange Commission, August.
5. US Government Printing Office (2007), *"Subprime and Predatory Lending: New Regulatory Guidance, Current Market Conditions, and Effects on Regulated Institutions"*, hearing before the Subcommittee on Financial Institutions and Consumer Credit of the Committee on Financial Services, US House of Representatives, 27 March.
6. The stabilisation mechanism of stablecoins is crucial to determine whether the coins issued can maintain a stable value. Different stabilisation mechanisms may either require the intervention of accountable institutions, in the role of issuer and custodian, or delegate these tasks to stablecoin users. See Bullmann, D, Jonas, K and Pinna, A (2019). *In search for stability in cryptoassets: are stablecoins the solution?* ECB, Occasional Paper Series, August.
7. Panetta, F (2021), *"The present and future of money in the digital age"*, lecture, Rome, 10 December.
8. Mizrach, B (2021), *Stablecoins: Survivorship, Transactions Costs and Exchange Microstructure*, SSRN, 28 April.
9. According to Statista (2022).
10. Decentralised finance grew from about \$15 billion at the end of 2020 to \$110 billion in September last year, before shrinking to \$80 billion in December. See Chapter 3 of International Monetary Fund (2022), *Global Financial Stability Report*, 19 April.
11. Financial Stability Board (2022), *Assessment of Risks to Financial Stability from Cryptoassets*, 16 February.
12. Based on the ECB Consumer Expectations Survey (CES), which – among other things – collects information on euro area households' economic and financial behaviour. The numbers in the text refer to the six countries covered in the sample (Belgium, Germany Spain, France, Italy and the Netherlands).
13. See, for instance, US Department of Justice (2022), *Two Arrested for Alleged Conspiracy to Launder \$4.5 Billion in Stolen Cryptocurrency*, February; for instances of Ponzi schemes, see "the Bitcoin Savings and Trust" or the "MyCoin" pyramid scheme in Planet Compliance, *The 10 biggest scandals that rocked the Blockchain world*, published online, last accessed 20 April 2022, or the "rug pull" scam based on the popular Netflix series "The Squid Game", in Wired (2021), *How a Squid Game Crypto Scam Got Away With Millions*, November.
14. Sources: Glassnode and ECB calculations.
15. The Economist (2021), *Crypto lobbying is going ballistic*, December.
16. A survey showed that one-third of cryptoasset investors know little or nothing about these assets. See Cardify (2021), *All Aboard The Crypto Train: Who Are The Latest Crypto Investors?*, February.
17. See G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' Statement on Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) and Digital Payments, 13 October 2021. Moreover, the European Supervisory Authorities have recently warned that these assets are not suited for most retail consumers as an investment or as a means of payment or exchange; see "EU financial regulators warn consumers on the risks of cryptoassets", 17 March 2022.

18. S&P 500; see Financial Stability Board (2022), *Assessment of Risks to Financial Stability from Cryptoassets*, February.
19. See European Central Bank (1998), *Report on electronic money*, August.
20. Chainalysis (2021), *The 2021 Crypto Crime report*, January.
21. Foley, S, Karlsen, JR and Putnins, TJ (2019), "Sex, Drugs, and Bitcoin: How much illegal activity is financed through cryptocurrencies?", *Review of Financial Studies*, May. The use of bitcoins for illicit payments is well documented, although the share of such payments in total bitcoin transactions is disputed. Foley (ibid.) estimates it to be 45%, while Chainalysis' 2021 crypto crime report puts the figure at less than 1% for 2021. At the same time, the low ratio could be because the denominator refers to trade volumes (investment flows) and not payments; see Green, MW (2021), "The Case Against Bitcoin", *Common sense*, 14 May. Finally, the FATF reports variations in identified illicit bitcoin transactions from 2016 to 2020 to range between 0.6% and 9.9% (relative to the number of transactions); see FATF (2021), "Second 12-Month Review of the Revised FATF Standards on Virtual Assets and Virtual Assets service providers", July.
22. A former US researcher in a cryptocurrency group has been sentenced to more than five years in prison for conspiring to help North Korea evade US sanctions using cryptocurrency. Moreover, the United States Treasury Department has linked North Korean hackers to the theft of cryptoassets tied to a popular online game and worth hundreds of millions of dollars.
23. See Kaiko Research (2022), *Bitcoin Dominance Climbs Amid Persistent Volatility*, March.
24. On 21 April Binance, the world's largest crypto exchange, announced that it would comply with the European Union sanctions imposed on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine and limit services in Russia. Russian nationals, residents and businesses in the country with cryptoassets exceeding €10,000 will not be able to deposit or trade them, they may only make withdrawals. See Binance (2022), *Changes of Services to Users in Russia*, 21 April.
25. See Chapter 2 of International Monetary Fund (2021), *Global Financial Stability Report*, October.
26. A survey by Intertrust of a group of 100 hedge fund Chief Financial Officers found that, on average, they expected to allocate 7.2% of their funds' assets to cryptoassets by 2026. If replicated across the sector, this could equate to a total exposure of \$312 billion. See *Financial Times*, 2021, *Hedge funds expect to hold 7% of assets in crypto within five years*, 15 June.
27. In 2022 the cryptoassets exchange, Crypto.com, had two advertisements banned because they were considered to be misleading by the UK's advertising regulator, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). See ASA (2022), *Ruling on Forisgfs UK Ltd t/a Crypto.com*, 5 January.
28. In particular, Mastercard, PayPal and Visa continue building capabilities and strategic partnerships to support cryptoassets (as well as stablecoins).
29. Backlinko (2021), *Coinbase Usage and Trading Statistics*, April.
30. The returns on bitcoin, for example, were unrelated to those on the S&P 500 index between 2017 and 2019, but their correlation coefficient increased to 35% in the period 2020-21. See Adrian, T, Iyer, T and Qureshi, MS (2022), *Crypto Prices Move More in Sync with Stocks, Posing New Risks*, *IMF Blog*, January.
31. Recent analyses from the IMF show that cyberattacks often cause the collapse of decentralised finance platforms: on average, more than 30% of the total deposits is lost or withdrawn after a cyberattack; see IMF (2022), *Global Stability Report*, April.
32. See Fidelity (2021), *The Institutional Investor Digital Assets Study*, September 2021.
33. See Panetta, F (2021), "Stay safe at the intersection: the confluence of big techs and global stablecoins", speech at the conference on "Safe Openness in Global Trade and Finance" organised by the UK G7 Presidency and hosted by the Bank of England, October.
34. See *Financial Times*, 2022, *Facebook owner Meta targets finance with 'Zuck Bucks' and creator coins*, 6 April
35. See IMF (2021), *op cit*.
36. The term cryptoasset is often used to label anything that is recorded via distributed ledger technology (DLT), regardless of whether it constitutes a new type of asset, a financial instrument or a form collective investment. See Bullmann, D, Jonas, K and Pinna, A (2019), *op. cit*.
37. Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Bolivia, Bangladesh, Nepal and China have imposed outright bans. Countries that have restricted the ability of banks to deal with cryptoassets or prohibited their use for payment transactions include Nigeria, Namibia, Colombia, Ecuador, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey, Iran, Indonesia, Vietnam and Russia.
38. The result of a questionnaire launched by FATF in July 2021, showed that less than 50% of reporting jurisdictions – 38 FATF members and 90 FATF-Style Regional Bodies (FSRB) members – had implemented the revised FATF Standards on Virtual Assets (VA) and VA Service Providers (VASPs) in their national law. See Financial Action Task Force (2021), *Second 12-Month Review of the Revised FATF Standards on Virtual Assets and Virtual Asset service providers*, July. The five most cited challenges and barriers to implementation are: (1) the lack of capacity, expertise and experience in public sector agencies, (2) the implementation of the travel rule and the lack of sufficient technological solutions, (3) challenges in identifying and registering/licensing VASPs, (4) the lack of implementation of domestic regulations for virtual assets/VASPs and (5) challenges in conducting ML/TF risk assessments and understanding the size of the virtual asset/VASP sector. The FATF addressed these issues in the revised Guidance it released recently. See FATF (2021), "Updated Guidance on Virtual Assets and Virtual Assets service providers", October.
39. According to some simulations by the European Commission, the revenue potential of taxing capital gains on bitcoin across the EU in 2020 alone would have amounted to about €900 million, or 0.3% of the total tax revenue from property taxation in the EU. See Thiemann, A (2021), "Cryptocurrencies: An empirical view from a tax perspective", *JRC Working Papers on Taxation and Structural Reforms*, No 12/2021.
40. Cryptoassets in most instances do not fall within the scope of the Common Reporting Standard (CRS) developed by the OECD in 2014, which applies to traditional financial assets and fiat currencies. Even where cryptoassets do fall within the definition of financial assets, they can be owned either directly by individuals in cold (ie. offline) wallets or via cryptoasset exchanges that do not have reporting obligations under the CRS. They are therefore unlikely to be reported to tax authorities in a reliable manner. See OECD (2022) *CryptoAsset Reporting Framework and Amendments to the Common Reporting Standard*, public consultation document, 22 March-29 April.
41. See OECD (2022), *op. cit*.
42. See IMF(2021), *op. cit*.
43. White House (2022), *Executive Order on Ensuring Responsible Development of Digital Assets*, March. The main policy objectives of the executive order are: 1) protecting consumers, investors and businesses; 2) protecting US and global financial stability and mitigating systemic risk; 3) mitigating illicit finance and national security risks; 4) reinforcing US leadership in the global financial system and in technological and economic competitiveness; and 5) supporting technological advances that promote responsible development and use of digital assets.
44. See FSB (2022), *Assessment of Risks to Financial Stability from Cryptoassets*, February; FSB (2021), *Regulation, Supervision and Oversight of "Global Stablecoin" Arrangements: Progress Report on the implementation of the FSB High-Level Recommendations*, October; FSB (2020), *Final report and high-level recommendations for the regulation, supervision and oversight of "global stablecoin" arrangements*, October. See also CPMI-IOSCO (2021), *Consultative report on Application of the Principles for Financial Market Infrastructures to stablecoin arrangements*, October.
45. See FSB (2022), *letter from the Chair to G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors*, 14 April.
46. See Panetta, F (2021), "Stay safe at the intersection: the confluence of big techs and global stablecoins", *op. cit*.
47. See Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia (2016), *Economic Insights*, Vol. 1, Issue 3.
48. See Panetta, F (2022), "Central bank digital currencies: defining the problems, designing the solutions", contribution to a panel discussion on central bank digital currencies at the US Monetary Policy Forum, New York, February.

