

**United Nations University**

Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies

# 2023

## Annual Report



**UNU**  
**CRIS**

# United Nations University

Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies

## 2023 Annual Report

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Designed, written and produced by Andrew Dunn with the support of Pascale Vantorre.

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UNU-CRIS personnel at the  
EUIA Conference in May

# Foreword by the Director

2023 was not a good year for humanity and world peace. Regional militarised conflicts were started, continued or flared up again. In addition, new and old tensions around disputed borders on all continents may be sowing the seeds for further expansion of conflict worldwide.

With the end of the Cold War, military expenditures as a percentage of world GDP had been halved in a matter of years and remained stable for almost three decades, slightly above 2% of world GDP (World Bank data). However, according to various sources, preliminary figures for 2023 and budget figures for 2024 show that military expenditures are on the rise again, not only in absolute terms but also as a percentage of world GDP. According to the latest SIPRI data, global military expenditure increased to 2443 billion USD in 2023, i.e. a year-on-year increase of 6.8% in real terms, reaching a level of 2.3% of world GDP (www.sipri.org).

Conflicts in various regions are causing human losses, suffering and destruction. Focusing on only three conflicts, the Israeli offensive in Gaza, following the Hamas attacks of October 2023, has already seen more than 33000 killed, double more than that injured, and over 75% of the population of Gaza is displaced (UNRWA). The current episode of civil war in Sudan started in April 2023 and follows decades of intermittent conflicts in different configurations. More than 8,6 million people are forcibly displaced, of which around 1,8 million fled to neighbouring countries (UNRWA/OCHA). Around 13000 deaths have been confirmed (UNOHCHR)

but it is generally understood that this is a great underestimation. Finally, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, eight years after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, has already claimed the lives of more than 10500 civilians and injured around 20000 more (UNOHCHR/HRMMU), to which tens of thousands of military casualties on both sides should be added, even if published figures diverge considerably. Ukraine counts almost four million internally displaced persons and around 6,5 million refugees worldwide (UNOHCHR).

UNU-CRIS contributes to a better understanding of the determinants of regional conflict and security and the roles of regional actors and institutions therein. There are currently research projects being conducted on regional security in West and East Africa, Eastern Europe/Eurasia, the Atlantic, and the Indo-Pacific. Our aim is not only to provide our UN colleagues and policymakers with rigorous analysis, but also to 'arm' citizens worldwide with data and arguments so that they can send the right (and strong) signals to their political leaders and authorities, namely: that they, and their children, live better lives with regional cooperation than with regional conflict.

In our research on regional security, our researchers are very much aware of the nexus between regional conflict/security, on the one hand, and human mobility, natural resources, health and the economy, on the other. This nexus approach characterises the research done at UNU as a whole. This is also reflected in the work

that is done in and between the different clusters at UNU-CRIS: from migration & social policy to economic interactions, from digital governance to nature, climate & health. This annual report is testimony to this and shows the creativity and productivity of our research community in 2023.

In this annual report, I invite you to discover the main academic events of 2023, our research output in different formats, policy reports and briefs, our capacity building and outreach portfolio, our new faces and our growing network.

I must also share that this year, we also bid farewell to Louise Fawcett, who has been the chair of our advisory committee for the past 12 years. Louise has been a great source of knowledge, advice and strength for UNU-CRIS, and will be greatly missed. She leaves us in good hands, however, as Fukunari Kimura takes over as chair of the advisory committee from 2024 onwards, and we welcome new members Adebayo Olukoshi and Florian Trauner.

In keeping with our driving principle that our greatest challenges can only be solved together, we encourage you to reach out to us to explore collaboration and do not hesitate to subscribe to our newsletter to keep abreast of our work.

## Philippe De Lombaerde

Director of the United Nations University  
Institute on Comparative Regional Integration  
Studies



Photo: Airlangga University



## Highlight

# Third Summer School on Comparative Regionalism

Following two virtual editions, in 2023 we held our *Third Summer School on Comparative Regionalism*, a collaboration with Universitas Airlangga (Indonesia) and Maqsut Narikbayev University (Kazakhstan), on site in Surabaya, Indonesia.

Over 80 students from 20 countries joined the week-long programme to explore the topics under the theme of *Regionalism and Crisis Mitigation: A Multidisciplinary Approach*.

The programme included discussions on the Why, Where, and So What of Regional Integration and Cooperation, China's Approach Toward Regionalism in Asia, Comparing Regional Security Organizations in Africa and the Asia Pacific, Economic Regionalism, Constitutional Crisis and Regionalism, and Nuclear Proliferation.

The participants were also treated to a full cultural programme, including visits to the Wonosari Bozem Mangroves to learn of their preservation efforts, a dinner hosted at the City Hall, a tour of the Indonesian Naval Academy, and a lunch hosted by the Mayor of the city of Sidoarjo.



Photo: Airlangga University

## Highlight

# The European Union in International Affairs Conference

We co-organised the 8th *European Union in International Affairs* conference in Brussels from May 3rd to 5th, bringing together around 400 academics and government officials from over 40 countries to delve into the EU's role on the world stage.

The programme included over 50 academic panels, along with a keynote address by the head of the EU Military Committee. Discussions also focused on policy connections between the EU and Africa, European defense collaboration, and the perspectives of leading academic journals

on EU foreign policy. The conference was a collaboration between several partners, including the Brussels School of Governance (VUB), the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Warwick, EGMONT – Royal Institute for International Relations, and the Institute for European Studies (ULB).

Frank Mattheis (pictured below) and Florian Trauner (BSOG) served as co-chairs of the conference, which was held at the prestigious Royal Academies for Science and the Arts of Belgium in Brussels.



Photo: Dani Oshi/BSOG



## Highlight

# The Governance Challenges of Artificial Intelligence

In October, we convened a lecture and panel discussion focused on the critical topic of Artificial Intelligence (AI) governance, guided by Professor Tshilidzi Marwala, Rector of the United Nations University and United Nations Under-Secretary-General.

The evening began with a presentation by Johan Hanssens, Secretary-General of the Flemish Department of Economy, Science and Innovation, who gave an overview of AI policies in Flanders. This was followed by Rector Marwala's lecture, which offered valuable insights into the ethical considerations, technical standards, and policy frameworks needed to ensure that

AI serves the greater good. He addressed the potential risks associated with advanced algorithms and autonomous systems, emphasizing the importance of responsible development and deployment.

