

## Portfolio plan Global Development and International Relations

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#### Valid from 2022

The portfolio plan is based on the Government's long-term plan for research and higher education and the Research Council's strategy, and it is operationalized through investment plans and calls for proposals. The plan describes the portfolio's scope, goals, priorities, measures, expected outputs, outcomes, and impacts, as well as how the portfolio is financed. It describes measures that the portfolio board itself will implement and measure that must be implemented through investments made by others.

The portfolio plan has a 5 to 10 years perspective. The plan will be completed in 2022, in a period of an ongoing corona pandemic, threatening climate and nature crisis, and a security situation in Europe that affects access to food, energy, etc. The challenges we face, and the great upheavals of recent years necessitates that the plan has a built-in flexibility that enables us to change course and take on new challenges as they arise. The portfolio plan describes the framework for the portfolio and planned overall measures. Specific priorities and measures are specified in the three-year investment plan, which is updated annually. The basis for the investment plan is in addition to this portfolio plan, annual portfolio analyses, allocated budgets, and the portfolio board's long-term budget.

#### Outlook

To realise the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, research and innovation must endeavour to inspire new forms of co-production, learning and sharing of insight and knowledge across complex subject fields, thematic areas and institutions. Framed by research, Norwegian development and humanitarian policy should be effective and promote progress in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). And high-quality research and innovation should encourage new generations of researchers and innovators to work towards a sustainable and prosperous future.

Our aim for Norwegian society in 2050 is that it is resilient and informed, and that R&D efforts have ensured both a solid national knowledge base and preparedness, and resulted in extensive contributions to global knowledge production. Further, Norway aims to contribute to a world order based on justice and the rule of law, and Norwegian security, values, interests and sovereignty are safeguarded.

This portfolio plan describes how the Research Council aspires to achieve the ambitions outlined above. The plan describes actions that are to be implemented through the portfolio board's own investments and actions that are expected to be realised through investments made by other portfolio boards.

#### The scope of the portfolio

The Portfolio plan for Global Development and International Relations covers the Research Council's overall efforts within research on Security and Governance, Poverty, Development and Equality, and Global Health. The portfolio encompasses all projects funded by the Research Council and the EU framework programmes for research and innovation as outlined within the four dimensions:

#### Disciplines and technologies

Research within this portfolio is dependent on the contributions from all disciplines and technologies. The complexity of the challenges this portfolio sets out to contribute to solving demands new and innovative approaches to research, encouraging both multi- and interdisciplinarity and a wide range of methodological approaches to ensure ground-breaking knowledge and pioneering practices.

#### Research themes

A solid knowledge base that considers geopolitical shifts is a prerequisite for the governance of Norway's international relations

and the achievement of its global ambitions. The following broad areas are of particular interest:

Figure 1 Schematic representation of the portfolio's priorities.

Each of these areas has thematic interlinked sub-priorities. In addition, there are several cross-cutting dimensions. Areas of, though not exclusive, interest to this portfolio are related to the SDGs and Climate Change, climate adaptation and the green transition (see sections 4.2 and 4.3). The former is relevant to all the Research Council's portfolios, while the latter is also a main concern for the Climate and Polar Research, Oceans, and Energy, Transport and Low Emissions portfolios. Independent, critical research is also needed to complement the stated policy priorities.

### **Areas of application of the research**

The broad thematic scope of this portfolio affects and relies on interaction with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Government, local communities, individuals, and the public, private and civil sectors, internationally and in Norway. The Portfolio for Global Development and International Relations receives part of its funding from the Official Development Aid (ODA) budget, which must be used for economic development and welfare in LMICs in accordance with the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria<sup>[1]</sup>. For ODA funds, research relevant to policymakers, the public and civil sectors, and businesses in LMICs is prioritised.

### **R&D value chains**

The Portfolio will seek to cover and support many kinds of activities that might make up 'research value chains', including conceptual work and basic research, different kinds of empirical work, including field research, the development of datasets and new methodologies or survey instruments. Academic publications and wider dissemination and non-academic impact outputs will be considered, as well as support for the governance of such 'value chains' through a commitment to ethical research, open data and the pursuit of equity and inclusiveness in research.

<sup>[1]</sup>[Development Assistance Committee \(DAC\) - OECD](#)

### **Investment goals**

The Government's priorities are stated in the long-term plan for research and higher education 2019–2028. This portfolio will have a particular responsibility for the long-term plan's priority area Societal security and social cohesion in a globalised world.

The efforts outlined in this portfolio plan will contribute to realising the main goals of the Research Council of Norway's executive strategy, [Empowering ideas for a better world](#) (2020 – 2024), in particular the goal of Sustainable Development and the strategic area Cohesion and Globalisation.

The investment goals consist of societal goals and user goals based on the criteria from the Norwegian Agency for Public and Financial Management.<sup>[2]</sup> The measures initiated by the Research Council shall result in expected outcomes and societal impacts that are in accordance with an intervention logic model. See Appendix 1 for a presentation of this portfolio's investment logic model.

Figure 2 Schematic illustration of the investment logic model on which this portfolio plan is based.

The investment goals provide direction and scope for the Portfolio Board's more concrete goals and priorities, which are laid down in the investment plans – the three-year plans for the portfolio's calls for proposals and other measures.

<sup>[2]</sup>The Norwegian Agency for Public and Financial Management

### **Societal goals**

The societal goals correspond to the societal impacts towards which the research and innovation efforts are directed. To underpin the executive strategy of the Research Council, the Portfolio Plan for Global Development and International Relations sets out the following societal goals:

1. Societies across the world are resilient and informed.
2. Researchers collaborate internationally in genuine, fair, and equitable partnerships.
3. Norway contributes effectively to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.
4. Norway is prepared to deal with the challenges and opportunities it faces in pursuit of its interests and values.