*This article is based on a speech delivered at Columbia University, New York, 25 April 2022*



Bank of St. Helena Ltd.

# Tourist Card

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# SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

DREAM IT. SEE IT. SHARE IT.





The pandemic has wreaked havoc on travel. How will our travel habits change? James Cortez looks at the future for sustainable tourism



It is time to move away from focusing on the pandemic and instead look towards the future. To say that the pandemic has wreaked havoc on travel feels like an understatement. With ongoing cancellations and travel restrictions, it's been a difficult period for both holidaymakers and travel firms.

But things are looking up, and the roll out of coronavirus vaccines has brought a fresh wave of hope for those who miss holidays, with some already starting to book trips across both 2021 and 2022.

Travel won't be the same as it once was, but maybe that won't be a bad thing. Cities will be quieter, UNESCO World Heritage Sites won't be over-crowded and the skies will be less polluted. The planet has had a breather, and although the tourism industry has been suffering massively, the pandemic has taught us a vital lesson – that travel is a privilege and not a right.

Post-COVID travellers are more discerning about the journeys they go on, willing and able to be away from home for longer (thanks to remote working), more appreciative of their surroundings and local people, and less reckless in their spending.

While many of us miss the freedom and excitement of travel, there is no doubt that there has been a realisation that travelling for social prestige should not be what motivates us going forward. We have to choose trips that really mean something to us and are worth the effort of making a journey to an overseas location. So we have to adapt.

How will our travel habits change? After endless months of cabin fever, there will be a universal hunger for wide-open spaces. Time spent in the wilderness is felt to be an antidote to modern urban life. The point-to-point holiday will be rivalled by an emerging trend for trips that take in multiple locations, occur at a slower pace, and are as much about the journey as the ultimate destination.

As people think more carefully about the way they travel, they will seek out hotels and travel companies that are doing everything they can to minimise their impact on the planet. We can also expect accreditation to gain prominence, as consumers look for reassurance from legitimate 'ecotourism' certifications.

Beachgoers will be swapping sun and pina colodas for shade and coconut water. Even if visitors aren't specifically travelling for a detox or bootcamp experience, they will want to book

trips that leave them feeling better than before when they return home. Wellness tourism is becoming increasingly popular.

Engaging with local communities in a safe and respectful way will also be an important aspect of trips in the future, with tourists keen to learn and form human connections. We will also want to leave a positive footprint – to give something back – whether that is paying direct or volunteering.

There will be a wider shift towards more meaningful travel, centred around giving back to the planet. Out go the weekend getaways and in with itineraries for longer periods of time.

There's one key reason as to why this is important. There are many communities and conservation projects around the world that are completely reliant on tourism. Their income has completely halted due to the pandemic and many are concerned it will get to the point of no return.

Many companies have launched conservation-centric experiences for their clients, such as tracking previously undocumented elephant herds in Angola's unspoilt wilderness and supporting safari rangers in Botswana's Okavango Delta. These are also remarkable opportunities to be the first to see wildlife and landscapes that have been left undisturbed over the past few months.

The pandemic has forced us to slow down and many of us are not in a hurry to return to a fast-paced style of travel. This will often be closer to home, but we're also seeing strong demand for all types of wilderness travel as people want to spend more time outdoors, from the Galapagos to Antarctica voyages.

People want to get active on holiday and keep up the walking or cycling they enjoyed during lockdown. Many are also ready to tackle that challenge they've always dreamed of.

There has been a shift towards experience-driven travel. People have been in their homes for months so now they want to discover new places, cultures, cuisines, landscapes, activities and reconnect with nature.

Finally, a last thought, as the idea of the 'holiday' starts to feel anachronistic, simply being abroad will be the mindful alternative. This will manifest in the rise of 'workations', where visitors combine work with vacations, embedding themselves for longer periods of time in a certain place. ■



*World Commerce Review is pleased to announce that St Helena Island, South Atlantic Ocean, has been awarded the Best Eco-Location and Sustainable Tourism Destination 2022.*

*The World Commerce Review awards celebrate achievement, innovation and excellence across several fields of endeavour. Our award programs are tailored to provide a comprehensive analysis of the very best in each market.*

*The World Commerce Review awards are recognised as the principal indications of professional conduct and excellence. The selection panel took into account product innovation, on-going customer support and best practice criteria as well as a continuing commitment to deploying the best possible solutions for linking green and blue local government agendas to its tourism and marketing practices.*

# A selection of the top ecotourism destinations



With more and more people travelling, we as travellers need to look for ways and means to protect and preserve the world we live in. Although travelling and eco-friendliness do not often go hand in hand, somewhere the stakeholders have to find a balance. This is where ecotourism comes in, which is mainly directed to support the conserve the ecology and the wildlife. And no tourism can be sustainable without the involvement of the locals. Meeting the gorillas in Rwanda, scuba diving in St Helena, exploring the Atacama Desert in Chile and much more. Check out the top ecotourism destinations to visit!

Ready to pack your bags? Some wanderlusting going on here!





## **RWANDA**

Visit Rwanda, Africa's home to some of the last remaining mountain gorillas and a place where you will be warmly welcomed by smiling locals. Rwanda has bravely risen from a tragic past and stands proudly as a representation of Africa's irreplaceable beauty. Be awe-struck by the profound power of the endangered mountain gorilla. The main attraction are the gorillas of Volcanoes National Park, which were made famous by late primatologist Dian Fossey. There are 10 habituated gorilla families open to tourist visits, so trekking permits are limited to 80 per day. Being surrounded by mothers, babies, and massive Silverback gorillas is an experience you'll never forget.



## **COSTA RICA**

Jungle jaunts and coastal chill in a tropical paradise. Introducing your new amigo – Costa Rica. Thanks to a longstanding tradition of preserving its natural assets, much of the country's primary rainforest still stands, opportunities for nature-based adventures are endless and the beaches on both coasts are nothing short of picturesque. Kick back in the rustic beach town of Quepos, explore the steamy cloud forests of Monteverde, and get to know the locals by lending a hand on a rural farmstay near Santa Rosa de Pocosol. Explore the depths of this colourful and vibrant country with plenty of time to make this trip your own.



