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UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY

UNU-CRIS

Institute on Comparative
Regional Integration Studies

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UNU-CRIS focuses on new patterns of regional and global cooperation and governance. Through its research activities it will connect scholarly knowledge with policy-making, aiming to contribute to the creation and maintenance of peace and stability.

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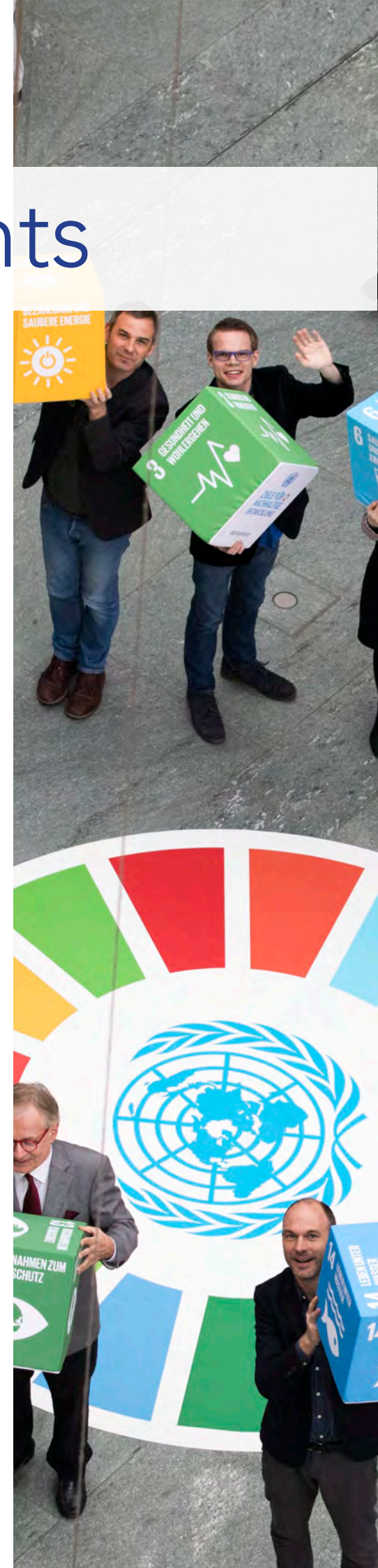
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UNU-CRIS can count on the continuing support of:



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Executive Summary

UNU-CRIS focuses on the provision of global and regional public goods, and on processes and consequences of intra- and inter-regional integration. The Institute aims to generate policy-relevant knowledge about new patterns of governance and cooperation, and build capacity on a global and regional level. UNU-CRIS acts as a resource for the United Nations system, with strong links to other United Nations bodies dealing with the provision and management of international and regional public goods.

The Institute aspires to be a hub of academic excellence, creating synergies between its two partner universities and developing into an active and international center of research focused on the aims and activities of the United Nations. UNU-CRIS focuses its research on the search for new and stable patterns of governance in a variety of policy fields, including environmental policy, trade, economic policies and migration, in a regional and global context. It considers the tensions between globalization and regionalization, assesses the potential that regionalization has for the creation of peace and stability, and explores the evolving relationship between globalization, nation-statehood and democracy.

This Strategic Plan details the mission and vision of UNU-CRIS, its current initiatives and goals as well as those for the medium-term future. It describes how the vision of UNU-CRIS will be achieved through a five-year strategic plan during the period 2017-2021. The overarching plan is broken down into smaller actions, targets and expected outcomes.

The UNU-CRIS Strategic Plan is organized as follows: Section 1 of this document provides the background to the Strategic Plan. The vision and mission of UNU-CRIS is presented in Section 2. Section 3 discusses the strategic objectives for the period 2017-2021. Section 4 lays out the implementation strategy and lists preliminary key performance indicators as well as a more detailed timeline.

1. Background

The Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) came into being in Bruges in 2001. Working closely with the College of Europe, the institute focused on processes of regional integration and their consequences for (global) governance and society.

UNU-CRIS' unique selling point is the leading research expertise it offers on the substantive topic of regional integration processes and new patterns of stable regional and global governance. The Institute stands out in the field of global public policy analysis and benefits from its strategic location close to the European Union's (EU) headquarters in Brussels.

Furthermore, UNU-CRIS has a research focus not only on states and developments within states, but also on the contributions that non-state actors make towards the provision of global and regional public goods. This enables the Institute to undertake policy analysis and offer advice on a variety of levels to a range of different actors, including the United Nations and the EU.

Following a competitive call by the Flemish Government to find a host university for UNU-CRIS in October 2016 a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the United Nations University (UNU), the Government of Flanders, Ghent University (UGent) and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) that initiates a new phase for UNU-CRIS. Together with UGent and VUB (the Partnership), UNU-CRIS' research will benefit from the know-how, expertise and networks of these universities. From a financial point of view, the partnership will also offer UNU-CRIS clear and sustainable opportunities for growth. Further, the continued presence of UNU-CRIS in Bruges will help the city to emerge as a global hub for internationally oriented academic exchange.

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a grey blazer, is speaking at a wooden podium. A blue microphone with the UN logo is in front of her. The background shows a blue UN flag and a red flag.

2. Vision and Mission of UNU-CRIS

2.1. Vision

UNU-CRIS seeks to develop into a true 'center of academic excellence' in addressing the seminal challenges of regional governance and integration and the search for new and stable patterns of global governance. The Institute aspires to be internationally recognized for the quality and impact of its research. It aims to produce a pool of relevant research from universities worldwide including with its primary regional partner universities, UGent and VUB.