## User goals

A well-functioning research and innovation system is a prerequisite for realising society's goals. In the Portfolio for Global Development and International Relations, the Government, the corporate sector, the public sector, local communities, and civil society, on both the national and international level, are important users of the research. The Research Council will bring together actors in research institutions and key users of research to produce ground-breaking and useful research and innovation. This portfolio plan aims to address the following user goals:

1. Civil society and citizens have confidence in and make use of research, participate in the development of knowledge, and help to create innovative and sustainable solutions.
2. Researchers within the portfolio's areas maintain high quality, theoretical and methodological diversity, and creativity in research, and participate actively in international research, development and innovation.
3. Governments, policymakers, practitioners and the corporate sector use research to shape global health and development policy and practice, in particular in LMICs.
4. The government uses research to frame Norwegian foreign and security policy.

## Priorities

This portfolio will prioritise research and innovation that contributes to realising relevant goals and ambitions of the Research Council and, consequently, the Government's research agenda. The priorities of the portfolio are based on several key documents (see Appendix 3).

### Disciplinary and technological priorities

The scope of this portfolio requires contributions from a wide range of technologies and disciplines, including social sciences, medicine, STEM etc. Further, there is an emphasis on the contribution from the humanities within the portfolio, in accordance with the ambitions set out in the Government's white paper [Meld. St. 25 \(2016–2017\) The Humanities in Norway](#). Research within this portfolio presupposes a good understanding of the local and regional context as regards societal structures, politics, values, traditions, language etc. Cultural and religious competence and sensitivity are crucial to issues such as inequality, migration, health, conflict etc., but also when it comes to policy making and systems of governance and democracy. The role of strong legal and justice frameworks is equally important on the international, national and local levels, which requires contributions from jurisprudence.

There is a need for a stronger emphasis on innovative interdisciplinary research if we are to be able to address complex challenges. This portfolio will encourage and support researchers aiming to work in interdisciplinary and transformative ways.

The complexity of the challenges this portfolio aims to contribute to solving demands new and innovative approaches to research. The portfolio supports epistemological diversity and is open to a range of methodological approaches.

### Thematic priorities

The Portfolio for Global Development and International Relations has been developed on the understanding that Security and Governance, Poverty, Development and Equality, and Global Health are interrelated.

Several prominent issues are of relevance and have an impact across the thematic priority areas, especially socioeconomic inequality, inequity, migration, peace, violence and conflict. In addition, two thematic dimensions have a particularly strong impact on this portfolio's thematic priorities, the SDGs (cf. Appendix 2) and climate change, climate adaptation and just transition.

### Climate change and just transition

Issues related to climate and the green transition are covered by designated portfolios, but they impact strongly on this portfolio's thematic dimensions. The consequences of flooding, drought and disease – resulting in migration on an unprecedented scale in areas where tension is already high, e.g. due to drought and crop-failure – lead to intensified competition for food, water and energy in regions where resources are already stretched to the limit. This has implications for conflict and development.

In many areas, ecosystem services are threatened by the degradation of habitats, loss of biodiversity, pollution, and climate change. Sustainable natural resource management practices have the potential to secure vital ecosystem services and prevent natural hazards from becoming crises. As detailed in the Government's [Strategy on climate adaptation, prevention of climate-related disasters and the fight against hunger](#), key priority areas include climate-adapted agriculture, warning systems and climate services, risk financing, and disaster risk management.

The threats facing the oceans are multifaceted, including rising temperatures and sea levels, acidification, the bleaching of coral

degradation of mangroves, and marine pollution and littering. Marine plastic waste is mainly caused by lack of waste collection and waste management on land, and most of the plastic enters the oceans via rivers. Many LMICs foresee increased economic growth within the blue sectors. Diversification and new economic activities are needed but may compete with existing activities, such as those of small-scale fishing communities. It is thus important that the consequences for those who live by and off the sea are considered both in connection with facilitating new economic activity and when implementing conservation measures.

Access to energy is fundamental to improving the quality of life and is a key imperative for economic and social development. However, in LMICs, energy poverty is still rife. Understanding the energy needs of societies, energy use, energy sources, technological solutions for energy supply and distribution, their implementation, financing, effects on societies and long-term sustainability is a priority. Knowledge is needed about the effects of renewable energy sources on poverty alleviation, climate, air job creation, as well as on the role of the private sector. Africa is emerging as a driver for growth in demand for oil, gas and renewables. However, the production of energy can create and increase inequality, and it is crucial to understand both how the energy sector affects local inequalities and how green transitions in affluent countries in many ways rely on precarious and dangerous work in low-income countries. It is crucial to ensure a just transition for all stakeholders and the inclusion of local communities.

## **Security and governance**

### **Security and governance**

Following a period of steadily increasing cooperation and relative stability, most indicators now point towards a more turbulent and unpredictable world. Several regions of the world are characterised by instability, violence and ongoing conflicts, most recently in Europe with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Confidence in research, media, institutions and leaders has been weakened due to conspiracy theories and fake news. The international security situation is affected by the development of new technologies, including military technologies and in the space and cyber domains. Tendencies towards de-globalisation and fragmentation and various interdependencies mean that questions about trade, technologies and finance are strongly linked to security competition and risk management. The EU is facing several external and internal challenges, including Brexit, the geopolitical strains on the union's relations with Russia, China and the USA, and challenges to freedom of the media and the rule of law in some member states.

### **Rule-based order**

The international order is changing. Growing inequality puts new pressure on the multilateral system. There is more competition between great powers and generally heightened levels of tension and conflict. Norway has a major stake in a rules-based and stable world order with open and free markets. A functioning multilateral system is also of crucial importance if the SDGs are to be achieved. Hence, research is needed on the conditions under which multilateral cooperation and the institutions can be strengthened, with a view to enhancing the effectiveness and legitimacy of key organisations, such as the UN.

New knowledge is required to understand how heightened competition between the great powers is further challenging the established world order and its institutions, and how this development creates a new, more challenging, and less predictable context for international cooperation on matters related to security, climate change, trade, commerce, and the world economy, as well as health and development issues. In this heightened competition, it is also imperative to understand and develop new knowledge of the changing legal framework surrounding international conflict. This new and challenging context affects all regions, states and communities.

An increasing number of regional institutions have been established. It is important to carry out research on the intentions behind and impacts of these new institutions. Do they help to fill a vacuum and offer public goods that are not otherwise available, or do they compete with existing institutions and regimes? And how can we understand the role of the great powers in regional institutions?