Following the lecture, an esteemed panel of Flemish AI experts – Sabine Demey (Flanders AI Research Program), Tijl De Bie (Ghent University), Rob Heyman (imec-SMIT, Vrije Universiteit Brussel), and Tinne De Laet (KU Leuven) – engaged in a stimulating discussion. Their diverse perspectives enriched the conversation and underscored the importance of ongoing collaboration among researchers and policymakers.

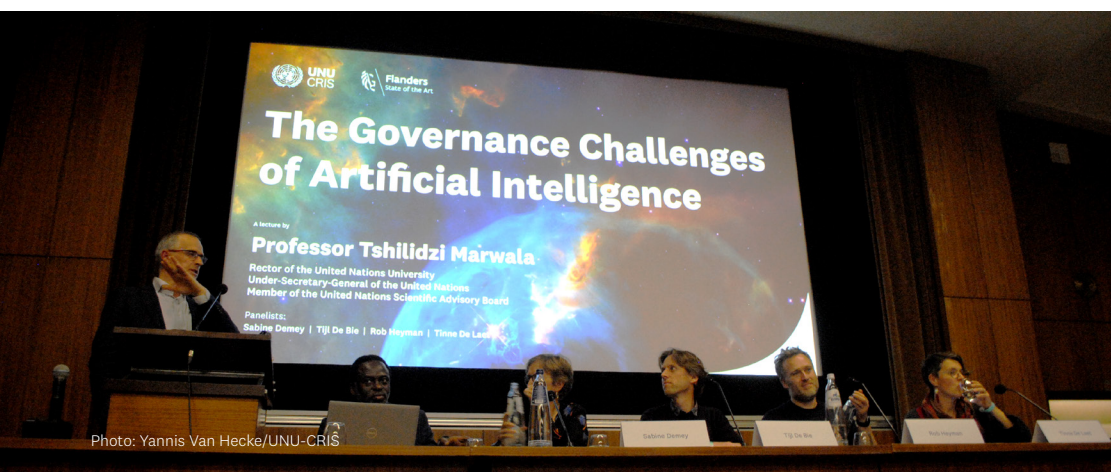



Photo: Yannis Van Hecke/UNU-CRIS

## Overview


# 2023 in Numbers

## 127 presentations and lectures


	Presentations	68
	Lectures	59

	<b>137</b> People	<b>41</b> Nationalities
	<b>46%</b> Women	<b>54%</b> Men


## 156 publications

	Journal Articles	64
	Special Issues	04
	Books	10
	Book Chapters	38
	Policy Briefs	13
	Reports	10
	Working Papers	16

## 49 (co-)organised events

	Conferences	5
	Workshops, Research Seminars, Webinar and Fora	38
	Other events	6

## Financial Overview

	Total Budget	<b>€2.002.941</b>
	Core Funding Flemish Government	52.7%
	External Project Funding*	21.0%
	Ghent University	19.3%
	VUB	6.0%

\*These include: FWO (via UGent); BOF-DOS (via UGent); Departement Kanselarij en Buitenlandse Zaken (Vlaanderen); European University Institute (EUI); Network for Advancement of Sustainable Capacity in Education and Research in Ethiopia – Nascere (via UGent); Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (via UGent); China Scholarship Council (via VUB); Microsoft (via VUB); U.S. Institute for Peace; Foundation for European Progressive Studies; Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS); European Parliament/TEPSA; VVSG/IDEA Consult; Swiss Research Fund.

External project funding corresponds to 41.7% of core funding from the Flemish Government.

Research

# Cluster Reports

Our clusters are the heart of our knowledge generation.



Photo: Dani Oshi/BSOG



# Regions and Cities Governance Lab

Some major milestones were reached in 2023 for the Regions and Cities Governance Lab, with the research done in our cluster breaking through into the policy sphere, and advancing new concepts and disrupting and evolving others.

Re-LAB was heavily involved in the European Union in International Affairs conference, which you can read more about on page 7. The events of 2023 underscored the important role Europe has to play on the global stage, and the conference was a fertile ground for discussion and reflection.

As part of mission to deliver policy-relevant research, we were involved in several policy transfer session for practitioners, for groups such as the UN Brussels Team, the Canadian Government, the Portuguese Government, and various EU Institutions like the European Parliament, the External Action Service and the European Council.

**Frank Mattheis**  
Cluster Coordinator



Photo: Andrew Dunn/UNU-CRIS

## PUBLICATION

### Disrupting European Studies

This special issue in the *Journal of Contemporary European Research (UACES)*, co-edited by Frank Mattheis and the culmination of the Diversity, Inclusivity, Multi-Disciplinarity in European Studies (DIMES) project, explores the ways in which DIMES sought to address the lack of inclusivity in European Studies. The contributions are representative of some of the many conversations held over the project's four years with a wide range of scholars, all committed to disrupting European Studies, albeit through different means. The editors argue that debates about decentring, about decolonising, on the need to acknowledge the privilege and Eurocentricity that continues to dominate knowledge production traditions, are pertinent to European Studies.

## PUBLICATION

### Analysing the Divide between Technocrats and Diplomats in International Organizations

This journal article by Jamie Pring in *International Affairs (Oxford Academic)* examines the connections among Communities of Practice (CoPs) in regional organisations in linking technical knowledge with other forms of knowledge, actors and tools crucial to address the larger environment, enhancing performance. It finds that disconnections among relevant CoPs foster an excessive focus on specific sets of knowledge and tools, particularly technical knowledge, which can lead to dysfunction.

## EVENT

### How Is Regional Governance Made Outside the EU? Policymaking and Implementation in Regional Organizations Across The Global South

This Exploratory Symposium at the 2023 EISA Conference, featuring Frank Mattheis and Leiza Brumat, sought to establish new connections on regional governance in the global South, combining existing but separated research strands on regional policymaking and implementation. The symposium advanced the proposal for a Special Issue and provided the venue for drafting a research proposal for a Jean Monnet network to bridge knowledge production on regional policymaking and regional implementation between the European Union and the Global South.

