

Why care **now**?

As a world leader, community leader, or global citizen, there is a broad range of issues that you could be concerned about. Why should global catastrophic risks be the priority?

What do we have to lose?

Whatever you care most about, be it justice, knowledge, achievement, or family, **it is likely to require this planet**. Conserving this world is a prerequisite for the continued existence of everything we know and fight for.

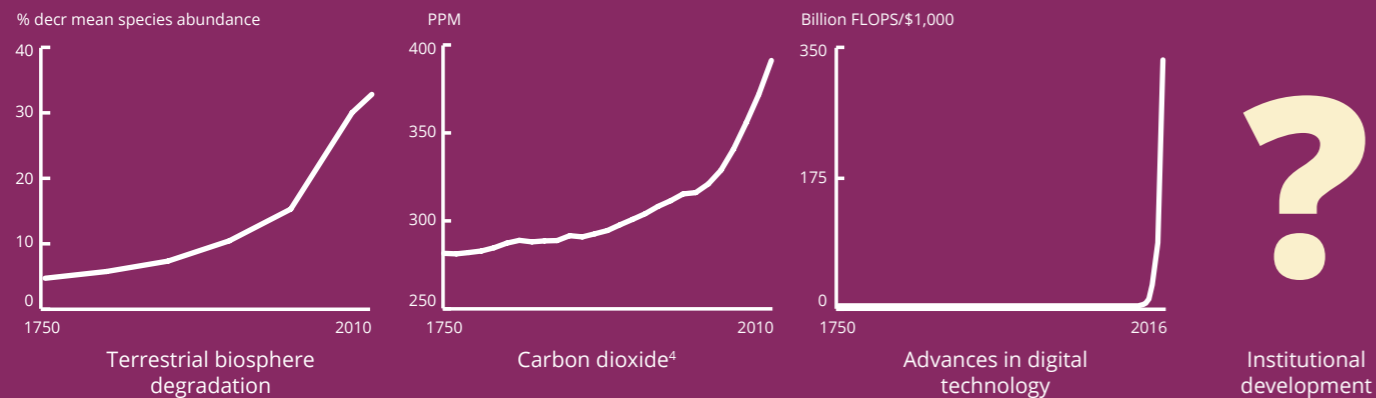
The limits of our cognitive ability

We're affected by cognitive bias. Our brain is not optimized to think about catastrophic risk. It either completely neglects or massively overweighs low probabilities, and it is wired to make sense of linear correlations. However, most of our greatest challenges are non-linear: beyond a certain threshold, change is sudden, rapid, and sometimes exponential. This directly betrays our cognitive expectations. **Global catastrophic risk is not an intuitive matter, and as such, it requires intellectual focus.**

Systemic risks

Many critical challenges today, such as climate change and political violence, are not contained within national borders, nor do they fit into the silos of separate government agencies or academic specialties. No matter who burns fossil fuels, the world's oceans continue to absorb carbon dioxide, and the resulting acidification affects fisheries and food security for millions. Many studies have shown that poverty is a significant contributor to political violence, which in turn further impairs economic development. **Today's risks are interconnected. We cannot view them or manage them in isolation.** Leaders can ignore them because they fall outside the limited scope of their mandate, but silos will not offer protection from the consequences.

Striking exponential developments



SCENARIO 1:
100%
of humanity is alive and well

SCENARIO 2:
1%
A catastrophe kills 99% of the world's existing population

SCENARIO 3:
0%
A catastrophe kills 100% of the world's existing population

Imagine the **three scenarios** above, where is there the most difference in terms of human loss? Is it between scenarios 1 and 2, or between scenarios 2 and 3?

Instinctively, we might think that the death of 99% of humanity marks greater loss. But the difference between 1% surviving or nobody is far greater: in the case of complete extinction, no future generations will ever come to be, and all of humanity's potential will be lost. The risks addressed in this report are not only catastrophic in terms of suffering and economic loss: at the extreme end of the scale, many of them could cause human extinction, and never give these future generations a chance to live. Putting it in purely

numerical terms, there are currently 7.5 billion people alive. Although we know that our planet is not eternal, scientists have postulated that the world will remain habitable for a few hundred million years at least. Over that period, hundreds of millions of generations could come to the world. But even **if humanity was to live for only 10,000 more years, maintaining its current size, this would add up to at least 2000 billion lives.** The potential of the far future is immeasurable and, unfortunately, systematically neglected.

Knowledge = opportunity

For the first time in human history, we have reached a level of scientific knowledge that allows us to develop an enlightened relationship to risks of catastrophic magnitude. **Not only can we foresee many of the challenges ahead, but we are in a position to identify what needs to be done in order to mitigate or even eliminate some of those risks.** Our enlightened status, however, also requires that we consider our own role in creating those risks, and collectively commit to reducing them.

Navigating suddenness

Emerging risks like synthetic biology or nanotechnology might seem far-removed, but a mere 100 years ago, weapons of mass destruction, climate change, and AI were not part of our lexicon either. From the time that climate change was recognised as both man-made and potentially catastrophic to the time when effective cooperation started, the risk increased dramatically, putting us all in jeopardy. Fostering better foresight and responsiveness in our institutions is essential to prepare for new risks on the horizon.



The next 50 years will determine the next 10,000 years

This report focuses on the greatest of our present risks, with potential for catastrophic damage. However, if we consider environmental risks alone, the last 50 years of human activity have pushed us away from the environmental stability of the past 12,000 years. As global temperature continues to rise, the possibility that may trigger catastrophic disasters increases in tandem. The need for decisive leadership and citizen initiatives to

shift businesses, politics and society onto a sustainable path has never been greater than today. The extent to which we protect our natural environment and transform harmful patterns of consumption in the next 50 years will shape our far future, over the next 10,000 years and beyond. **So why care now? Because so much is at stake, too little is done, and if we wait until later, caring may no longer matter.**