### **Foreign and security policy**

Foreign and security policy concerns the behaviour of individual countries and is of course affected by systemic impulses that impinge upon individual countries, e.g. the number of and relations between the great powers, and by alliance obligations. But foreign and security policy behaviour is also a product of domestic factors: the mindset and ambitions of key decision-makers, domestic political constellations, including the character of the bureaucracy, and economic and military capabilities. Security policy is about the survival of the nation state and the safety of its citizens.

Transnational crime, international terrorism and cyber threats are putting societies, including Norway, under pressure. The hacking of critical infrastructure, fake news, disinformation campaigns and other external meddling are all part of a complicated new threatening situation, thus adding further complexity to the challenges posed by the traditional threats to the nation's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence.

Obviously, some countries, regions and institutions stand out as particularly significant and deserving of attention from a Norwegian point of view. These countries may be important to Norway's foreign and security policy relations or may be global drivers because of their economic and military strength and/or their technological impact. At the same time, however, it is essential to carry out research on themes, countries and areas other than those that appear to be most immediately important,

both because this helps us to understand new developments and changes to the international system, and because it gives us access to knowledge that may be useful in contingency situations. Of particular importance from a Norwegian foreign and security policy standpoint are Russia and the former Soviet states, the High North and the Arctic, the USA, Europe and the European Union, as well as the leading Asian countries.

### **Governance and human rights**

Democracy as a system of government expanded geographically from the mid-20th century. This trend is now moving in reverse however. Authoritarian-style government is on the rise in many parts of the world. People are losing faith in democratic governments for multiple reasons: inequality, a decline in relative or absolute living standards, and inequities as a result of globalisation. One commonality is widespread anger at existing political elites that is further agitated by forceful populist politics. Many of today's anti-democratic movements also challenge ideas of gender equality and minority rights. The core enlightenment values of democratic principles, freedom of speech and individual human rights are under attack.

The global power shift towards emerging players, like China in particular, with their very different political traditions, is also affecting development towards democracy in new ways. How does the emergence of these new players affect the possibility of supporting human rights and democracy movements when they remain intellectually, culturally and politically powerfully oppose to them? The very notion of a public sphere and civil society is being reframed and undermined by the politics espoused by players like China, Russia, and to some degree, India. Together, these countries account for almost half of the global population and over a quarter of global GDP, figures that are likely to increase in the coming years. Ignoring the challenge these countries pose to the values of the West would be negligent. However, taking a zero-sum approach, whereby they simply figure as problem that will eventually be prevailed against, is naïve and unrealistic. The stability of the world is being fundamentally challenged by strong identity conflicts, ethnic as well as religious, and by a shift from a unipolar to a multipolar, and therefore more diverse but fragmented and potentially unstable, global order. Knowledge of these fundamental geopolitical changes, and tensions of this type, and, not least, how different actors and countries utilise them, is important in order to understand not only local conflicts within and between countries, but also more general challenges to the world order, and the need to create a new, more dynamic structure within which that order is framed and defended.

New and inexpensive digital platforms and social media have enabled the extensive and rapid exchange of information. New digital technology is being used to access information about people's personal lives. This threatens universal rights relating to elections and freedom of expression, as well as minority rights intended to protect against discrimination.

Major incidents that are a serious threat to society, such as natural disasters, conflict, terrorism or pandemics, normally trigger extraordinary measures and regulation by the authorities. There is a need to understand the wider consequences of such measures, such as emergency laws and the imposition of severe restrictions, for human rights. We also need to better understand the impact of urban and domestic violence and broader security threats and tensions. Furthermore, there is a need to understand how changing geopolitical priorities and more intense great power rivalry change the conditions for human rights advocacy.

### **Population displacement and migration**

The number of internally and externally displaced people has doubled in the decade 2011–2021<sup>[3]</sup> and it is expected to rise further. Individual lives and livelihoods, regional and national stability, and decades of development are at risk. New and ongoing conflicts, the climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic continue to increase the need for humanitarian assistance. Children, especially girls, are missing out on education. Women's rights are threatened. Gender-based violence (GBV) is increasing in humanitarian settings, mainly affecting women but also children and men. More research is needed to understand how and what measures need to be implemented to ensure effective prevention of all types of GBV, including through legal tools and mechanisms. The implementation of effective programmes that facilitate the provision of compassionate care, safe spaces, and referral pathways for those who have survived GBV is a priority since they are not available to the majority of people affected by conflict and war.

The humanitarian caseload is a growing concern in relation to development and has a direct impact on the SDGs, as there is a lack of resources and a need for reforms that enable a more adequate response to humanitarian challenges. It is necessary to find appropriate ways of linking humanitarian assistance with long-term development and responding to the root causes of vulnerability. This includes the roles of local, national, and international actors in the humanitarian response and how social and political factors affect the root causes of vulnerability and marginalisation processes, as well as being accountable to affected populations and reaching the most vulnerable. New knowledge is needed about key concerns relating to the delivery of efficient and timely humanitarian aid to 'hard to reach' areas. How can humanitarian principles be upheld in complex conflict settings, where the ruling party sets the conditions for the delivery of humanitarian aid? The presence of peace operations, with their resources and infrastructures, affects and interacts with the social, material and institutional infrastructure of local states. Research is needed to understand the unintended effects of such international presences. The political roles and effects of humanitarian action are important to understand, as is answering the question of whether humanitarian efforts succeed or fail.

Large migration flows have significant and complex impacts on the development of countries of origin, on transit countries, and recipient countries, and not least on the individual migrants. New knowledge is needed about the entire migration chain, from the

causes of migration to the effects of migration on countries of origin, transit countries and recipient countries, in order to improve the chances of benefiting from opportunities and meeting the challenges.

Migration also comes in other forms. Regional labour migration is growing despite difficult working conditions and limited access to welfare benefits. There is large-scale internal migration in countries with rural-rural migration and migration to big cities that leads to major changes in the composition of population, the labour market, the economy and the environment. Going forward, it will be important to monitor how migration in all its forms affects international and regional cooperation, governance policies, economies, social structures and societal values.