## COMMENTARY

### Is There a Future for the EU's Eastern Partnership?

In this piece for LSE's EUROPP platform, Fabienne Bossuyt, Louise Amoris, Katsiaryna Lozka and co-authors discuss the Eastern Partnership, establish a framework for the EU's engagement with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, and argue that almost fifteen years after it was launched, the future of the initiative looks bleaker than ever.

# Regional Integration Knowledge System

It has long been acknowledged that the success of the SDGs relies on local and regional implementation, and in 2023 the RIKS cluster contributed to the cause, playing an instrumental role in the first Flemish SDG Subnational Voluntary Review, produced together with IDEA consult, the Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten, and the Vereniging Vlaamse Provincies (read more on page 37). Localising the SDGs is a major theme forming in our work, and one that will pay dividends into 2024 and beyond.

Another major highlight was the production of a dataset and accompanying working

paper that brings together all publicly available datasets on regional trade agreements and regional organisations, which aims to break down barriers to trade.

The RIKS platform and its trove of data continues to deliver promising and exciting avenues for research. 2023 was a year of behind-the-curtain work on new updates which will come online in 2024. Stay tuned!

**Samuel Standaert**  
Cluster Coordinator



## PUBLICATION

### **Towards an Exhaustive Regional Integration Agreements Database**

Recent decades have seen regional integration agreements (RIAs) become a dominant feature of international relations. The rapid proliferation of agreements has sparked the need to compile information on the phenomenon.

This working paper from Samuel Standaert and Justine Miller provides an overview of the five most prominent databases on RIAs. They show how these databases can be combined to create a more comprehensive repository of trade agreements and regional organisations.

The final database contains 1,149 trade agreements and regional organisations from the early 1910s to 2020.

## WORKSHOP

### **From a World of Regions to Interlocking Regional Worlds: What Next for the Study of Regionalism in Complex Geopolitical Times**

In November, a UNU-CRIS delegation, including Justine Miller, visited the Centre for International Studies and Development (CISAD) of Jagiellonian University in Kraków for a workshop to explore the potential future of regional studies and engage in discussions about prospective collaborations.

Scholars from as far away as Japan took part in the two-day event, which included three panels on regional organisations redefining regionalisation patterns, the different dimensions of regional integration and understanding complex regional integration patterns, concluding with a panel titled *Toward Global Regionalism: Decentring Regionalism*.

## PRESENTATION

### **Measuring the Level of Overlap between Trade Agreements**

Justine Miller presented her paper, *Measuring the Level of Overlap between Trade Agreements*, at the 13th Bari Conference on Economics of Global Interactions in September.

The paper creates a measure of the “Spaghetti Bowl” of modern regional integration that captures both the overlap in membership and content between trade agreements, and describes the Spaghetti Bowl at the global and local levels, identifying the countries and agreements that contribute the most to the phenomenon.

## EVENT

### **Innovative Approaches to the Implementation of the SDGs at Subnational Level**

In July, on the sidelines of the High Level Political Forum, Regions4 and the Government of Flanders in New York organised an event on the localisation of the SDGs. In one of the panels, Wim Dries (President of the VVSG) presented the *SDG Report of the Flemish Provinces, Cities and Municipalities*, the first Flemish subnational voluntary review, in which UNU-CRIS researchers, and particularly those from the RIKS cluster, were major contributors.



## Regional Public Goods

# Migration and Social Policy

In the Migration and Social Policy cluster, we're proud of our track record of nurturing and developing promising young researchers in the field of migration studies. This year, Rossella Marino and Dereje Regasa defended their theses and now start the next chapter of their careers, while staying connected to Bruges as Associate Research Fellows at UNU-CRIS.

In 2023 we welcomed two new researchers, with Yeshiwas Alemineh strengthening our research on IDPs in Ethiopia, and Flor Vandavelde developing a new line of research in the cluster on the development

implications of involuntary immobility. The cluster put considerable energy into the Seasonal School on the Climate, Migration and Health Nexus and the doctoral school on Decolonial and Postcolonial Perspectives on (the) Eastern (of) Europe, two trainings to develop researchers and grow scholarship in the field of migration and social policy studies.

**Ine Lietaert**  
Cluster Coordinator



Photo: IOM - UNICEF Ethiopia

## PUBLICATION

### Regions and Regional Organisations in Global Migration Governance

This chapter by Ine Lietaert and Antoine Pecoud in the *Research Handbook on the Institutions of Global Migration Governance* (Edward Elgar) explores recent developments in regional cooperation and integration over migration governance. It provides an overview of how, and why, regional migration governance has become involved in the governance of human mobility, and of the relationship between regional and national/global migration governance respectively. They posit that while regions may embody an alternative level at which peoples' mobility can be governed, they also reproduce some of the characteristics - and sometimes the shortcomings - of both national and global migration policy.

## PUBLICATION

### The Aspiration to Stay: A Global Analysis

This paper by Alix Debray, Ilse Ruyssen and Kerilyn Schewel in *International Migration Review* (Sage Journals) offers the first global analysis of the aspiration to stay, defined here as the preference to stay in one's country of residence. The authors use the unique Gallup World Polls which provide information on aspirations to stay (as opposed to migrating abroad) as well as on individual characteristics and opinions for 130 countries worldwide between 2010 and 2016. They find staying aspirations are far more common than migration aspirations across the globe and uncover important "retain factors" often overlooked in research on migration drivers — related to social ties, local amenities, trust in community institutions, and life satisfaction.

## PUBLICATION

### Gaps and Opportunities in the Climate Change, Migration and Health Nexus: Insights From a Questionnaire Based Study of Practitioners and Researchers

This journal article by Amal Sarsour, Ilse Ruyssen, Charlotte Scherens and their co-authors in the *Journal of Migration and Health* (Elsevier) identifies initial gaps and opportunities in the nexus of climate change, migration and health research. They conducted a questionnaire based study of academics and practitioners working in the fields of climate change, migration and health, focussing on the additional complexity when the nexus themes move beyond a bidirectional relationship. They put forward thematic frameworks and thematic analysis that can support researchers by contributing to hypothesis generation for further study of this pertinent and timely field.