© Beth Taylor

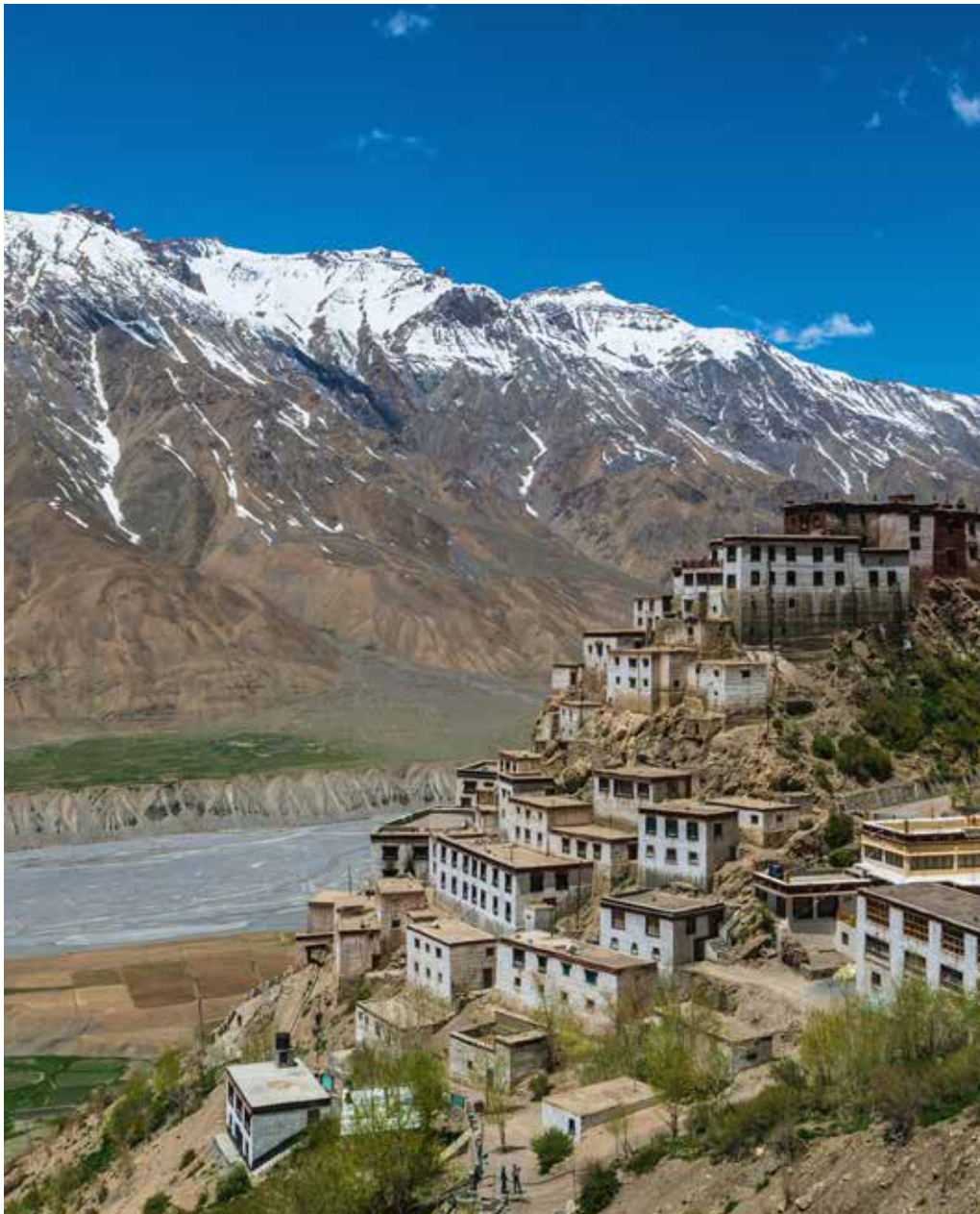
## ST HELENA

Home to more than 500 species of plants and animals that are found nowhere else on Earth. The remote island is also proud to be surrounded by a Category VI Marine Protected Area. St Helena also directly link its tourism practices with vital environmental initiatives like the St Helena Cloud Forest Project, facilitated through local and overseas partnerships. Clear, warm waters, wrecks and fascinating marine life make St Helena Island an enticing snorkelling and scuba diving destination. Dive site habitats vary from rocky reefs with caves and areas of boulders to cobbles and sand, all teeming with marine life and all within easy reach of the wharf in Jamestown. The wrecks dotted around the coast present popular dive and snorkelling sites. For their continued diligence and excellence, and in recognition of their innovation, expertise and services, WCR is proud to award St Helena the *Best Eco-Location and Sustainable Tourism Destination 2022*.



# CHILE

Chile, not just for mountain lovers. Chile can be divided into four different ecotourism areas: North and the Atacama Desert, Santiago and the Central Valleys, Lakes and Volcanoes district and Patagonia. In the north, the bohemian San Pedro de Atacama is a perfect jump off point to explore the geysers, salt flats, flamingoes and volcanos of the region. Near Santiago, wine tasting, skiing, and hiking in the Andes are on tap. Heading to the lake district, there are plenty of areas to get off the beaten path including Pucon, the world heritage site of Chiloe, and the azure waters of Chile Chico. Finally, and probably most famously, is the Chilean Patagonia. Here, you can undertake numerous ecotourism trips including cruises on iceberg busting vessels, galloping through the pampas on horseback or hiking in the Torres del Paine National Park. Being one of the best countries for ecotourism in South America, Chile most certainly has something for you.



# INDIA

Lahaul Spiti valley in Himachal Pradesh is the extension of the landscapes of Tibet with challenging terrains and adventurous roads. It is a dry desert with the towering Himalayas in the background and the emerald River Sutlej and Spiti feeding the area. The valley has calming vibes and is a visual treat for every tourist, traveller, photographer, and adventurer. Lahaul Spiti is a nature's paradise and is one of the best ecotourism destinations in India. It is a place to relax and enjoy the changing colours, terrains and the beauty of Himalayas.

# WHAT IS ECOTOURISM? WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM?

**W**hat is ecotourism? How does it work? Why does it matter? And how can we, as travellers, put the core principles of ecotourism into practice? In recent years, the growth of interest in responsible travel has outpaced that of traditional sun/sand tourism by an increasingly wide margin.

With ecotourism increasing its share of consumer spending, these sorts of questions have become more and more common. And, as we continue to see more negative impacts of mass tourism on beloved destinations around the world, the answers to these questions will become increasingly vital.

Part of the confusion surrounding sustainable travel is the plethora of names being used for it within the industry.

Ecotourism is the oldest and most commonly used word for it. More recent industry buzzwords include sustainable tourism, green tourism, nature tourism, responsible tourism, ethical tourism, mindful travel, conscious travel, pro-poor tourism, and many others.

Regardless of what you call it, the central concepts that these philosophies share in common are that the travel industry as a whole should adopt more environmentally friendly practices, protect the natural and cultural heritage of a destination, and support local communities.

Post-COVID, travel won't be the same as it once was, and it seems like a good time to deepen the conversation about what ecotourism is and why it's important for the future of travel.

## THE DEFINITION OF ECOTOURISM

Ecotourism is a form of tourism involving responsible travel (using sustainable transport) to natural areas, conserving the environment, and improving the well-being of the local people. Its purpose may be to educate the traveller, to provide funds for ecological conservation, to directly benefit the economic development and political empowerment of local communities, or to foster respect for different cultures and for human rights.

Since the 1980s, ecotourism has been considered a critical endeavour by environmentalists, so that future generations may experience destinations relatively untouched by human intervention. Ecotourism may focus on educating travellers on local environments and natural surroundings with an eye to ecological conservation. Some include in the definition of ecotourism the effort to produce economic opportunities that make conservation of natural resources financially possible.

Generally, ecotourism deals with interaction with biotic components of the natural environments. Ecotourism focuses on socially responsible travel, personal growth, and environmental sustainability. Ecotourism typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. Ecotourism is intended to offer tourists an insight into the impact of human beings on the environment and to foster a greater appreciation of our natural habitats.

Ecotourism aims at minimal environmental impact on the areas visited. Besides fostering respect towards the natural environment, ecotourism also helps in creating socio-economic benefits for the communities of the area visited.