[3][UNHCR - Figures at a Glance](#)

## **Poverty, inequality, and development**

### **Poverty, inequality, and development**

There is a need to understand how progress towards development and equality can be achieved worldwide. The situation in many LMICs calls for urgent action, as they have been hit hard by multiple crises simultaneously: the global pandemic, climate crisis, ecosystem crisis, global political crisis and economic crisis. Thus, in line with the criteria for ODA funding, LMICs are a priority in this section.

### **Reducing poverty, inequality, and exclusion**

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, and mostly in LMICs, approximately 120 million more people have been pushed into extreme poverty. The slow-down of economic activity has caused a significant increase in unemployment and brought years of progress to a halt.<sup>[4]</sup> The Russian invasion of Ukraine is further affecting the global economy and value chains, with detrimental consequences (e.g. for fuel and food prices). How poverty is interlinked with trends on the local, national, and global level must be better understood. Developing and upscaling innovative solutions to promote poverty reduction by using new digital opportunities and new types of partnership should be explored. There is a need to understand how public-private partnerships can contribute to poverty reduction, without impacting negatively on the authority and accountability of international and national public actors engaged in development work. A key challenge is to effectively engage and include local communities in decision-making processes, and to ensure robust long-term results from the perspective of poverty reduction.

Inequality, both socioeconomic and gender-based, is of concern, since inequalities are increasing both between and within populations. Corruption, state capture, tax evasion and other forms of economic crime often exacerbate inequality and poverty and threaten democracy. Illicit financial flows from poor countries, and the use of tax havens, result in vast amounts of money being siphoned off instead of advancing economic development for the common good. There is a need to understand how these complex developments and trends, in addition to digitalisation and the expansion of new technology, create both risks and opportunities.

### **Education, skills and labour**

Education with good learning outcomes is essential to reduce poverty, create new jobs, stimulate business, promote peace and democracy, and to achieve a just and green transition. The educational system plays a crucial role in nation-state building by shaping collective identities and framing history in ways that can mitigate or even prolong conflicts. The education of children and young people, especially that of girls and women, is at risk in conflict and crisis situations. Despite considerable progress in increasing educational access in recent years, millions of children still have no access to formal education and, where they do, learning levels often remain low. Knowledge is needed about how to improve learning outcomes and the quality of education, improve teacher education and ensure inclusive and equitable access to educational opportunities. We need knowledge about what works if we are to ensure quality learning for particularly vulnerable groups, such as migrant and refugee children, the disabled, minority populations etc.

Skills and the education of the workforce play an increasingly important part in countries' ability to compete for work in global value chains. New knowledge is needed to better understand the skills and competences needed for the labour markets in LMICs to improve the quality and responsiveness of postsecondary vocational/professional higher education, especially for vulnerable groups, and to utilise the potential of the use of digital technologies in education. Furthermore, the education sector must enable lifelong learning, which is important if the adult population is to acquire new skills. The green transition and technological advances are expected to render many (but not all) labour-intensive jobs obsolete.

In many parts of the world, the unemployment rate is surging, particularly among youth. Research is needed on how to meet the urgent need for job creation, particularly for young people in the context of high population growth and increasing urbanisation in parallel to persistent, extreme, rural deprivation. Widespread discrimination against women, marginalised groups like LGBT+ people, the disabled, and numerous ethnic groups is prevalent in many labour markets. The Covid-19 pandemic has raised awareness of the significance of welfare provision for the poorest and most vulnerable, especially for workers in the informal economy that is not regulated or protected by the state, as well as a new understanding of macroeconomic support instruments in such conditions. More knowledge is needed about how new jobs with decent working conditions can be created, and how



trends in the globalisation of trade, services, capital and information facilitate and constrain employment and income opportunities.

### **Peace, violence and state fragility**

Violence and conflicts have an impact on security, on political and economic conditions, health and general law and order. Human rights violations are more widespread in times of armed conflict, and often persist long afterwards. The number of armed conflicts characterised by extreme brutality and complexity has increased in recent years. In addition, the majority of non-war, violence-related deaths occur in LMICs. Combined with natural and other disasters, and partly exacerbated by the consequences of climate change, these are immense challenges and create unprecedented needs for humanitarian assistance.

Armed conflicts, both inter-state and non-state conflicts, change people's lives, and women, men and children are affected in different ways and often long after the formal end of armed conflict. The underlying causes and dynamics of armed conflict and violence must be better understood and addressed, and knowledge about efficient conflict transformation should be increased. To reduce the impact of armed conflict, we need to know where it is most likely to erupt, and which conflicts have the potential to escalate into full-blown wars. There is a need to continue to deepen our understanding of the multiple ways in which conflicts affect development, and vice versa, and to identify the most effective tools to bring countries out of the conflict trap, e.g. the effect of extractive industries on conflict should be further examined.

There is also a need for further research on the most effective forms of armed conflict/violence prevention and on the conditions under which peace negotiations, agreements, and support operations are more likely to secure lasting and positive peace.

LMICs often suffer from one or more fragilities in core functions of the state, i.e. the state's ability to control violence, its ability to provide basic public services, and the state's legitimacy. Violence and conflicts, both within a country and in neighbouring countries, have the power to destabilise or even subvert governments and significantly weaken core state functions.

### **Food access and food security**

Access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food is vital for everyone. However, food security is a major concern in an increasing number of countries and regions, especially in countries suffering from war and violent conflict. Identifying drivers of failures in food systems is essential to reduce undernourishment and malnutrition and improve system sustainability. Such drivers may be political, structural or economic. Technology, innovation, entrepreneurship and the establishment of functional markets are key parts of this complex. The international food security agenda has mostly focused on rural hunger and measures to increase production and support smallholder agriculture. However, food insecurity is a consequence of poverty and inequalities, and these factors also affect urban households and consumers. The food insecurity of urban populations has been of marginal concern to governments and the international community.

A well-functioning food system relies on sustainable natural resource management practices, and fair sharing of the benefits of natural resources. New knowledge is needed to ensure climate-adaptive agriculture, warning systems and climate services, risk financing, and disaster risk management.

