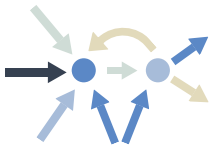# Summary

This Roadmap presents a plan to advance polycrisis analysis as an inclusive, credible, and recognized field of knowledge and practice. It draws on the results of a broad consultation of participants in the growing community of polycrisis research and action; and it is intended to provide scholars, policymakers, firms, and funders with a concise yet comprehensive snapshot of this emerging field, including its gaps, opportunities, and potential priorities.

Five core characteristics of polycrisis

The term "polycrisis" highlights interactions between crises, but there is as yet no agreed upon, authoritative definition of the term. Its proponents, however, broadly agree that the phenomenon has five key features:

1. **Emergent harms:** when crises interact, their impacts are different from—and generally worse than—the impacts the crises would have had separately from one another.

2. **Multiple causes:** interacting crises are not reducible to single root causes; they arise from complex causal interactions that require multifaceted responses.

3. **Deep uncertainty:** crisis interactions generate change that strains comprehension and exceeds our ability to anticipate future developments.

4. **Systemic context:** crises arise within complex systems and, therefore, must be understood and addressed using complex systems thinking.

5. **New knowledge and action:** established frameworks, institutions, and practices are ill-equipped to address crisis interactions; new modes of research and practice are required.

Gaps, challenges, priorities, and solutions

Over the last two years, the term "polycrisis" has evolved from a loosely applied buzzword into the conceptual anchor for a rapidly growing global research community focused on the systemic inter-relationships among the world's many problems.[1] But these developments remain patchy and incomplete, resulting in many gaps, challenges, solutions, and priorities across four dimensions of polycrisis analysis:

- **Theoretical foundations:** Those engaged in polycrisis analysis disagree about the conceptualization of crisis versus risk; the plural versus singular nature of polycrisis; the role of power and agency alongside systemic structures in polycrisis analysis; and the nature of crisis interactions sufficient to constitute a polycrisis. While these issues may not be resolvable, theorists should be more explicit about their positions on them to aid knowledge cumulation.

- **Empirical research:** Research has begun to explore past and present polycrises at multiple scales in productive ways, but researchers need to more clearly identify the systems under investigation, the boundaries of those systems, and the particular crises that make up a polycrisis. Key research priorities include identifying the mechanisms of crisis transmission among systems and the lessons of past polycrises, given their commonalities and differences with present and possible future ones. Empirical research should explore and expand the full range of available methods, models, and datasets so as to build a rigorous and inter-disciplinary field of inquiry.

- **Practical applications:** The polycrisis community wants to help policymakers and other frontline actors prevent and respond to urgent, intersecting crises, but the field has a "negativity problem," limiting its audience and potential impact. Also, policymakers and other frontline actors are largely excluded from the research process. To address these two challenges, organizations conducting polycrisis research should engage communications experts to learn how to better frame polycrisis analysis and identify policymaking "champions" whose expertise and priorities can be integrated into research projects.

- **Community building:** The development of the polycrisis field requires a cohesive identity for polycrisis researchers, wider inclusion of diverse perspectives, increased public outreach, and expanded organizational infrastructure, such as research positions, communications platforms, annual meetings, and cooperative coordination. The polycrisis community should therefore develop a set of shared principles, initiatives to increase participation from the Global South and other underrepresented groups, means to support members intellectually and financially, and strategies to increase communication and understanding both within the group and beyond.

[1] For a snapshot of the polycrisis community, see the Polycrisis Community Map at: https://polycrisis.org/community-map/.