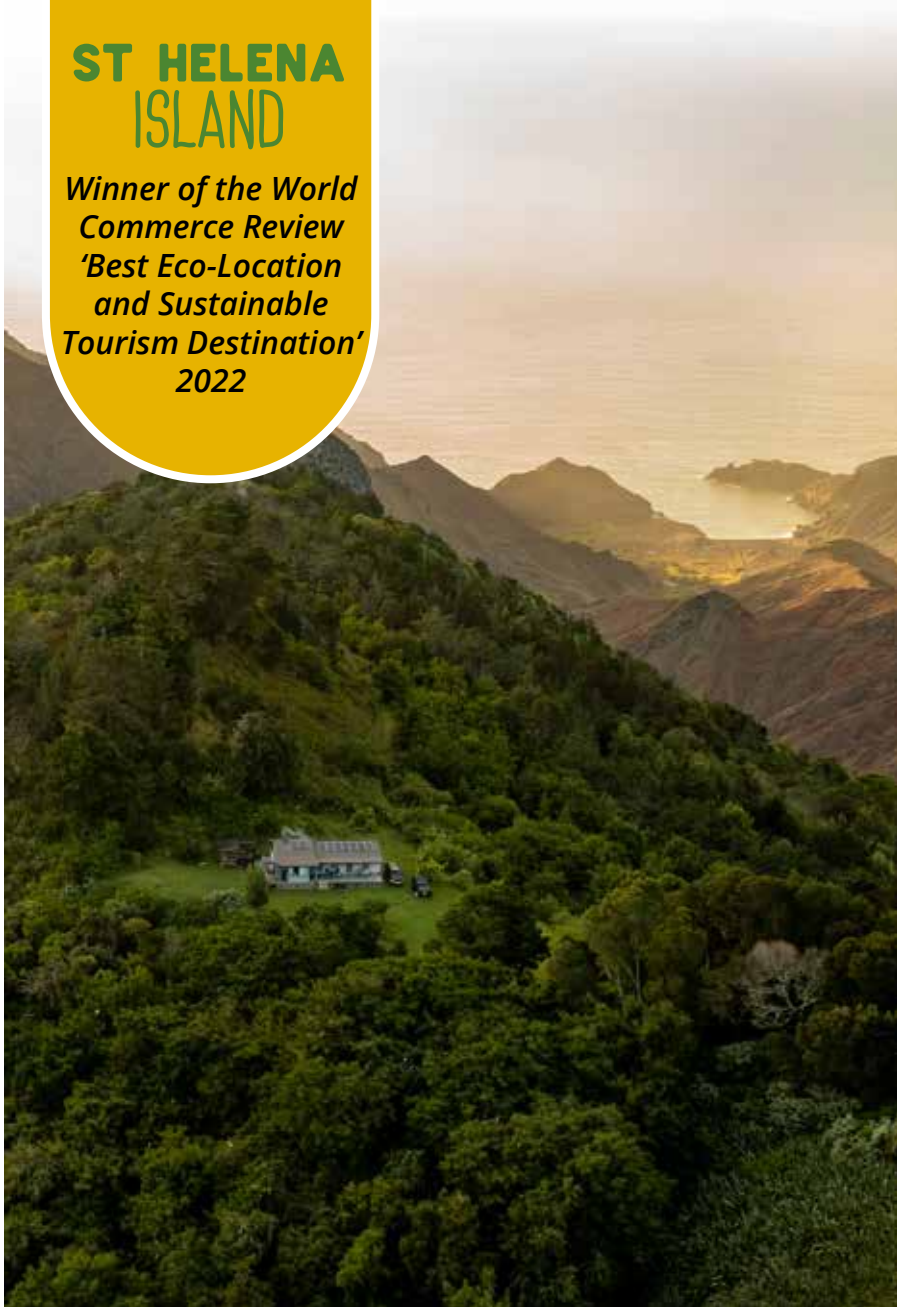
Responsible ecotourism programs include those that minimize the negative aspects of conventional tourism on the environment and enhance the cultural integrity of local people. Therefore, in addition to evaluating environmental and cultural factors, an integral part of ecotourism is the promotion of recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation, and creation of economic opportunities for local communities. For these reasons, ecotourism often appeals to advocates of environmental and social responsibility.

## BENEFITS

Ecotourism is tourism which is conducted responsibly to conserve the environment and sustain the well-being of local people. Its benefits include:

# ST HELENA ISLAND

Winner of the World  
Commerce Review  
'Best Eco-Location  
and Sustainable  
Tourism Destination'  
2022



## Are you ready for a breath of fresh air?



St Helena Island is only marginally bigger than Disney World Orlando, yet it has more endemic (only found in St Helena and nowhere else in the world) plant and animal species than the rest of Britain and its overseas territories combined. It's volcanic origins and geographical position present lush green inlands bordered by dramatic barren coastlines just waiting to be explored.

Dive into the clear, warm waters and explore shipwrecks beneath the waves. Hike to the island's highest peak – in the midst of Britain's last remaining cloud forest – and breathe the pure air. Be blown away by panoramic views of stunningly varied landscapes by trekking through mountainous terrain to untouched parts of the island. Enjoy the welcoming old-world charm of local Saints in every adventure.

Come discover our pristine British Overseas Territory, awaiting you in the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean.

- Building environmental awareness.
- Providing direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Providing financial benefits and empowerment for local people.
- Respecting local culture.
- Supporting human rights and democratic movements such as:
  - conservation of biological diversity and cultural diversity through ecosystem protection.
  - promotion of sustainable use of biodiversity, by providing jobs to local populations.
  - sharing of all socio-economic benefits with local communities and indigenous peoples by having their informed consent and participation in the management of ecotourism enterprises.
  - tourism to unspoiled natural resources, with minimal impact on the environment being a primary concern.
  - minimisation of tourism's own environmental impact.
  - affordability and lack of waste in the form of luxury.
  - local culture, flora, and fauna being the main attractions.
  - local people, who benefit from this form of tourism economically, and often more than mass tourism.

Ecosystem protection can occur as ecotourism can help the funding of the operation of protected areas (ie. national parks) Protected areas such as national parks often need to employ (and pay for) park rangers, and if Safari lodges are foreseen, staff is needed for this as well.

For many countries, ecotourism is not simply a marginal activity to finance protection of the environment, but a major industry of the national economy. For example, in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Nepal, Kenya, Madagascar and territories such as Antarctica, ecotourism represents a significant portion of the gross domestic product and economic activity.

## **SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**

Sustainable tourism is a concept that covers the complete tourism experience, including concern for economic, social and environmental issues as well as attention to improving tourists' experiences and addressing the needs of host communities. Sustainable tourism should embrace concerns for environmental protection, social equity, and the quality of life, cultural diversity, and a dynamic, viable economy delivering jobs and prosperity for all.

It has its roots in sustainable development and there can be some confusion as to what 'sustainable tourism' means. There is now broad consensus that tourism should be sustainable. In fact, all forms of tourism have the potential to be sustainable if planned, developed and managed properly. Tourist development organisations are promoting sustainable tourism practices in order to mitigate negative effects caused by the growing impact of tourism, for example its environmental impacts.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization emphasized these practices by promoting sustainable tourism as part of the Sustainable Development Goals, through programs like the International Year for Sustainable Tourism for Development in 2017. There is a direct link between sustainable tourism and several of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Tourism for SDGs focuses on how SDG 8 ('decent work and economic growth'), SDG 12 ('responsible consumption and production') and SDG 14 ('life below water') implicate tourism in creating a sustainable economy. Improvements are expected to be gained from suitable management aspects and including sustainable tourism as part of a broader sustainable development strategy.





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# Business aviation's future front and centre at EBACE2022

**Ed Bolen is President and CEO the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA)**

**N**ew business models. New connections. New ways of thinking. Pioneering new technologies for on-demand air mobility. All were in focus at the return of the European Business Aviation Convention & Exhibition, or EBACE, which underscored that the industry wasn't just coming back to an event but was moving forward with an eye on the horizon.

Held 23-25 May at Geneva Airport and Palexpo conference centre and co-hosted by the European Business Aviation Association (EBAA) and NBAA, the first in-person EBACE since 2019 marked a celebration of business aviation's resilient present and exciting future – of the inspiring people, bold ideas, and new markets propelling the sector forward.

EBACE2022 was a newsy show, with a lineup of product launches, including the show debuts of Bombardier's Global 8000, the Gulfstream G700 and Dassault Falcon 6X, and a slate of news conferences that highlighted the innovation propelling the industry at an unprecedented pace.