[4][Sustainable Development Report 2021 \(sdgindex.org\)](https://sdgindex.org)

## **Global health**

### **Global health**

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is recognised as one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition. Unequal development in different countries in the promotion of health and control of disease, especially communicable diseases, is a common danger. Health is also seen as fundamental to the attainment of peace and security. A comprehensive approach to global health recognises the physical, psychological (or mental), and social components of health and recognises that they are inter-related. A focus on equity in global health research also involves pursuing research on these broad determinants of health. Promoting equity will also favour research that focuses on values that are linked to health equity, e.g. voice, agency, and the accountability to citizens of health systems.

### **Determinants of health**

Health research includes research on the intersecting social, economic, political and cultural determinants of health, and access to and the provision of health services. The latter is closely connected to a range of challenges that are reflected in the other 16 SDGs, such as education, poverty, inequalities, gender equality, nutrition and food security, air pollution, conflicts, and climate change, which are generally described as the social, economic, and environmental determinants of health.

Of relevance to global health research supported by the portfolio is the influence of global-level institutions and policy processes and global governance and financing mechanisms, which often shape the parameters for health improvement in LMICs. This includes research on public health interventions that span different sectors, including addressing health challenges through intersectoral collaboration at the nexus of human, animal and environmental health (e.g. One Health) or responding to the impact on health and health systems of climate change.[5]

## **Burden of disease**

Disadvantaged populations in LMICs contribute disproportionately to the global burden of disease and suffer from excessive mortality, morbidity and disability due to a range of communicable and non-communicable diseases. The specific targets set include an emphasis on vulnerable populations, including mothers and new-born babies, children under five years of age, as well as a focus on communicable diseases such as AIDS, TB and malaria, neglected tropical diseases, hepatitis, water-borne and other communicable diseases. Premature death from non-communicable diseases, mental health and wellbeing, the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, death and injury from road traffic accidents, hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution are recognised and important aspects of the global burden of disease.

The portfolio will support and encompass research that can contribute to continued progress in reducing the burden from communicable diseases, maternal, new-born, and child health, non-communicable diseases (NCDs),<sup>[6]</sup> population-based public health interventions that can prevent major health risks, and all other health issues reflected in the SDG 3 targets. The spread of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) will stall progress in fighting infectious diseases, and research on all aspects of AMR in an LMIC-setting is therefore supported by the portfolio, as is vaccine development. Specific mention is also made of the need to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, including family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health in national strategies and programmes.

Focusing on issues that contribute to the greatest disease burden is important in order to identify areas where research can have the greatest impact. However, it is important to recognise that, in contexts and for populations where surveillance and diagnostic services are non-existent or weak, estimates of mortality and morbidity are complicated, inaccurate or even completely lacking. Research is needed that seeks to provide 'know how' on the development of birth and death registration and causes of death, as well as assessing documentation of morbidity, especially for 'hard to reach' and disadvantaged population groups.

The portfolio takes a broad approach to thematic areas covered by global health research in order to capture important parameters that effect health equity (distribution of disease burden, generating knowledge on the effectiveness, feasibility, and sustainability of interventions etc.) Thus, the portfolio covers research on the adverse interaction of diseases of all types in an LMIC-setting, referred to as the syndemic approach.<sup>[7]</sup>

## **Health systems**

A health system is best described through its six 'building blocks', including health services delivery, the health workforce, medical products, vaccines and technologies, information services, leadership and governance, and financing. All six need to be in place for a health system to be able to provide the required services. Research is needed to provide information to inform health systems and strengthen the provision of high-quality health services, thereby ensuring health preparedness, promoting equity, and meeting the health needs of LMIC populations, especially those who are most vulnerable, disadvantaged and hard-to reach. One of the key targets of SDG3 is to ensure Universal Health Coverage (UHC), including financial risk protection, access to high-quality essential healthcare services and access to safe, effective, high-quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.

Emerging and re-emerging communicable diseases with epidemic or pandemic potential are a persistent threat to global health security, to public health and socioeconomic development in many LMICs. This has been underscored by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has clearly demonstrated that for one country to be safe, all countries must be safe. The goal of attaining strong health preparedness to promote global health security, as reflected in several targets in the SDGs, has the potential to accrue benefits to all countries. However, the portfolio's thematic priority of global health will only support research on this topic insofar as the focus is on health needs and health systems in LMICs.

## **Policy and practice**

The primary objective of global health research is to conduct high quality research that will provide new knowledge and understanding of what is needed and how this can best be implemented to promote health equity and health improvements for disadvantaged populations<sup>[8]</sup> in LMICs.

The societal impact of submitted research proposals can be assessed in terms of their potential to: (1) contribute, directly or indirectly, to substantial reductions in the disease burden in LMICs; (2) promote health equity in LMICs, and (3) produce higher-level insights of relevance to policy and practice beyond the specific setting and context where studies are carried out, i.e. by closing current evidence gaps and thus informing future guidelines and policies. These three criteria will be used together to evaluate the potential for impact.

The portfolio will prioritise implementation research defined in a broad and inclusive way.<sup>[9]</sup> This reflects the significant potential of implementation research to advance sustainable and equitable health improvements in LMICs by catalysing the integration of evidence-based approaches in practice. Research on effective implementation should be understood broadly to include research on interventions with proven efficacy as well as programmes and policies with the potential to substantially reduce the disease burden and promote health equity.



The prioritisation of implementation research does not exclude funding of high-quality research, such as basic science, social sciences, epidemiological, diagnostic and clinical research, if it addresses questions that are demonstrably of high relevance to global health.

[5]Watts N, Amann M, Arnell N, Ayeb-Karlsson S, Belesova K, Boykoff M, et al. The 2019 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: ensuring that the health of a child born today is not defined by a changing climate. *Lancet*. 2019 16;394(10211):1836–78.

[6]The 2018 UN Political Declaration on NCDs promotes a 5 x 5 NCD agenda, focusing on five core diseases (cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease, cancer, diabetes, and mental and neurological conditions) and five core risk factors (unhealthy diet, tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol, physical inactivity, and air pollution). The inclusion of air pollution demonstrates the growing attention to environmental risk factors that contribute significantly to the burden of disease in LMICs.

[7]Syndemics involve the adverse interaction of diseases of all types (e.g. infections, chronic non communicable diseases, mental health problems, behavioral conditions, toxic exposure, and malnutrition) that, as a result of such interaction, produce an increased burden of disease in a population. Syndemics advance under health disparity, impacted by poverty, stress, structural violence or conflicts. The syndemic approach departs from the biomedical approach to diseases, which diagnostically isolates, studies and treats diseases as distinct entities separate from other diseases and independent of social contexts.