## EVENT

### UNU Migration Network Research Symposium

In October we hosted the United Nations University Migration Network Research Symposium. In a time when more people than ever before live in a country other than their own, the network brings together top researchers on migration to discuss its intersections with climate, development and governance. With researchers from UNU-CRIS, UNU-MERIT, UNU-EHS and UNU-CPR in attendance, the group covered three main thematic themes: migration and climate (and health), migration and development, and migration and governance.

## Regional Public Goods

# Economic Interactions

In 2023, the Economic Interactions Cluster played a vital role in the development of the DEITA database (Database on the Environmental Impact Assessment of Trade Agreements), which includes all trade agreements of which the environmental impact assessment is publicly available. This exciting new database will play a central role in the study of EIAs and positions us a leader in this field.

We laid the groundwork for important new strands of research throughout the year with several successful funding applications, including for the MINOS

international thematic network on sanctions, in which the cluster will play an active role.

We supervised seven interns in 2023, strengthening their capacity and building our network. Finally, we presented our work at seven academic conferences, ensuring our research sparks debates and discussion.



**Glenn Rayp**  
Cluster Coordinator



Photo: WTO/ Flickr

### PUBLICATION

#### **Forging Their Path in the Brussels Bubble? Civil Society Resistance Within the Domestic Advisory Groups Created Under the EU Trade Agreements**

This journal article by Jan Orbie, Jamal Shahin and Diana Potjomkina in the *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* explores the growing academic and policy interest in civil society participation in the European Union's trade policy. They analyse civil society's engagement with the Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs)-consultation mechanisms established by the European Commission at the implementation stage of its free trade agreements. They show that DAGs are deeply contested and also provide a nuanced analysis of resistance with particular attention for divisions between business and non-business members.

### EVENT

#### **Bridging Policy and Research on FDI and Cities: Sustainability, Chinese Investment and the Latest Thinking on Mobility**

In June, we co-organised a Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Cities Forum, together with University of York and NEOMA Business School.

The event, held in Paris and centred around three panels, brought together researchers, academics, practitioners, and policy makers working on foreign investment into cities in an era where sustainability, China's emergence as a global investor in cities, and city mobility are increasingly put under the spotlight.

### PUBLICATION

#### **European Financial Law and the State-Finance Nexus: Sovereign Privileges or Market Discipline for Safe Public Debt?**

This journal article by Ad van Riet in *Finance and Society* (Cambridge University Press) examines how European financial regulation consistently gives governments privileged access to private investors, reflecting the anchor role assigned to sovereign securities as safe and liquid assets for the financial system, and the conflict of interest this leads to for governments - on the one hand, they are prudential regulators of financial risk-taking, on the other hand, they tend to overlook the financial sector's exposure to sovereign risk. He considers four theories of the state-finance nexus and their solutions to this conflict of interest.

### PRESENTATION

#### **The Design of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) of Trade Agreements**

In this presentation at the The European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR)'s *Joint Sessions of Workshops* in Toulouse, Simon Happersberger presented the paper authored by himself, Glenn Rayp, Nidhi Nagabhatla and Ruben Dewitte that investigates the design of EIAs of trade agreements, answering questions such as who conducts them and how, to what extent have trade actors incorporated what kind of environmental risks in trade agreements, and do EIAs converge or diverge?



## Regional Public Goods

# Nature, Climate and Health

The Nature, Climate and Health Cluster was particularly active in collaboration and cooperation with various UN entities in 2023, as our researchers co-authored reports for UNESCO and the FAO, and were involved in several side events at COP28 in Dubai and the UN 2023 Water Conference in New York. Addressing the climate crisis is a top priority for the UN, and for us too.

Our researchers spotlighted some major hotspots of 2023, such as mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the tragic floods in Libya, and themes such as seaweed cultivation and protection,

the effects on climate change on mental health, water conflict prevention, Arctic environmental governance, the geopolitics of energy, and the circular economy.

The breadth of our research underscores how intertwined the climate crisis is, and how deeply it flows into many aspects of society. It affects us all, and our cluster is doing our part.

**Nidhi Nagabhatla**  
Cluster Coordinator



Photo: Johan Scheerens

## REPORT

### Supporting Sustainable Mining Practices and Pathways in the Congo Region

This research report, co-authored by Nidhi Nagabhatla, emphasises the ongoing challenge of achieving sustainability in natural resource mining, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Central Africa.

It stresses the necessity for a widespread shift towards sustainability across the mining industry and governing bodies, with a focus on employing best practices to mitigate environmental and socio-economic impacts. The authors propose a strategic framework encompassing integrated approaches, regulatory norms, stakeholder involvement, and continuous collaboration with the scientific community.

## EVENT

### Multifaceted Impacts of Climate Change on Mental Health – Towards Integrated Climate Services

UNU-CRIS co-organised a COP28 side event with four UNU institutes (EHS, MERIT, IIGH and IAS), UNESCO, WHO, UNICEF and two NGOs to discuss the multifaceted impacts of climate change and related hazards on mental health and psychosocial well-being.

The participants stressed the need for support services to deal with the mental health impacts of climate change and reiterated the role of partnerships in accelerating climate action through collective agenda-setting and collaboration.

## SPECIAL ISSUE

### Water Conflict Prevention

This special issue in *Water (MDPI)*, edited by Nidhi Nagabhatla and David Katz, is dedicated to instruments and innovations in water policy intended to aid in the prevention of conflict over water resources.

While much of the academic literature and popular media coverage of water conflict focuses on the potential for acute and/or violent conflict, especially among competing nations, this Issue looks at conflict more broadly defined, including at the sub-national, regional, and international levels.

## BOOK CHAPTER

### The Geopolitics of Energy After Russia's War in Ukraine

This chapter by Thijs Van de Graaf in *Forging Europe's Leadership: Global Trends, Russian Aggression and the Risk of a Regressive World (FEPS)* provides an in-depth assessment of how Russia's war in Ukraine will impact the global energy agenda in the long term.

It examines how the conflict has reshaped the energy landscape and explores the emerging trends in energy geopolitics, and investigates the potential scenarios for the future of global energy politics.

## Regional Public Goods

# Digital Governance

In some ways, 2023 will be remembered as a year in which the digital was thrust into the public spotlight, as questions of how to best regulate and manage new and established technologies that have become part of the fabric of society were being asked louder than ever before.