EBACE was also an opportunity to inspire: for example, tennis legend Martina Navratilova and trailblazing pilot Zara Rutherford wowed the audience during an exhilarating opening keynote, while in a special featured session, UN Goodwill Ambassador Maya Ghazal captivated EBACE2022 attendees with her incredible story of overcoming hardship to become the first female Syrian refugee pilot.

EBACE also made clear the need to ensure our industry's future is a sustainable one. That's why, in a show milestone, aircraft exhibited at EBACE2022 departed Geneva fuelled with sustainable aviation fuel, or SAF, which offers the potential to reduce lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions as much as 80% over fossil fuels.

The inaugural EBACE Business Aviation Sustainability Summit showcased SAF and other game-changing technologies and business models the industry is developing to achieve its goal of net zero emissions by 2050.

The summit put forward an incredible lineup of electric and advanced air mobility (AAM) aircraft on display, with leaders of several pioneering companies sharing their thoughts on this emerging market at several compelling 'newsmaker' events.

Also included as part of the summit was the launch of the Standards and Training for Aviation Responsibility and Sustainability (STARS) program, a new youth-advanced EBAA initiative that goes beyond emissions reduction to include best practices for workplace diversity, gender equality and inclusion.

These themes were emphasized throughout this year's EBACE Careers in Business Aviation Day, where students connected directly with EBAA and industry leaders about opportunities



*“The inaugural EBACE Business Aviation Sustainability Summit showcased SAF and other game-changing technologies and business models the industry is developing to achieve its goal of net zero emissions by 2050”*

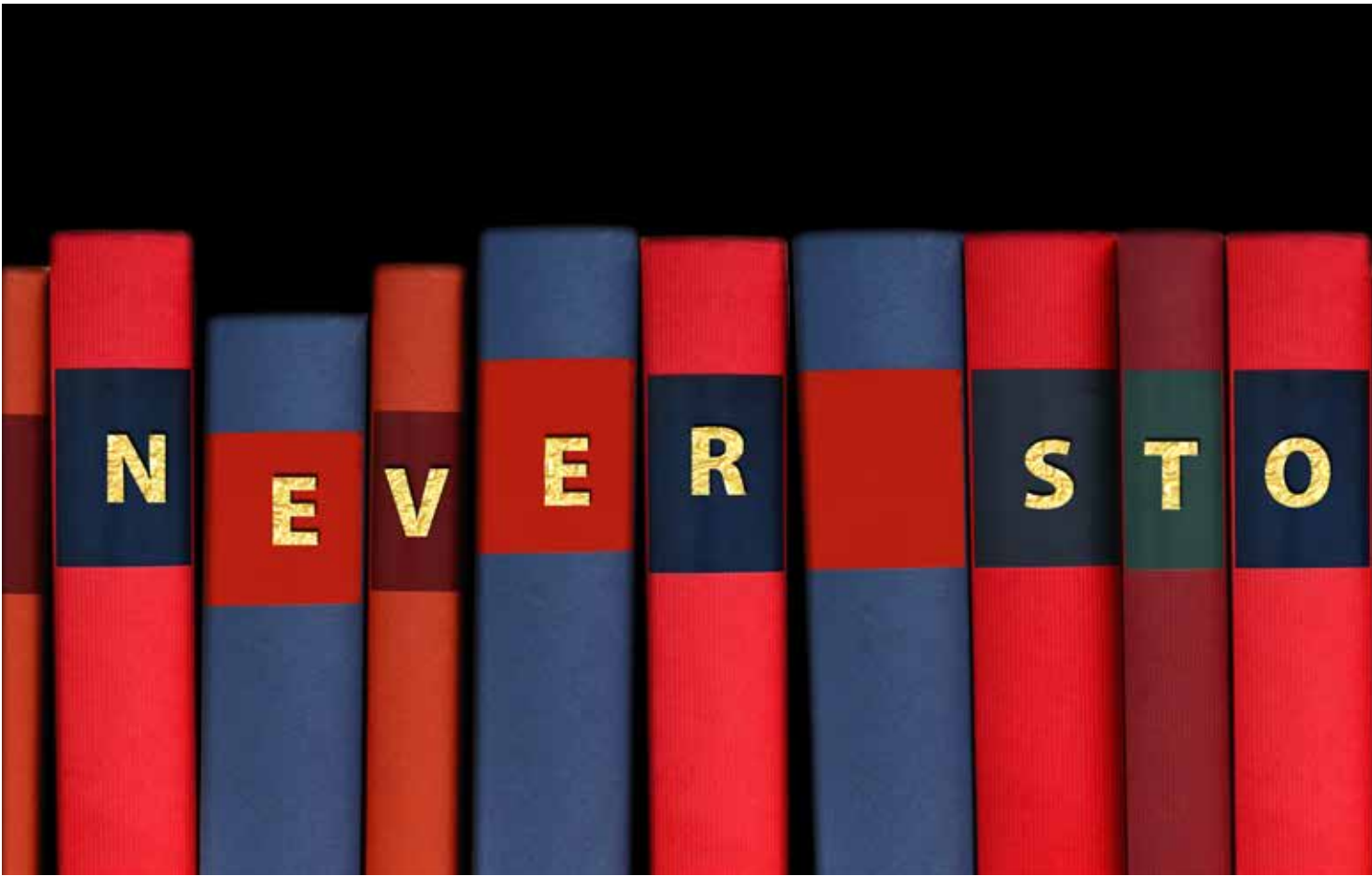
in the industry. Without question, EBACE2022 was *“lightning in a bottle,”* in the words of EBAA Secretary-General Athar Husain Khan, and certainly one of the most transformative and important events ever for an industry soaring with new momentum into the future.

As we already look with excitement to the 2023 edition of EBACE, the event’s inspirational themes will continue at the upcoming 2022 edition of NBAA’s Business Aviation

Convention & Exhibition (NBAA-BACE) that will return to Orlando, FL, from October 18-20.

I look forward to welcoming readers of *World Commerce Review* to Orlando later this year for the most influential business aviation event in the world, where we can once again mark our industry’s resilience and celebrate its unlimited potential. ■





## The future of lifelong and executive education

**Andrew Crisp is the co-founder of CarringtonCrisp, an independent global provider of intelligence, market insight and consulting services for business schools and universities**

**H**ave you heard of Byju<sup>1</sup>? If you follow cricket, you may have seen the name on the shirts of the Indian cricket team this year, but otherwise, it seems unlikely. But you should know Byju as it may be a big part of the future of lifelong and executive education.

Byju started just over 10 years ago in India with an app for mobile phones to teach young children better maths skills. Recently, it announced a deal to license Disney characters to support their learning tools for children. At about the same time, the company suggested one of its next steps would be a move into workplace learning.

It's not difficult to see how a company that builds brand recognition and loyalty with children and continues into workplace education could become a key player in lifelong learning. Especially, when you discover that at its last fundraising round, Byju was valued at \$18.5 billion.

### **Accelerated digital adoption**

It's no surprise to learn that COVID has accelerated digital adoption across society, and learning is no different. In a recent study with LinkedIn, entitled *The future of lifelong and executive education*<sup>2</sup>, CarringtonCrisp discovered that two-thirds of employees will increasingly use online methods to



develop themselves and their careers and more than three-quarters (79%) of employers anticipate online learning becoming the standard approach to developing people in their organisations.

It doesn't have to be Harvard, it could be any number of business schools that have a reputation with an employer and a strong online offering, but brand will certainly be key. Building a lifelong learning journey in an organisation probably means having more than one partner, but you may choose a core partner to be with you on the journey.

Just over eight out of ten employers (81%) agree that their organisation will seek to build long-term relationships with learning providers to build understanding of their business and maximise impact from learning.

### **Brand reputation**

Brand is also key for individual learners: 62% agree it is important that any future learning they undertake is with a provider with an international brand reputation. When a learner is investing in their future, they want to know that they will get a return on their investment, that a future employer will recognise and value their qualification and the provider of their learning. As new providers enter the marketplace, brand becomes ever more important as a sign of quality.

Brand also plays another role related to the choice of learning provider. With learning increasingly available on an "anytime,

anywhere" basis, top-of-mind awareness of a learning provider will be key. For the learner at work who needs to quickly develop a new skill or build on an existing skill to help in their current role or for a new role, provider awareness will be key in making quick decisions.

There will no longer be months of researching the market while a learner waits for a once-a-year, fixed starting date at an institution. Instead, needs will be identified on a Monday, learning will start on a Tuesday, and impact at work will commence on a Wednesday.