[8]Disadvantaged populations include children, and socially and economically disadvantaged groups, such as people living in poverty, rural populations and disadvantaged minorities.

[9]For a definition of implementation research, please consult the publication [Implementation research: new imperatives and opportunities in global health](#)

### **Prioritised areas of application**

The portfolio targets Norwegian research organisations, but the public sector, business and society at large must benefit from the research results. Research relevant to policymaking and the public administration, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, the Ministry of Health and Care Services and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), is an important priority. Other ministries, public agencies, business and NGOs will also benefit from the research. The portfolio also prioritises research relevant to policymakers, the public sector, business and local communities in LMICs.

Calls that require the participation of users include criteria relating to dialogue with and the dissemination of findings to key stakeholders. Interaction with society at large is also promoted by the portfolio. User involvement refers to the involvement of end users of research findings, during different stages of the research process, from defining the research priorities and questions to interpreting the implications of the research for policy and practice.<sup>[10]</sup> Many research proposals will have the potential to inform Norwegian investments and participation in global health initiatives with a sound evidence base.

Many research proposals are intended to have the potential to inform Norwegian investments and participation in global initiatives and arenas. The portfolio will seek direct and indirect dialogue with Norwegian policymakers and other Norwegian stakeholders to ensure policy relevance. The portfolio uses the communication channels established with government ministries and takes initiatives to establish regular meeting places between policymakers and researchers.

[10]Relevant users may include community members, patients, public sector officials, and bureaucrats in ministries, politicians, other collaborative partners and officials in international organisations and local and international NGOs and social movements.

### **Structural priorities**

This portfolio will underpin the ambitions relating to open research, which refers to the way research is carried out and shared, and how changes are evaluated. The need for high-quality research in society is increasing. Open research will be included in the development of the portfolio's instruments, e.g. through measures that provide better access to research data, the development of methods, utilisation of research results in research and innovation, and by means of user participation and involvement.

Data generated through publicly funded research should in principle be considered a public good and shared with other researchers, business and industry, and society at large. This will help to strengthen the quality of and trust in research by allowing for better validation and verification of research results. It will also help to speed up knowledge development and, in turn, value creation and innovation in the private and public sectors. Research and innovation are increasingly driven by access to new and massive quantities of data. Efficient structures for transparency and the sharing of research data are necessary to ensure data quality, efficient utilisation of resources by the research communities and increased use of research findings in society.<sup>[11]</sup>

### **International collaboration**

The achievement of the portfolio's goals is dependent on cooperation with other funding schemes, including, but not limited to, the EU framework programmes, Nordic Research Cooperation (NordForsk), Belmont Forum, the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP), Global Research Council and other international R&D-funding organisations and multi- and bilateral initiatives. Further, international cooperation in the research projects will be of great importance to achieving this portfolio's goals. The portfolio will work actively to support international collaboration that aims to reduce fragmentation, facilitate coordination and increase the impact of research investments.

The strategy to strengthen collaboration within research and higher education with prioritised countries outside the EU, [the Panorama strategy](#), is highly relevant to this portfolio. The countries included in the strategy are the USA, Canada, Brazil, India, China, Japan, Russia, [\[12\]](#) South-Korea and South-Africa. The strategy aims to facilitate a more comprehensive and long-term cooperation with these countries in higher education and research, with a view to more cooperation in areas where Norway has competence and a potential to contribute, despite international research cooperation with several countries becoming increasingly difficult.

In development and global health research, collaboration with all countries listed in the OECD-DAC register of ODA-eligible countries [\[13\]](#) is of relevance to this portfolio. In addition, in line with the Government's development policy, emphasis is placed on collaboration with specific partner countries, both those targeted for long-term development: Colombia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Malawi, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Tanzania and Uganda, and countries that are mainly in need of stabilisation and conflict prevention: Afghanistan, Mali, Niger, Palestine, Somalia and South-Sudan.

### **Fair and equitable partnerships**

This portfolio will promote equitable research partnerships between Norwegian research institutions and academic institutions and other research institutions in LMICs in all relevant areas. Such partnerships may also involve governments or NGOs, regional networks and institutions. Strong partnerships with academic institutions in LMICs are pivotal to research of high quality and to ensuring the relevance of the research to the context studied.

As part of a broader movement to decolonise the global research agenda, there is an increasing emphasis on the limitations of focusing solely on capacity building, and on the benefits of moving towards fair and equitable research partnerships that promote the agency of partner institutions in LMICs, with equitable sharing of funding, institutional costs and credits. An important part of equitable partnerships is ensuring that LMIC institutions and researchers are genuinely involved in defining the scope, relevance and priority questions of collaborative research proposals. The allocation of funding to respective LMIC partners should be commensurate with their expected responsibilities and the capacity-strengthening goals, from scientific leadership to grant management. Collaboration agreements governing the partnerships should, among other things, stipulate the responsibilities of Norwegian and LMIC researchers, as well as other partners in managing the grant and developing research studies, and how, in collaboration, they will manage data handling, scientific analysis, intellectual property rights and authorship.

Research projects carried out in LMICs should demonstrate co-leadership of the proposed scientific agenda with investigators from LMIC institutions and strive to include opportunities for mentorship and/or research training for junior researchers from Norway and LMIC partners. The Research Council requires that a Norwegian institution be 'project owner' with overall administrative and scientific responsibility. Projects implemented in one or more LMIC should include institutional partner(s) in the relevant country or countries, and, where possible, they should be assigned senior responsibility within the project as co-project manager, work package leaders or as project managers if employed in part by the Norwegian project owner.

### **Ethics**

Researchers are expected to abide by national, European and international standards for research integrity. They must ensure and document that their research is conducted in accordance with ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations, and standards. This includes seeking ethical approval for research where appropriate. Researchers are expected to treat colleagues with integrity, honesty and collegiality, including the fair provision of references and peer reviews.

Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) has emerged as an important approach in international research and innovation policy. RRI includes approaches to research and innovation that aim to anticipate and assess potential impacts and societal expectations, with the goal of creating inclusive and socially responsible research and innovation. RRI's approaches to democratisation of research and innovation through participation are important dimensions.

### **Gender balance and gender perspectives**

The portfolio follows the Research Council's policy for [Gender balance and gender perspectives in research and innovation](#), which states that the Research Council will work more systematically to promote gender balance within research projects, where deemed relevant, by striving to achieve the goal of increasing the proportion of female project managers and women in senior academic positions.

A gender perspective on research implies that biological and social gender is reflected in research content. A growing number of studies show that diversity, including gender balance and gender perspectives, helps to enhance the scientific quality and social relevance of research.

These initiatives emphasise paying attention to asymmetries in power, privilege and resources that might affect gender inequities. They also encourage reflection on the role of research in addressing such issues. Gender also intersects with different forms of discrimination and marginalisation.

## **Innovation**

A broad understanding of innovation includes significantly improved goods, services, processes and concepts, as well as ways of organising and governing that generate value and societal benefits, including new models for governance, financing and delivery of services and public interventions. Innovation should also be about how research is conducted and the portfolio values innovation in research methodology. This aligns well with the goals of the main strategy of the Research Council of Norway - Empowering ideas for a better world and the [Strategy for innovation in the public sector](#). Innovation in research is not limited to the development of technologies and products. The portfolio will encourage researchers to think creatively about how their research findings can contribute to innovations with the potential to contribute to all the SDGs.

[11] Cf. the Research Council's [Report and recommendations relating to licensing and making research data available](#)

[12] The research collaboration with Russia has been suspended following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

[13] [OECD-DAC list of ODA-eligible countries](#)

## **Priorities concerning the EU framework programme, Horizon Europe**

The synergies and interactions between national and European arenas are important in the work on achieving the portfolio plan's investment goals. The relevance of the structure of Horizon Europe to the Portfolio for Global Development and International Relations is primarily linked to Pillar 2 – Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness. Of particular interest for this portfolio is the inclusion of targeted actions with key non-EU partners, including the comprehensive 'Africa Initiative'. As a strategic partner, the EU seeks to enhance cooperation with Africa in order to promote actions targeted at finding locally adapted solutions to challenges that are universal in nature, but which often hit Africa hardest.

In the area of global health, the EU-Africa Global Health Partnership (often referred to as EDCTP3) is part of Horizon Europe. EDCTP3 will support international collaborations that accelerate the clinical evaluation and implementation of interventions against poverty-related infectious diseases, including the neglected ones affecting sub-Saharan Africa. By building research capacity, it will also enhance the ability of sub-Saharan African countries to identify and respond to key infectious disease health challenges. The portfolio is responsible for representing Norway in the Partnership. Relevant parts of the global health research supported by the portfolio should be aligned with the strategic research and innovation agenda of EDCTP3.

Horizon Europe will incorporate research and innovation missions linked to key societal challenges and that are relevant to a broad range of stakeholders, as well as citizens, in order to increase the effectiveness of funding by pursuing clearly defined targets. Missions are a new concept in the EU framework programme and are thereby 'experimental.' They provide a learning laboratory for policy experimentation with a view to planning and co-creating R&I with all the EU policies concerned, but also with concerned stakeholders and citizens. Ultimately, they should deliver European public goods on some of the issues that matter most to people.

Norway's investments in the EU framework programmes are significant, and the Government's ambition is for Norwegian actors to receive 2.8 per cent of the competition-based funding in Horizon Europe. The Research Council will closely follow up the framework programme's more specific priorities in relevant clusters, and strongly encourage Norwegian researchers and research groups to participate in EU calls for proposals.

## **Actions**

To ensure the achievement of the established user goals, several actions must be launched. When deciding on specific actions, available budgets and priorities etc. must be taken into consideration. This portfolio is highly dependent on close collaboration with other portfolios and with contributions from the EU framework programmes.

### **User goal 1: Civil society and citizens have confidence in and make use of research, participate in the development of knowledge, and help to create innovative and sustainable solutions.**

**Actions:** Invest in projects and measures that promote participation and interest in knowledge development. Ensure wide dissemination of research findings.

Portfolio board for global development and international relations:

- Invest in projects with relevant user participation.
- Ensure that researchers disseminate knowledge to society at large, internationally and in Norway, in the form of popular

science presentations, participate in the public debate, and organise conferences and seminars that are open to all.

- Announce network resources that help to strengthen user participation in research.

Other portfolio boards:

- Include user participation in their projects and initiatives.

**User goal 2: Researchers within the portfolio's areas maintain high quality, theoretical and methodological diversity and creativity in research, and actively participate in international research, development and innovation.**

**Actions:** Invest in and advise on measures to strengthen competence and capacity within the portfolio's subject areas and promote high-quality research. Promote and underpin international research collaboration, including genuinely equitable partnerships with researchers in LMICs.

Portfolio board for global development and international relations:

- Invest in high-quality research within the thematic priorities.
- Contribute to international cooperation and capacity building within the portfolio's area of responsibility.
- Contribute to developing and maintaining relevant research infrastructure within the portfolio's areas.
- Invest in projects involving international collaboration.
- Invest in efforts that contribute to participation in, or the establishment of, international networks.
- Encourage and support participation in the EU's framework programme Horizon Europe in areas of relevance to this portfolio, especially the EU's Africa Initiative, and in other multi- and bilateral research funding schemes encompassing fair and equitable partnerships with LMICs.

Other portfolio boards:

- Develop infrastructure for research within the portfolio's areas.
- Support and encourage the research communities to participate in the EU framework programme, Horizon Europe, and in other multi- and bi-lateral research funding schemes.

**User goal 3: The Government, policymakers, practitioners, and the corporate sector use research to shape development policy and practice in LMICs.**

**Actions:** Invest in research that provides updated knowledge and a thorough understanding of developments and trends relating to Norway's development policy in general, and to Norwegian ambitions for Agenda 2030 in particular. Ensure an ongoing dialogue and sharing of findings between the research community and key stakeholders, and ensure that research findings are implemented and validated, and that new practices based on research are assessed on a regular basis.