The Digital Governance Cluster sought to play its part in answering these questions by engaging with the bodies and people making decisions. We were active at the United Nations Internet Governance Forum, taking part in a number of discussions and collaborating with

UNU-EGOV to represent UNU in major debates. We engaged with Microsoft on the sustainability of digital sovereignty in November and were heavily involved in the European Dialogue on Internet Governance in June.

Understanding the digital will be a major priority in the coming years, and our team is ready for the challenge.

**Jamal Shahin**  
Cluster Coordinator



Photo: Loey Felipe/United Nations Photo

## PUBLICATION

### The Age of Digital Interdependence? A Critical Discourse Analysis of EU, US and ASEAN Digital Strategies

This paper by Jamal Shahin and Orsolya Gulyás examines how, in recent years, digital policy has become a prominent topic in global policy debates, as evidenced by the ongoing discussions surrounding governmental/commercial surveillance and the building of 5G networks.

They analyse discourses found in US, EU, and ASEAN digital strategies, hypothesizing that economic agents' needs are given primacy over the needs of humans, leading to a discourse focusing on competition rather than cooperation, grounded in vertical power relations. Furthermore, they trace the evolution of these regional strategies, and show how they have evolved over time.

## PUBLICATION

### Roles in the Digital Space: Symbolic Interactionist Role Theory and Norms of Sovereignty

This working paper by Sophie Hoogenboom aims to demonstrate the usefulness of Symbolic Interactionist Role Theory in furthering our understanding of the way in which roles in the digital realm come about and the function of (digital) sovereignty in this process.

It argues for using central concepts of Symbolic Interactionist Role Theory: problematic situation, role-taking process, role-making process, and alter-casting as a conceptual scheme which can be used in empirical research to analyse the roles that specific actors are attempting to forge in relation to the digital realm, as well as the usage of the notion of (digital)-sovereignty therein.

## PUBLICATION

### Youth Participation at the Internet Governance Forum

This working paper by Nadia Tjahja and Carlos Fonseca addresses five themes of engagement that elaborate on how youth are being empowered and what barriers they face at the IGF: accessing the IGF, the youth voice, availability of resources, integration of youth activities, facilitators, and encouraging youth participation.

The authors propose six recommendations which will support a growing youth community at the IGF: autonomy within IGF spaces, integrating youth ideas, programmes for returning participants, educator and student participation, establishing an IGF database of resources, and changing funding barriers.

## AWARD

### Santander-CIDOB 35 Under 35

Nadia Tjahja, cluster co-coordinator, was included on the Santander-CIDOB 35 under 35, which acknowledges the work of 35 potential and consolidated minds of 35 or less years of age, as part of the fourth edition of the CIDOB Future Leaders Forum, organised by CIDOB with the support of Banco Santander.



# Capacity Building

Taking our research and expertise beyond the pages and into the minds of those bringing about change in the world.



Photo: Yannis Van Hecke/UNU-CRIS

# Visiting Researchers and Interns

At UNU-CRIS, we're proud of the dynamic and insightful research culture we've cultivated, and every year we make it one of our core missions to give both established and up-and-coming experts the chance to experience and contribute to it.

Our Visiting Research Fellowships and Internship programme attracts leading and promising researchers, giving them the opportunity to spend time at UNU-CRIS and exchange knowledge, ideas and experiences. In 2023, we welcomed 15 Visiting Research Fellows, bringing expertise from 13 countries, and helped 28 promising young researchers grow through our internship programme, from countries including Ethiopia, El Salvador, Colombia, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

Several of the internships were financed via the Flanders Trainee Programme, which gives students who obtained their diploma at an institution of secondary or higher education, financed or subsidised by the Flemish Community, the opportunity to work in a multilateral organisation.

**FLANDERS**  
Trainee  
Programme

## IN THEIR WORDS

As my six-month research internship is coming to an end, I look back on my time with UNU-CRIS with great fondness. Interning at this UN research institute has provided me with the opportunity to grow as a young researcher, working on an individual research project. At the same time, it has allowed me to be involved in the broader research activities of the institute through seminars, key events and monthly meetings, amid a welcoming and supportive multicultural team of experienced researchers. I am deeply grateful for the support I received from the Flanders Trainee Programme, through their generous grant and smooth collaboration.

**Hannah Grondelaers**  
Research Intern

UNU-CRIS has provided me with various avenues to learn, network, and share my interdisciplinary expertise. My campus visit in September was very productive as a guest faculty for the Seasonal School on the 'Climate Change-Migration-Health' nexus organized by Ghent University and UNU-CRIS where I had the great opportunity to meet the Director, Cluster Lead for Health, Belgian researchers, and other global experts. During my term, I have submitted two book chapters for the "Springer- United Nations University Series on Regionalism" and also contributed to a T20 Policy brief on 'Water Security' for the upcoming G20 Summit 2024 in Brazil.

**Vijay Kumar Chattu**  
Visiting Research Fellow

# Short Training Programmes

Training the next generation of researchers, policymakers, and changemakers is a core mission of UNU-CRIS. In 2023, we organised five major training programmes, giving the opportunity to more than 120 of tomorrow's bright minds to expand their expertise, broaden their perspectives, and build their international networks.

## Third Summer School on Comparative Regionalism: Regionalism and Crisis Mitigation

Surabaya, Indonesia | 5 - 10 June

Partners: Universitas Airlangga and Maqsut Narikbayev University

## Eleventh Doctoral School on Latin American, European and Comparative Regionalism

Quito, Ecuador | 10 - 14 July

Partners: Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar and FLACSO-Argentina

## The Climate, Migration & Health Nexus: Mechanisms of Mitigation, Adaptation & Loss and Damage

Gent, Belgium | 18 - 22 September

Partners: UGent, University of Antwerp and Vrije Universiteit Brussel

## Decolonial and Postcolonial Perspectives on (the) Eastern (of) Europe

Online | 17 - 20 October

Partners: UGent, Euroglot and ULB

## School of Modern Diplomacy

Online | September - December (weekly)

Partners: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of Ghana and the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna



# PhD Programme

As part of our partnerships with Ghent University and the VUB, UNU-CRIS hosts PhD candidates from both universities throughout their doctoral journey. In 2023, five of our PhD Fellows defended their theses, completing this chapter of their career.