Increasingly, the first thought of adult learners won't be to enrol for a degree. At a recent conference, a Business School Dean suggested employees will change jobs nine or ten times in their lifetime and while every change might be a learning opportunity, they won't be taking a degree each time.

Instead, learners will sign up for diplomas, certificates, microcredentials, digital badges and much more. And if their new qualification has been delivered by a well-known provider with a strong brand reputation, the qualification gains portability, meaning the learner has something that they can take from employer to employer and it will be valued.

That doesn't mean new providers won't have success in the market. LinkedIn Learning has already been used by 1 in 5 learners who took part in a study on the future of lifelong and executive education. Similar numbers of respondents

*“Just over two years before the pandemic arrived, McKinsey in their study, ‘What the future of work will mean for jobs, skills and wages’ suggested that 350 million workers would have to reskill or upskill to remain in employment”*



indicated they would consider using FutureLearn, eduCBA, Coursera, ServiceSkills.com, Open Sesame, General Assembly, 2U and edX in the future.

And that future may already be here. In the second quarter of 2020, Coursera registered 5 million new users on their platform – that is the equivalent of almost every EQUIS accredited business school in the world each recruiting 25,000 new students in just 3 months.

#### **New approaches to corporate learning**

There's no doubt that there is a growing demand for new approaches to learning among employers and employees. While training and development budgets took a hit during earlier stages of the pandemic, 51% of employers who took part in the CarringtonCrisp/LinkedIn study suggested that spending had been frozen over the past two years, 48% expect growth in the next two years.

Just over two years before the pandemic arrived, McKinsey in their study, *What the future of work will mean for jobs, skills and wages*<sup>3</sup>, suggested that 350 million workers would have to reskill or upskill to remain in employment. If we add in the digitisation of the economy that has come about because of the pandemic, then the number needing to acquire new skills will have grown significantly.


The evidence for large scale reskilling can also be seen in a number of corporates in the USA. Starbucks, Chipotle, Walmart and now Amazon have all announced programmes that will provide free college and other skills development programmes to their employees.

Amazon alone has over 700,000 staff in the USA. Skills, and with them career development programmes, will increasingly be seen as an employee benefit, used by employers to retrain and retain their staff.

Much of this reskilling will be done online. One interviewee in 'The future of lifelong and executive education' report commented, 'Online is here to stay and a lot of Chief Learning Officers have caught up with the fact that online providers can do it well and deliver it at much cheaper prices.'

Studies published by Shell and IBM both found that by widely adopting e-learning across their businesses, both companies





had each saved around \$200 million from their learning and development budgets.

It's not just how people learn and the qualifications they want that are changing, but the skills they choose to learn as well. Inevitably there are a host of digital skills that are important, but the list of interests is much longer.

For employers, the top five skills identified as important for their business, but not widely available are: Change management, Resilience/mindfulness, Global mindset, Ethics and ethical behaviour, and Managing across cultures.

Other studies highlight the importance of skills such as Diversity, equality and inclusion, and managing a multi-generational workforce as people live longer and work later into their lives.

Traditional skills such as leadership remain popular, and alongside communication, this is one of the top two skills sought by individual learners. But learners may be seeking new approaches to leadership.

Instead, leading remotely and digitally from the other end of a laptop screen is of growing interest to learners with a recent suggestion that the influencers and YouTubers of today may have the skill sets to be the leaders of tomorrow.

For individual learners, the list of skills they are seeking still includes subjects such as strategy and marketing, but also social impact, responsible management, and decision making in complex and uncertain times.

The demand for skills was well summed up by a Dean at a business school in North Africa when he said 'Corporate needs are evolving very quickly in turbulence, needs are not clear yet, but just like a tango, they are moving forward.' He might have added that, just like a tango, needs can change direction very quickly.

### Changes needed for business schools

So what does this all mean for business schools? In one word, change. There will still be students on campus doing degrees – undergraduate and postgraduate – but perhaps they will do these degrees differently.

The Education Minister of Singapore suggested in an interview in January 2020 that students would be enrolled for 20 years, but rather than frontloading their learning, it would be accumulated over time and interspersed with periods of work.

In the postgraduate marketplace, change may be more dramatic. In the 2020 testing year, 173,176 students took the GMAT and 60.4% sent their scores to schools to study for an MBA, the equivalent of around 105,000 individuals applying to hundreds of schools worldwide. Yet in the same year, Quantica, an online provider of MBA programmes that launched in 2013, received around 70,000 applications.

Look a little further into the executive education, workplace and lifelong learning marketplaces and the change is even greater. Some business schools have embraced these changes – Saïd Business School at the University of Oxford now has a suite of 23 short course online certificate offerings delivered in partnership with Esme Learning and Get Smarter.

Others are working with a multitude of other partners, who grew on the back of MOOCs, and have now built substantial offers for corporates and working individuals – Coursera, FutureLearn, Emeritus, edX, and 2U to name just a few.

For business schools wanting to be ready for tomorrow's learners, there is much to think about. Selling undergraduate degrees to a 16-year-old is a very different proposition to engaging corporates seeking short online courses for their staff.

And it doesn't stop at selling, delivering degrees and short online courses, as well as managing the 'alumni' relationships, require different skills and approaches. All of these changes may then need to be wrapped in a different business model to achieve sustainable success.

Embracing uncertainty, delivering in a world where geography is less important, collaborating with external partners and putting flexibility and personalisation at the heart of learning will all be key concepts that have to be built into future business school strategies.

Building a sustainable and successful lifelong learning offer that meets the different needs of learners, whether they are 16 or 60, is possible, but it will mean taking risks, being imaginative, and putting learners first. ■

#### Endnotes

1. [https://twitter.com/BYJUS?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor](https://twitter.com/BYJUS?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor)
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# Data management in the age of cloud

**Mark Hermeling is the CTO of Alveo**

**F**or financial services organisations, migrating entire data management ecosystems to the cloud was once an ambitious goal. Today, it is a reality that many are embracing and see tangible benefits from. Over the past few years, businesses have been moving market and reference data to the cloud in an aim to reduce the costs of infrastructure and maintenance as well as increase scalability, elasticity and flexibility.

The latter is important as it relates to being able to effectively deal with fluctuating data volumes and adapting to changing provisioning requests from the business. This helps achieve increased agility and resilience and future-proof the infrastructure so it can withstand the challenges of tomorrow.

When it comes to cost, moving market data management to the cloud helps bring down the spend through appropriately-sized infrastructure, centralised licensing and easily shared data sets.

The wider move to the cloud and its advantages is continuing today. In fact, according to the recent Market Research Future report<sup>1</sup>, the financial cloud market is expected to reach the US\$52 billion mark by 2028 and is projected to grow at an astounding compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 24% between 2018 and 2028.

Another report from Allied Market Research forecasts<sup>2</sup> that the global finance cloud market will reach US\$90 billion by 2030. All of the above-mentioned benefits are certainly driving this market dynamic, and so is the pandemic which highlighted the need for infrastructural change and greater agility amongst financial services companies.

However, as firms seek to transform data management, they need to steer towards overcoming the hurdles along the way, minimising risks and ensuring the cloud migrations go as smoothly and successfully as possible.

## **Navigating data management challenges**

Financial services firms have often followed a convoluted and siloed approach to provisioning market data to their businesses processes, which translates into high maintenance costs and unpredictable change cycles for the smallest of adjustments.

Past mergers and acquisitions are adding to the complexity and are reflected in an often highly complex and heterogeneous application landscape, causing a multitude of disparate data sources, databases and redundant data management.

Whilst external reporting requirements are growing and existing set-ups are impacting new product development, financial firms need a solution fast to untangle the costly web and unfold new opportunities that cloud migration can present.

A scattered and redundant architecture can not only inflate the running costs of on-premise applications but also prevent businesses from having quick and easy access to reliable information when they need it. It is often the case that departments do not have a single source of truth and encounter multiple data duplicates and validation rules which can lead to ambiguity and inconsistencies.

As well as high levels of manual data validation and verification, financial services firms are often lacking data consumption and sourcing monitoring and measuring capabilities. It is hard to create authoritative sources of market and reference data that can become an internal service bureau to make the best use of vendor-sourced data.

Very few firms can say they are managing and consistently using such data in an efficient, fault-proof way, which leads to further data discrepancies, duplications and higher costs. This could further be fuelled by regulatory requirements such as BCBS239 for banks to be able to identify and standardise the source and provenance for all data.