Portfolio board for global development and international relations:

- Invest in efforts that contribute to participation in, or the establishment of, international networks.
- Invest in collaborative innovation projects with public-, private-, and civil-sector organisations.
- Establish arenas for the dissemination of research findings and dialogue with key stakeholders, e.g. webinars, seminars, policy briefs etc.
- Monitor and assess outcomes of the research portfolio.
- Encourage joint calls across portfolios to address complex challenges.

Other portfolio boards:

- Increase investments in issues related to Norwegian interests and security, including international and geopolitical perspectives on research related to all 17 SDGs.
- Increase investments in research related to global health challenges and SDG3
- Participate in international calls for proposals in relevant areas.

**User goal 4: The Government uses research to frame Norwegian foreign and security policy.**

**Action:** Invest in research that provides updated knowledge and a thorough understanding of developments and trends relating to Norway's foreign and security policy and ensure an ongoing dialogue and sharing of findings between the research community and key stakeholders.

Portfolio board for global development and international relations:

- Invest in high-quality research with relevance to Norwegian foreign and security policy.
- Ensure that research findings are disseminated to key users.
- Host seminars and workshops with participation by researchers, both international and Norwegian, and relevant ministries.

Other portfolio boards:

- Increase investments in their respective thematic priority areas, including security, and international and geopolitical perspectives.

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The relative contributions to the Portfolio for Global Development and International Relations in 2021 with one part from the Portfolio's own activities one part from other portfolios and two parts from the EU's framework programmes.

## **Expected outputs, outcomes and impacts**

### **Expected outputs**

The calls will be designed to ensure high-quality publications, both scientific and more wide-ranging and user-focused; strengthened research capacity and increased recruitment; scientific renewal through methodological diversity and theoretical scope; relevant use of trans- and multi-disciplinarity; extensive collaboration across research institutions, nationally and internationally; user involvement in research and collaboration between researchers and users; targeted communication and dissemination, including user dialogue; and gender balance among the projects' principal investigators.

The portfolio will be analysed annually to monitor achievement of the portfolio's various outputs, which will also form the basis for future calls. If one or more of the outputs mentioned above is not progressing as well as expected, the calls will be adjusted to encourage better progress.

### **Expected outcomes**

Based on the outputs from the funded projects, the portfolio anticipates several outcomes that will benefit the Norwegian Government, policymakers, public, private and civic society, global partners, and society at large. Through funding decisions, extensive user dialogue and the dissemination of research to all relevant stakeholders, we seek to ensure the following outcomes from this portfolio: the Norwegian contribution to international agendas within the portfolio's priority areas is based on research; governments, the private, public and civic sectors, and society base their decisions on new and updated knowledge; an expanded knowledge base enables policy and the public administration, working life and civil society to better deal with global challenges and issues related to the foreign policy and security area; Norwegian researchers and their international partners contribute directly to policy development; and strong, sustainable research institutions and research groups are at an international level.

The Research Council will, on a regular basis, assess the various outcomes of this portfolio, and will monitor and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data in mixed methods assessment projects. These assessments will form the basis for future revisions of this portfolio plan. For foreign and security policy research and, in part, development research, the Research Council will trace the use of research conducted under this portfolio in government white papers, national strategies, work programmes for NGOs etc. and the use of researchers within the portfolio's thematic areas on public committees, as advisers to the Government, to policymakers, business, civil society etc.

### **Expected societal impacts**

For this portfolio, it is a prerequisite that the investments made by the funding ministries will have societal impact. This is of particular importance for the funds from the ODA-budget, which are dedicated to the economic development and welfare of LMICs. While planning for future societal impacts is difficult, this portfolio aims to contribute to the following: Norway makes significant contributions to achieving the SDGs based on best practice and updated knowledge; Norwegian development and humanitarian policies, and corresponding efforts, are effective and foster progress and relief in LMICs; Norway makes important contributions to securing a world order based on the rule of law, and Norway's security, values, interests and sovereignty are safeguarded.

Assessments of societal impacts will vary according to subject area. Development research and global health research, both funded by the ODA-budget, are subject to clear expectations to document societal impact related to advances in their respective priority areas.

## **Funding**

The Portfolio for Global Development and International Relations is funded by nearly all ministries, but mainly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Health and Care Services. The ministries commission

Funding of the portfolio board's targeted investments from the ministries.

## Appendix 1: Illustration of the investment logic model of the portfolio plan

See the text in chapters 5 and 6 for complete descriptions.





### Appendix 3: Reference documents

The list below encompasses key documents of high relevance to this portfolio plan. The list is not exhaustive.

- [St. 4 \(2018–2019\) Long-term plan for research and higher education 2019–2028](#) (With particular relevance to cross-cutting perspectives related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the priority area Societal Security and Social Cohesion in a Globalised World)
- The Research Council of Norway's executive strategy, [Empowering ideas for a better world](#) (2020–2024)
- [St. 27 \(2018–2019\) Norway's Role and Interests in Multilateral Cooperation](#)
- [St. 36 \(2016–2017\) Setting the course for Norwegian foreign and security policy](#)
- [St. 24 \(2016–2017\) Common Responsibility for Common Future](#)
- [The research strategy for the Ministry of foreign affairs and The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation 2017 - 2024](#)
- [Strategy for research and development for the defence sector](#) (Only available in Norwegian)
- [St. 25 \(2013-2014\) Education for Development](#)
- [Health and Care 21-strategy](#) (Only available in Norwegian)
- [Better Health, Better Lives - Combating Non-Communicable Diseases in the Context of Norwegian Development Policy \(2020-2024\)](#)
- [St.17 \(2017-2018\) Partner Countries in Norway's Development Policy](#) (summary)
- [St.35 \(2014-2015\) Working together: Private sector development in Norwegian development cooperation](#)
- [Norway's Humanitarian Strategy](#)
- [Strategic framework for Norwegian efforts in vulnerable states and regions](#) (Only available in Norwegian)
- [St. 22 \(2016-2017\) The place of the oceans in Norway's foreign and development policy](#)
- [The Norwegian government's action plan on sustainable food systems \(2019-2023\)](#)
- [The Norwegian coalition government's programme declaration](#) (Only available in Norwegian)
- [The Panorama strategy \(2021–2027\)](#)

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