## Lived Citizenship of Ger Residents in Ulaanbaatar : A Socio-Spatial Understanding of Social Inequality, Belonging, Aspirations and Social Work

Bayartsetseg Terbish (UGent)

Promoters: Griet Roets and Ine Lietaert



## Foreign Policy Onstage: Identities and Affect in Russian and EU Cultural Diplomacy in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus

Domenico Valenza (UGent)

Promoters: Fabienne Bossuyt and Olga Burlyuk



## Remaining Displaced: Resettlement Processes, Marginality and Coping Strategies Among Internally Displaced Persons in Urban Ethiopia

Dereje Regasa (UGent)

Promoter: Ine Lietaert



## Re-Making It Here: Returnees and Non-state Actors in the (European) Externalisation of Return Migration Management in the Gambia

Rossella Marino (UGent)

Promoters: Ine Lietaert and Joris Schapendonk



## Towards Transformative Forest Politics? Agency, Discourse and (Counter)Hegemony in the European Union's External Anti-deforestation Policies

Elke Verhaeghe (UGent)

Promoter: Jan Orbie





Outreach and Engagement

# Global Impact

From Bruges to the world - our global footprint.



Photo: Airlangga University



# Policy Engagement with the UN, Regional Organisations and Governments

Influencing and informing policy, and those that make it, are core components of our mandate and strategy. In this section, you will find some selected highlights of our engagement with the various levels of governance. The full account of our outreach in 2023 can be found on our website.

## PUBLICATION

### The United Nations World Water Development Report 2023: Partnerships and Cooperation for Water

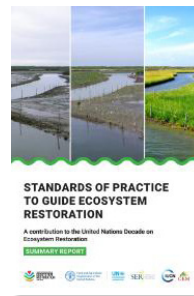
Philippe De Lombaerde, Nidhi Nagabhatla and Sisir Bhandari contributed to the World Water Development Report 2023, which explores how enhancing positive and meaningful cooperation amongst the water, sanitation and broader 'development' communities is required to accelerate progress, and analyses how the water and sanitation community can internally collaborate more effectively. They co-authored four chapters, including Water Supply and Sanitation for Human Settlements (Chapter 4), Health (Chapter 6), Regional Perspectives (Chapter 8), and Governance: A 'Whole-of-Society' Approach (Chapter 13).



## PUBLICATION

### Standards of Practice to Guide Ecosystem Restoration: A Contribution to the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration

We were a collaborating partner of an inter-agency report led by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), SER and IUCN CEM, which outlines Standards of practice to guide ecosystem restoration for the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030.



## EVENT

### COP28 Side Events

A UNU-CRIS delegation was in Dubai for COP28 in December, taking part in seven side events. COP28 was unique in that it marks the conclusion of the first-ever global stocktake — the process for the world to assess our collective progress on the goals of the Paris Agreement. Together with a range of collaborators, including other UNU institutes, the Belgian Government, the IOM, Health Canada, and UNFCC, among others, the events touched upon some key themes such as the effects of climate change on mental health, circularity, enhancing resilience, youth, disaster risk reduction and ecosystem restoration.



## PUBLICATION

### Building Climate Resilience: Lessons from the 2021 Floods in Western Europe

In May, we launched the final report from our joint project with UNU-MERIT and UNU-EHS on the lessons learned from the devastating 2021 floods in Western Europe, funded by the German Government. Based on the research and outcomes of the Flood Knowledge summit held in July 2022, the UNU Climate Resilience Initiative identified five key areas for further research and action to address risks and promote climate resilience. This report outlined the need for better understanding of current and future risks, strengthening emergency response preparedness and coordination, insuring losses, strengthening risk governance, and developing transformative recovery pathways from extreme flood events.

### 15 Policy Recommendations for the Climate-Health Nexus

Produced by four researchers from the UNU Climate Resilience Initiative, including Nidhi Nagabhatla, a trio of policy briefs give backgrounders on three main pillars of the climate-health intersection followed by key recommendations for policymakers.

Policy Brief 1

Multiple and disaggregated impacts

Policy Brief 2

Risk factors, vulnerabilities and inequalities

Policy Brief 3

Opportunities, solutions and future generations





Photo: European Parliament

#### PRESENTATION

### The African Political Integration Process and Implications on Relations with the European Union

Frank Mattheis, Dimpho Deleglise and Ueli Staeger presented their study *African Union: The African Political Integration Process and Its Impact on EU-AU Relations in the Field of Foreign and Security Policy* to the European Parliament in May. The report, which was requested by the AFET Commission, recommended that the EU adapts its funding arrangements, cooperation formats, and multilateral engagement to remain in tune with the AU, allowing the European Parliament to add specific value through parliamentary diplomacy.

#### EVENT

### European Week of Regions and Cities

We co-organised two events for the European Week of Regions and Cities in October. The first, *European Capitals of Culture: How to Stand the Test of Time*, explored how to create management bodies for major cultural projects. The second, *Do You Know the City You Live In?*, discussed the elements that make up a city and how to create green cities.

#### AWARD

### Universal Health Coverage Day Champion

Ana B. Amaya was identified as a Universal Health Coverage Day Champion as part of their *Health For All: Time for Action* campaign, which advocates for ensuring equitable access to essential health services without financial burden—a right for everyone, not a privilege.

#### PUBLICATION

### Mangroves for Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction

Padmi Ranasinghe authored a case study on Sri Lanka for *International Applications of Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction in Coastal Areas*, commissioned by the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) of the People's Republic of China and IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature).

#### EVENT

### Side Events at the UN 2023 Water Conference

We co-organised seven side events at the 2023 *Water Conference*, held at UN Headquarters in New York in March, looking at the relationship between and role of water in sustainable development, mental health resilience, youth inclusive water governance, women in the water action decade, indigenous ecological knowledge, and the circular economy.

#### PROJECT

### Developing Indicators for the Organisation of East Caribbean States

Philippe De Lombaerde and Fredrik Söderbaum were part of a team that created a new set of integration indicators in a project commissioned by the OECS.