Demonstrating data lineage is difficult when there is a lack of transparency or controls. It can be hard for firms to pinpoint the origin of specific data points, leading to the value of data decreasing and becoming somewhat unusable and causing ineffective controls of the overall cost base.

For financial services firms, reference data, however, is not an area where mistakes can happen or can be managed in a substandard way. It is the type of data that helps organisations function smoothly and, if impacted, can have serious implications on the day-to-day operations, service providers or regulatory agencies.



As it involves the most complex transactions and numerous entities, contingencies and dependencies, the industry is pursuing a policy of standardising it. It is not a straightforward process as large data volumes make up transactions, there are different variations in data types and the rate of change in markets and their products is substantially high.

There is also the case of data and metadata that cannot be separated and should be managed cohesively as the contextual information defines its use cases. Permissions management and origins tracking is an integral part of data management and governance, making it easier to determine the sensitivity levels of pieces of data, what can be shared where and with whom and what are the permitted use cases from a business, content licensing, legal and regulatory perspective.

Considering the complexity and number of data challenges that financial services firms are facing today, it is becoming ever clearer that a market data management transformation has to accelerate, with the move to the cloud as an enabler of change.

### **Moving data management and whole ecosystems into the cloud**

As the need to shift market and reference data management is apparent, financial services firms are embarking on a journey to move whole data ecosystems to the cloud. This allows to improve efficiency in multiple areas and across processes, lowering the costs at the same time. Embracing a hybrid or cloud infrastructure can help eliminate a multitude of time-consuming manual processes and bring together fragmented systems that are scattered on-premise.

Supporting this move, data vendors are now starting to push their products directly onto cloud platforms such as AWS, Microsoft Azure, Oracle Cloud Infrastructure and the Google Cloud Platform.

In addition to this, providers of portfolio management systems, trading solutions, risk and settlement systems and other applications are also migrating to the cloud, as they are attracted by the enhanced security and scalability, increased efficiencies and reduced costs that this deployment can bring.

Rather than financial institutions placing individual applications in the cloud or using specific software as a service provider to host their data management platforms, they are more frequently moving their entire data ecosystem. Data providers too increasingly make their data directly available on cloud platforms and cloud-based data warehouses.

The implications are that data management systems need to be both cloud agnostic and cloud native to optimally source, integrate, quality-control and distribute market data. That means systems need to be first designed and built to run in the cloud and to work effectively in that environment.

Otherwise, the migration will fail, let alone bring any operational or cost efficiencies. At the same time, systems should not rely on a single cloud provider's proprietary

*“The promises of greater mobility, flexibility and scalability when moving entire ecosystem to the cloud are not just empty ones”*

service or in any way be locked into a single cloud vendor. Vendor lock-in in cloud computing could negatively impact a business as data sets will be very difficult to move once they're set up and may require reformatting. There are always additional risks that vendor's quality of service will decline over time, there will be a significant price increase, or worst-case scenario, a vendor goes out of businesses.

It is, therefore, important to reduce the dependence on a single provider from the start and opt in for a 'lift and shift' mentality to place data operations on a future-proof footing.

In addition, financial services firms need to consider the security element when moving their ecosystems to the cloud. Keeping valuable data safe should be a priority in today's climate as cyberattacks are on the rise and they increase in sophistication. Thus, developing a robust information security strategy, implementing enhanced permissions management, monitoring usage and data quality are becoming critical.

Security in the cloud should certainly not be seen as a roadblock to migrate as providers have made strides and advancements in their technologies as well as their corresponding level of compliance.

The more a company automates to put more applications in the cloud, or simply more directly connect them, then data quality becomes extremely critical. This is because the process removes what is typically a manual step in between cloud and on-premise, which could act as a safety net to prevent mistakes escalating quickly into major problems.

There is, however, a solution that can ease the process. Through partial or full utilisation of vendor managed solutions, financial firms can experience a 'one stop shop' for the end-to-end provision of market data from vendor feeds all the way through to the distribution to their clients.

### **Doing it once, doing it right**

If firms focus on the delivery of achieving reusable assets that generate recurring value and develop sustainable and cost-effective solution, they will be well-positioned to meet their migration goals.

However, this has to start with a comprehensive market data transformation plan first. This should focus on creating recurring value and developing collaborative and sustainable relationships among market data vendors, IT, and business units.



Transformation should be fuelled by the use of configuration-driven products, as these can be much more closely aligned to the specific business needs.

This can apply both to the initial transformation and shift to the cloud as well as in supporting change afterwards. Configurable products will typically result in faster turnaround on business decisions about new datasets and process change.

In this process, firms need the ability to link different external data sets with their internal data sets. They need robust data quality management including lineage and audit to track data flows and explain data values.

Monitoring consumption will help optimize data sourcing and identify underused and overused data sets to maximize Data ROI. It will also secure compliance with content licensing and other usage restrictions.

Adopting a managed services approach can help financial firms achieve the transformation goals, optimise their cloud environments and data usage to achieve the highest level of efficiency, addressing key migration challenges along the way and building an infrastructure that can deliver cost-effectiveness and scalability for years to come.

The right data management solution from an experienced and flexible vendor will make sure that users and applications are effectively supplied with the data they need to do their jobs.

It is important to note though that vendor managed solutions must be cloud neutral to allow firms to interact with data on any public cloud platform and reap the most benefits.

### **Accelerating cloud migration**

The ongoing migration of financial services market reference data to the cloud is nothing new, however, the process is certainly picking up speed. At the same time as data management solutions and processes are moving over to

the cloud, data vendors are putting data on public cloud platforms.

Downstream, application providers are also doing the same to facilitate the acceleration. This not only creates a healthy competition and hunger for new customers, but also facilitates technological advancements and innovations that later on financial firms can benefit from. Thus, the time is now to overcome the cloud concerns and instead confidently move data ecosystems.

Indeed, this has started to happen as there is a greater need amongst financial service organisations to move their market and reference data to the cloud as they battle for a spot in a very competitive landscape.

Choosing cloud-native solutions and opting it for a managed services approach can inject the needed level of competitiveness, agility and business resilience that financial companies are searching for post-pandemic.

As long as these solutions are also cloud-neutral and cloud-agnostic, not allowing any lock-ins, they will be able to deliver the scalability that financial firms need if they are to future-proof their operations.

The promises of greater mobility, flexibility and scalability when moving entire ecosystem to the cloud are not just empty ones. A managed services provider will enable firms to realise a full array of benefits that cloud can offer, from better data management and governance to streamlined processes and cost efficiencies. All whilst removing the laborious every-day task of data processing and platform maintenance.

As market and reference data plays a central role in business processes as well as finance and risk, it has to be migrated smoothly, without any interruptions or mistakes.

With a trusted provider's expertise and know-how, financial services organisations can – and will – successfully speed up their deployments and reap the rewards for years to come. ■

#### Endnotes

1. <https://www.marketresearchfuture.com/reports/financial-cloud-market-7492>
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*World Commerce Review is pleased to announce that Euro Exim Bank Ltd has been awarded the Best CSR in Finance 2022.*

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# Brand implications for successful M&A

## Gonzalo Brujo is Global President at Interbrand

**T**he business world has braced itself for multiple economic shocks recently, not least from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. But amid all the uncertainty and restrictions imposed by lockdowns, M&A activity reached record levels – hitting \$6 trillion<sup>1</sup> at the end of 2021.

While there have been further global events to negatively affect businesses this year – the Ukraine war and now rising inflation being the most shattering – M&A deals will remain very much part of the global corporate landscape.

Indeed, any brands looking to be world leaders will have to acquire businesses to grow and extend into new categories and arenas and reach new consumers.

If we look at those brands that have excelled in the tech space – and now dominate as the best global brands – acquisitions have supported their growth. From their founding year until 2020<sup>2</sup>, Apple made 123 acquisitions, Amazon 111, Google 268, and Facebook (now Meta) 105.

Last year, the biggest M&A deal was between AT&T's WarnerMedia and Discovery – worth \$43 billion<sup>3</sup>. But while mergers and acquisitions are a huge part of the business landscape and are assumed to lead to business growth, their outcomes are less than certain (merger failure rates<sup>4</sup> are between 50–85%).

