

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Economic activity was surprisingly resilient through the global disinflation of 2022–23. As global inflation descended from its mid-2022 peak, economic activity grew steadily, defying warnings of stagflation and global recession. Growth in employment and incomes held steady, reflecting supportive demand developments—including greater-than-expected government spending and household consumption—and a supply-side expansion amid, notably, an unanticipated boost to labor force participation. The unexpected economic resilience, despite significant central bank interest rate hikes aimed at restoring price stability, also reflects the ability of households in major advanced economies to draw on substantial savings accumulated during the pandemic. In addition, as Chapter 2 explains, changes in mortgage and housing markets over the prepandemic decade of low interest rates moderated the near-term impact of policy rate hikes. As inflation converges toward target levels and central banks pivot toward policy easing in many economies, a tightening of fiscal policies aimed at curbing high government debt, with higher taxes and lower government spending, is expected to weigh on growth.

Global growth, estimated at 3.2 percent in 2023, is projected to continue at the same pace in 2024 and 2025. The forecast for 2024 is revised up by 0.1 percentage point from the January 2024 *World Economic Outlook* (WEO) *Update*, and by 0.3 percentage point from the October 2023 WEO. The pace of expansion is low by historical standards, owing to both near-term factors, such as still-high borrowing costs and withdrawal of fiscal support, and longer-term effects from the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine; weak growth in productivity; and increasing geoeconomic fragmentation. Global headline inflation is expected to fall from an annual average of 6.8 percent in 2023 to 5.9 percent in 2024 and 4.5 percent in 2025, with advanced economies returning to their inflation targets sooner than emerging market and developing economies. The latest forecast for global growth five years from now—at 3.1 percent—is at its lowest in decades. The pace of convergence toward higher living standards for middle- and lower-income

countries has slowed, implying a persistence in global economic disparities. As Chapter 3 explains, the relatively weak medium-term outlook reflects lower growth in GDP per person stemming, notably, from persistent structural frictions preventing capital and labor from moving to productive firms. Chapter 4 indicates how dimmer prospects for growth in China and other large emerging market economies, given their increasing share of the global economy, will weigh on the prospects of trading partners.

Risks to the global outlook are now broadly balanced. On the downside, new price spikes stemming from geopolitical tensions, including those from the war in Ukraine and the conflict in Gaza and Israel, could, along with persistent core inflation where labor markets are still tight, raise interest rate expectations and reduce asset prices. A divergence in disinflation speeds among major economies could also cause currency movements that put financial sectors under pressure. High interest rates could have greater cooling effects than envisaged as fixed-rate mortgages reset and households contend with high debt, causing financial stress. In China, without a comprehensive response to the troubled property sector, growth could falter, hurting trading partners. Amid high government debt in many economies, a disruptive turn to tax hikes and spending cuts could weaken activity, erode confidence, and sap support for reform and spending to reduce risks from climate change. Geoeconomic fragmentation could intensify, with higher barriers to the flow of goods, capital, and people implying a supply-side slowdown. On the upside, looser fiscal policy than necessary and assumed in projections could raise economic activity in the short term, although risking more costly policy adjustment later on. Inflation could fall faster than expected amid further gains in labor force participation, allowing central banks to bring easing plans forward. Artificial intelligence and stronger structural reforms than anticipated could spur productivity.

As the global economy approaches a soft landing, the near-term priority for central banks is to ensure that inflation touches down smoothly, by neither easing policies prematurely nor delaying too long

and causing target undershoots. At the same time, as central banks take a less restrictive stance, a renewed focus on implementing medium-term fiscal consolidation to rebuild room for budgetary maneuver and priority investments, and to ensure debt sustainability, is in order. Cross-country differences call for tailored policy responses. Intensifying supply-enhancing

reforms would facilitate inflation and debt reduction, allow economies to increase growth toward the higher prepandemic era average, and accelerate convergence toward higher income levels. Multilateral cooperation is needed to limit the costs and risks of geoeconomic fragmentation and climate change, speed the transition to green energy, and facilitate debt restructuring.