#### APPOINTMENT

### Regional Plan to Address Migration in South America

Leiza Brumat was appointed as a senior consultant for the International Organization for Migration's project *Development of a Regional Plan to Address Migration in South America*. The project aims to strengthen regional cooperation and articulation in migration management for safe, orderly, and regular migration in South America.

#### EVENT

### Policy and the Media

Trisha Meyer spoke at a roundtable on *Mediawijze beleidsaanbevelingen* organised by Mediawijs in preparation of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

#### EVENT

### UN Internet Governance Forum

The Digital Governance Cluster, represented by Jamal Shahin, Nadia Tjahja, Orsolya Gulyas, Stephanie Arnold and Sophie Hoogenboom, took part in four sessions at the *Internet Governance Forum* in Tokyo in October. Jamal Shahin and Nadia Tjahja also co-organised the 11th Annual Global Internet Governance Academic Network (GigaNet) Symposium as a pre-event to the IGF. On the final day of the IGF, UNU-CRIS and UNU-EGOV hosted a joint session on *Regional Perspectives on Digital Governance*, featuring a stellar panel including Mactar Seck, the Chief of Section – Innovation and Technology at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA).



Photo: IGF/Flickr

## OUTREACH

### Engaging with Governments

Philomena Murray submitted a text to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry into Australia's Human Rights Framework.

UNU-CRIS co-organised a Policy-Research Dialogue on EU-LAC relations with the Permanent Representation of Spain to the European Union.

Lelio Iapadre co-authored a report on external economic policy for the Government of Italy.

Ueli Staeger co-authored a report on global challenges for Switzerland.

Ikboljon Qoraboyev gave a presentation for the East Java Government's Agency for Research and Innovation.

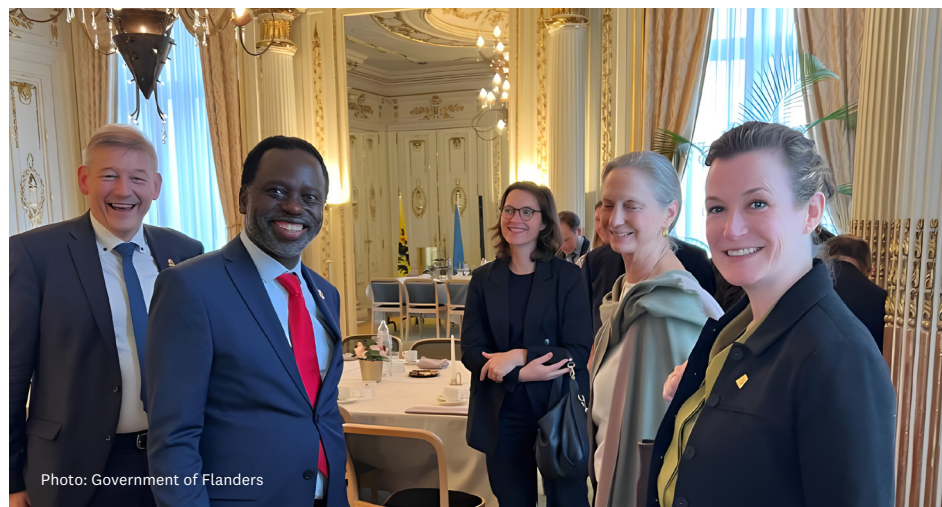


Photo: Government of Flanders

## EVENT

### Meeting of the UNU Rector with the Government of Flanders

In October, UNU Rector Tshilidzi Marwala, UNU Executive Officer Sabine Becker-Thierry, Philippe De Lombaerde, Glenn Rayp, Anthony Antoine and Andrew Dunn met with Julie Bynens (Secretary-General of Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office), Johan Hanssens (Secretary-General of the Flemish Department of Economy, Science and Innovation) and Freddy Evens (Director of the Executive Office of Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office) at the Errera House in Brussels.

Over a working lunch, the group discussed the work of the United Nations University, the role of UNU-CRIS in the Flemish research architecture, the priorities of the United Nations, and how Flanders is positioning itself as a hub of knowledge and innovation in Europe.

# Policy Briefs

## Youth Participation at the Internet Governance Forum

Nadia Tjahja and Carlos Fonseca

## Filling the Void: Engaging Indigenous Peoples in Arctic Environmental Governance

Natalia Skripnikova, Nidhi Nagabhatla and Nancy Doubleday

## One Year Later: What Lessons Should Policymakers and Scholars From the EU Draw From Russia's Invasion of Ukraine?

Fabienne Bossuyt

## La Unión Europea: ¿Qué papel en la Economía mundial?

Sven Van Kerckhoven and Victoria Hernandez

## Transformaciones y desafíos de la gobernanza social europea ante las crisis

Laura Gómez Urquijo

## Striking a Balance: Wild Stock Protection and the Future of Our Seaweed Industries

Elizabeth J. Cottier-Cook, Phaik-Eem Lim, Saul Mallinson, Nurulafifah Yahya, Sze-Wan Poong, Joanna Wilbraham, Nidhi Nagabhatla and Juliet Brodie

## Interregional Human Rights Cooperation Between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean: Challenges and Opportunities

Maria Martins

## Les multilatéralismes latino-américains: relance ou recomposition?

Kevin Parthenay

L'Année politique en Amérique latine, Etudes du CERI

## From the Green Deal to Repower EU: What About the EU's Southern Fossil Gas Suppliers?

Reinhilde Bouckaert

Brussels: FEPS

## “Becoming a ‘Spacifier’ – Why the European Union Needs a ‘Global Spaces’ Strategy and What It Could Look Like

Simon Schunz

Bruges: College of Europe





## Outreach and Engagement

# Local Impact

Change begins at home - how we brought the world to Flanders.



Photo: Stad Brugge

## AWARD

### UNU-CRIS Awarded 'Sustainability Hero' by the City of Bruges

We were recognised as one of five Sustainability Heroes for 2023 by the city of Bruges, in a ceremony hosted by Mayor Dirk De fauw at the Bruges City Hall on 12 September.

