

World Economic Forum Rates Global Risks for 2013



The World Economic Forum asked experts to rate global risks.

From VOA Learning English, this is the Economics Report in Special English.

The World Economic Forum says the most likely risk facing the world over the next 10 years is the severe disparity in income between rich and poor. The estimate was made in a new report called the World Economic Forum's Global Risks 2013. Many of the issues discussed in the report are familiar. Food availability and the spread of extremism and terrorism are noted every year. But new risks, especially technological and financial ones, are becoming more important than ever.

The World Economic Forum is based in Geneva, Switzerland. The non-profit group says its risk report is based on surveys of more than 1,000 experts from around the world. They include industry leaders and specialists in government, academics and civil society.

The experts considered the likelihood that risks could become serious problems in the future. They also studied the impact, or influence, that these risks would have if they became reality.

The experts judged the likelihood that a risk would become a problem over the next 10 years. Sharp income differences between rich and poor were the

risk considered most likely. This is the second time in two years that the disparity in wealth was identified as the most likely problem. It was followed by what the report calls “chronic fiscal imbalances,” or the failure of governments to deal with heavy debt over time.

The risk said to have the biggest possible impact was a major failure in the world financial system, like the collapse of a top institution or currency. But experts rated a water supply crisis as second on the list of high-impact risks. The report’s organizers say this issue has generally received little attention.

How the experts change their opinions is also something to note. This year, the mismanagement of the aging population moved from the 18th to the fifth most likely threat. The failure to deal with the costs and social issues involved with an aging population is now considered a risk with greater possible impact.

The experts also were asked about extreme possibilities. The report calls these “X Factors.” They include the likelihood of climate change going out of control, and even the results of discovering alien life forms.

The World Economic Forum is an international group whose members represent industry, charitable organizations and other partners. Its stated goal is to improve the state of the world.