Two well-known failure cases are AOL & TimeWarner and Daimler-Benz & Chrysler, which can be explained in cultural and brand terms. In a nutshell, they both lacked a clear brand strategy. In the particular case of Daimler & Chrysler, each brand agreed to the deal with very different ambitions – meaning the merger would never succeed.

For any company embarking on a deal of this nature – or starting the process of searching for one – there are some essential brand implications to consider and the first and foremost is that the brand will play a critical role in any M&A deal.

Indeed, the strategic, cultural, and brand implications of merging two organizations are just as important to the long-term success as the price of the deal. So, to determine how

to build a market-ready M&A brand, we need to start by considering the myriad reasons for an M&A:

- Grow market share
- Improve customer experience
- Improve value chain positioning
- Increase shareholder value
- Access new distribution channels
- Expand capabilities and access to technology
- Access key talent
- Expand geographically and demographically
- Expand into new industries and offerings
- Cut costs and boost revenues
- Increase competitive advantage
- Customer-focused opportunities.

As global competition intensifies, M&A is – and will continue to be – a cornerstone of many growth strategies. The expectation is that M&A will increase shareholder returns and fuel future business growth but, as already mentioned, many have ultimately shown negative returns.

Ultimately, the M&A journey is a maze. From pre-deal to post-merger, there are a million twists and turns and unforeseen roadblocks, both internally and externally.

When looked at in this light, it's easy to see why so many M&A ventures don't reach their intended results:

- Unclear business and brand strategy
- Lack of a clear, strategic plan for becoming market-ready
- Not understanding the risks to current customer loyalty and key revenue streams
- Overlooking cultural integration risks that could lead to low talent retention
- Failure to identify brand equities and sources of growth
- Limited evaluation and consideration of customer alignment with the brand promise.

However, these issues can be mitigated. There are four clear steps to help ensure a brand is ready for the process.

### 1. Create a strategic foundation

The path to success starts with a strong strategic foundation for the brand and the business. It is important to clearly

understand where the company is today (its departure point) and where it will be tomorrow (its ambition).

This will become the framework for evaluating potential M&A candidates and ensuring key decision-makers and leaders are on the same page.

A clearly mapped M&A strategy trajectory guides the company moving forward, but it is essential to ask the right questions at each turn.

The 'sweet spot' of any M&A is the intersection of current and future marketplace expectations and the sustained ability of the brand to deliver on those expectations. This will allow potential synergies, opportunities, and risks to be unearthed.

That means looking closely at the internal employee impact, and the external customer implications of the M&A. This will help complete the outline of the growth narrative — the challenges, opportunities, and implications of the M&A on your company, brand, and audiences in the short and long term.

Additionally, considering your shareholders' stakes is equally crucial – it will help dealmakers engineer powerful alliances that can create value for all. The motivation for a merger must proportionately represent the ambitions of the business and the shareholder. The financial health of the enterprise and the financial health of the shareholder should be considered in concert.

In addition, the values and the behaviours of leaders must connect with the sentiments and priorities of the shareholder. Any perception of personal gain and prejudice, at the expense of the vast population of shareholders, invites cynicism and concerns that the deal may be motivated by greed and control.

The language and tone used to communicate the merger must be consistent with the brand; then it will be familiar – and respected – by the employees. Often, a large portion of shareholders includes current and past employees.

When a corporate speaks and behaves in ways that contradict the style and reputation of the brand, it invites sceptics who will challenge the intentions of leaders, building mistrust and suspicions.

The onus is on the leadership team to create open and frequent dialogue to build understanding and advocacy among shareholders. Mergers are complicated chapters to write and execute – it's important to recognize the emotional current that flows throughout. Shareholders are a powerful force for change and their inclusion in the process is an asset, not a source of contention.

## **2. Design a market-ready plan**

The next phase is setting the building blocks for a market-ready brand. This means creating a migration plan on top of your strategy and outlining exceptional customer experience principles that will lead to future growth.

*“Businesses use M&A deals to transcend their own arenas or to gain new expertise – this simple aim makes business sense and can be hugely successful”*

The insights gained by laying a strategic foundation will help guide this growth process and allow you to make informed, strategic decisions on how to implement the M&A, internally and externally.

For instance, in a market such as financial services, there can be huge logistical problems with M&A especially as companies are likely operating on completely different platforms with associated differences in security. This has a significant impact on customer experience – following a merger the way customers navigate may have to change.

The growth story is imperative to define the internal and external narrative moving forward. It should be derived from your company's M&A strategy vision – explain the central rationale for the move and create a common set of expectations around the results of M&A for both customers and employees. This could include your new name, visual system, customer experience principles, and key messages.

When BB&T and SunTrust merged to become Truist, it was the largest merger bank in the US. One of the reasons for the success of this merger was a clear purpose<sup>5</sup> – its strategy was to be the main financial institution of the future and so invented a different way of banking.

The plan will dictate the integration and optimization strategy for the foreseeable future. Based on the information obtained about the implications on employees and customers, you can set the timeline and key milestones for the merger.

### **Culture eats strategy**

During a transition, it's even more vital for an organization to align the brand, people, and culture with the vision for the new business. Your brand is the red thread that connects employees to customers and is the one thing that will differentiate you over time.

When the people inside an organization understand who they are and what they stand for, they can nurture, evolve, invigorate, and truly bring the brand – and the business – to life. This is about identifying cultural alignments and building employee engagement as well as a retention plan.

In an M&A situation, we need to protect the equity that we have in the current culture and examine existing strengths. We want to bring those forward to create something new and

inspiring that will help employees through this tremendous change.

What is the role of the brand in this endeavour?

- The brand can provide clarity and sense of purpose
- Your brand can help align the dots across the organization
- Your brand can give leadership a fresh platform for storytelling—one that is inspiring and helps employees to understand their roles in the new organization.

For example, when Thomson and Reuters merged, the research showed the two companies had strong, but different, brand attributes that needed to remain intact in the new brand. The combination would not only enhance their existing strengths but also create a new one.

Joining the brands created key foundational attributes of global, accurate and unbiased, timely, trusted and customer focused.

Research pointed to Thomson Reuters being compelling for customers because of three brand pillars: relevant depth, practical intuition, and immediate effectiveness.

### 3. Equip the business

It's easy for leaders and the integration team to lose focus once the merger is complete and to stray from the agreed-upon timeline.

While it is important to nail the operational integration, it is just as important to be aware of – and remain focused on – the changing conversations happening among employees and customers.

This is where most M&As fail to realize their potential and succumb to the many risks, such as loss of customers, loss of talent, and failing to achieve synergies and cost-cutting goals.

The market-ready plan gives the organization a roadmap to bring the new brand to life internally before the external launch. The goal is to have the new M&A brand prepared for life in the customer's world.

Some tactics that can ensure successful integration as you bring the new brand into the spotlight are:

- Conduct leadership and employee engagement programs
- Merge verbal, visual identity systems, digital touchpoints,

messaging, and voice principles

- Deliver brand management tools and training
- Track key internal KPIs that were set out at the beginning of the M&A
- Communicate the M&A to customers and the sales team
- Secure quick sales to reinforce confidence in the M&A
- Communicate clearly about internal restructuring and changing roles
- Build detailed customer transition plans
- Identify (or create) pilot projects and experiences
- Establish an external launch and communications plan.

### 4. Deliver the promise

When it's time to deliver the M&A brand's promise to customers and shareholders, it moves from being a theoretical construct or set of talking points in a press release, to the real world.

People will be engaging with your M&A brand through the stories you tell, as well as the products, experiences, and services you deliver. Your promise and vision need to come through in a compelling and clear way.

This is the time for your brand to shine – listen to, and engage with, your customers to ensure that they understand how the M&A is adding value to their lives. Their feedback, combined with employee feedback, will also allow your brand to be flexible and continue to evolve after the launch.

### The proof of success

Businesses use M&A deals to transcend their own arenas or to gain new expertise – this simple aim makes business sense and can be hugely successful. But you need a strong brand and a strong ambition.

Communication of those ambitions is vital; without it, the purpose of the deal may not resonate with the parties you need it to most.

Taking employees on this journey so that they feel comfortable and not fearful – but rather excited and involved is part of the battle. Your brand culture will help you through this. If you can convince your internal public of the merits of the deal, you will be better placed to do the same with your customers.

Of course, shareholders want to make money – and that can't be ignored in M&As – but they won't make money without customers. There is always politics at play and the more open and transparent you can be, the better in the long run.

Ultimately the biggest success for M&A is that the brand catalyzes positive change. ■

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