The awards cover five pillars – Planet, Partnerships, People, Prosperity and Peace – highlighting local sustainability initiatives. UNU-CRIS was awarded the 'Peace' pillar for its contribution to peace through research, training and impactful policy advice. Our researchers work to improve governance in various policy areas and, in doing so, set the necessary peaceful conditions for a sustainable future.

In giving the award, Mayor De fauw highlighted the evaluation of Bruges' SDG progress, carried out by UNU-CRIS researchers, using the SDG Monitor. This report provided helpful feedback on the city's SDG initiatives and helped the city to achieve a positive final evaluation in the SDG Pioneer City Programme.



## PUBLICATION

### SDG Report of the Flemish Provinces, Cities and Municipalities

UNU-CRIS was one of the four contributing organisations to the Flemish SDG Subnational Voluntary Review, together with the VVSG, the Vereniging Vlaamse Provincies (VVP), and IDEA Consult. The report discusses how Flemish provinces, cities and municipalities deploy the 2030 Agenda as a strategic and moral framework for their policies and gives an understanding of the achievement of the 17 SDGs through an extensive data analysis and practical examples. Additionally, the report gives recommendations on how local, provincial and other governments can promote the local anchoring and implementation of the SDGs.

## SDG report

of the Flemish provinces,  
cities and municipalities.





#### EVENT

### Paradiplomacy Scholars Forum

In September we co-organised the *Paradiplomacy Scholars Forum*, an initiative together with the University of Łódź, Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas and Universidad Iberoamericana (Mexico), a first-of-its-kind meeting that focused on the research topic of international activities of regions and cities.

The forum aimed to be the starting point of a formalised network of scholars working in the field of paradiplomacy, an area of which Flanders is a leader and a central focus of study.

#### EVENT

### Introduction to the European Union

In collaboration with Europa Direct West-Vlaanderen and the Grootseminarie, we organised two sessions giving an introduction to the European Union on 23 January and 21 March. In October, we organised a similar session for the Koninklijke Gidsenbond van Brugge en West-Vlaanderen.

#### PUBLICATION

### Urban Growth in Belgium

In this publication in *The Annals of Regional Science (Springer)*, Samuel Standaert and his co-authors take advantage of a new data set to examine urban growth in Belgium from 1880 to 1970 using unit root tests to check random growth in the long term.



#### LECTURE

### The United Nations and the Sustainable Development Goals

On 22 February and 1 March, Anthony Antoine, Executive Director of the Brussels School of Governance, delivered a guest lecture at the Bruges campus of the University College Howest, in which he explained the working of the United Nations and its constituting bodies, including UNU, and provided the students with an overview of the Sustainable Development Goals.

#### PUBLICATION

### Just Transition in Belgium: Concepts, Issues at Stake, and Policy Levers

Charlotte Scheerens co-authored a report, commissioned by the High Committee for a Just Transition for the Belgian Federal Minister for Climate, Environment, Sustainable Development and Green Deal.

The report gives an overview of current initiatives and possible pathways for a more Just and Sustainable future in Belgium.

#### EVENTS

### Away Days

We hosted Away Days for two different organisations in 2023. In October, we welcomed researchers from the University of Amsterdam for their meeting *Towards a Critical Area Studies – Unconference on Sustainable Knowledge Production and Rethinking the University*. In November, we welcomed the Directorate-General for Bilateral Affairs of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a number of strategic sessions.

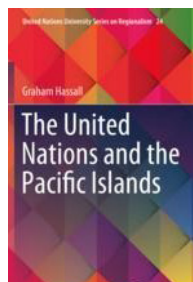




## Scholarly Output

# UNU Series on Regionalism

In this section we highlight our Series on Regionalism, publications in refereed journals, and our Working Paper series. For all other publications, please visit our website.

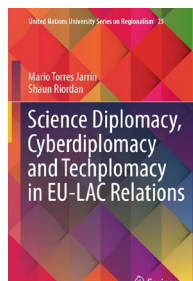


### The United Nations and the Pacific Islands

Graham Hassall

United Nations University Series on Regionalism, Volume 24

This book examines the relationship between the United Nations Organization and the small states of the Pacific islands, provide a profound context to Pacific-UN engagement, and includes contributions to comparative literature on small states in the age of globalisation.

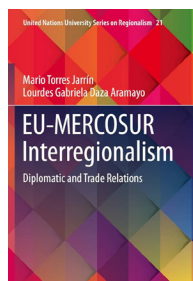


### Science Diplomacy, Cyberdiplomacy and Techplomacy in EU-LAC Relations

Mario Torres Jarrin and Shaun Riordan

United Nations University Series on Regionalism, Volume 25

This book analyses the relationship between science, cyberspace, technology and diplomacy in an intellectually rigorous way, explores how the EU and the CELAC can enhance collaboration through new areas of science, and offers policy proposals for strengthening science diplomacy post-COVID-19 in an interregional context.



### EU-MERCOSUR Interregionalism – Diplomatic and Trade Relations

Mario Torres Jarrin and Lourdes Gabriela Daza Aramayo

United Nations University Series on Regionalism, Volume 21

This book provides an exhaustive analysis of the EU-MERCOSUR relations at all levels, discusses impacts of Brexit, the pandemic and the rise of new players on EU-MERCOSUR relations, and comprehensively discusses legal and interregional trade aspects in terms of the 2019 political agreement

## Scholarly Output

# Publications in Refereed Journals

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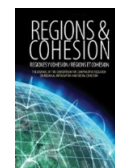
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## Scholarly Output

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Philippe De Lombaerde – Director  
Andrew Dunn – Policy and Communications Officer  
Pascale Vantorre – Management Assistant  
Noël Neven – Financial and Administrative Officer  
Asjela Masovic – Administrative Assistant

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Samuel Standaert | Ine Lietaert | Glenn Rayp | Jamal Shahin | Nidhi Nagabhatla | Frank Mattheis

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Rezart Hoxhaj | Charlotte Scheerens

### PhD Fellows (30)

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### Associate Research Fellows (32)

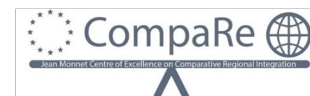
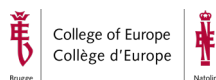
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The United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) is a research and training institute of the United Nations University.

We produce interdisciplinary research on policy challenges requiring cross-border and multi-level governance and cooperation.

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