2.2. Mission

UNU-CRIS focuses on new patterns of regional and global cooperation and governance. Through its research activities it will connect scholarly knowledge with policy-making, aiming to contribute to the creation and maintenance of peace and stability.

The Institute will generate policy-relevant knowledge about new forms of governance and cooperation on the regional and global level, about patterns of collective action and decision-making, benefitting from the experience of European integration and the role of the EU as a regional actor in the global community.

UNU-CRIS focuses on issues of imminent concern to the United Nations, such as the 2030 Development Agenda and the challenges arising from new and evolving peace, security, economic and environmental developments regionally and globally. On these issues, the Institute will develop solutions based on research on new patterns of collective action and regional governance.

The Institute endeavors to pair academic excellence with policy-relevant research in these domains.

3. Strategic Objectives

During the period of 2017-2021, UNU-CRIS will initiate programs focused on medium-term challenges – where a 'critical gap' exists in terms of policy expertise on an emergent theme of importance – as well as on immediate policy challenges related to the activities and work of the United Nations. Its programs will primarily focus on the provision of regional and global public goods, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), on how to prevent and combat violent conflict, and on emerging forms of regional and global governance that seek to effectively address such challenges.

UNU-CRIS will engage with salient questions of global and regional governance, focusing on the competing tensions between integration and disintegration, and centralization and fragmentation. More specifically, it will explore how European integration and the provision of regional public goods – among them sound patterns of economic governance, health policies, mitigation of environmental degradation and combatting the push and pull factors of migration flows – can be enhanced and strengthened.

UNU-CRIS will also assess regional integration initiatives beyond the European context such as ASEAN, ECOWAS and MERCOSUR (as well as newer regional integration schemes) to develop strategic advice on how to provide 'public goods' such as human well-being, safety and security by combatting, among other things, the risk of violent conflict, of poverty and food scarcity. Research will explicitly be directed towards the role and potential of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in such areas.

The recently launched cooperative agreement between UGent, VUB and UNU-CRIS will bring distinct benefits for all three partners. Working in collaboration will expand the strategic research bases in themes that are of a mutual interest to all, including collective action and decision-making in terms of the provision of global, regional and local public goods, and major challenges of global public policy in the early 21st century – such as the longstanding and competitive tensions in the relationship between global and regional governance. As a result, all three partners to the agreement are determined to ensure the success of this new enterprise. For UGent and VUB an association with the UN brand will also enhance their access to, and potential effect on, international academic and policy-making circles.

In collaboration with academics from its two partner universities, UNU-CRIS aspires to use the unique vantage point it enjoys as a member of the United Nations system and its geographical situation close to the main institutions of the EU, while maintaining an uncompromising commitment to independent and high-quality academic analysis.

The strategic objectives of UNU-CRIS during 2017-2021 can be summarized as follows:

- Explore patterns of public goods provision and management at the regional and global level;
- Assess how regional integration agendas impact on policymaking, in the context of European integration and beyond;
- Analyze the role of regionalization processes for the attainment of the SDGs;
- Provide policy support focused on peace and stability to public institutions at various levels of governance;
- Explore possibilities for new patterns of collective action, decision-making and stable governance on the regional and global level;
- Establish UNU-CRIS as a sustainably-financed Institute.

These goals will be further elaborated upon in the next section.



4. Strategy

UNU-CRIS, will proceed on four fronts:

- Thorough policy-relevant **research programs** and related projects concerning new patterns of regional and global collaboration and governance;
- **Training and capacity-building** of policy-makers and policy-shapers through teaching and training programs;
- **Networking** within the partnership, at 'Brussels-level' and within the UN and UNU;
- **Communication and outreach** to civil society and public awareness building through open lectures and debates, and through the use of electronic and social media.

4.1. Research Programs

For the past 15 years, the focus of UNU-CRIS has been on comparative regional integration studies. UNU-CRIS will build on the legacy and networks it has created so far, while shifting the focus more towards the provision of global and regional public goods and new patterns of stable governance.

The programmatic shift of UNU-CRIS to the analysis of public goods provision and management at the regional and global level – from a focus on comparative regional integration – is due to the fact that the expertise of the partnership is largely centered on a) European integration and b) the search for new patterns of stable regional and global cooperation and governance. This expertise will help UNU-CRIS to successfully expand its scope of research, benefitting more explicitly from its geographical location close to several main institutions of the EU, while being embedded explicitly as an institution within the United Nations and UNU.

Projects will be organized in the following – evolving – program areas:

1. The Role of Regions in Global Governance

This research cluster will encompass projects focused on the role of regional organizations and institutions, including the EU, in global governance and in the United Nations, patterns of regional integration (including measures to assess the extent and scope of integration) and links between regional integration processes and global peace and stability.

How do regional organizations and institutions, including the EU, contribute to the provision and management of global public goods? Projects in this program area will focus on how regional institutions and integration can complement global governance, how international relations are influenced by regionalization processes, and on the role of the EU and other regional organizations in international organizations, including the United Nations. In this program area, moreover, a database will be renewed – based on an earlier collection of data provided by UNU-CRIS – on indicators of regional institutions and integration (Regional Integration Knowledge System – RIKS) and made available publicly on the UNU-CRIS website. Finally, this program area focuses on the analysis of a wide range of actors in processes of (global) decision-making and governance.

2. The United Nations and Regional Public Goods

This research area focuses on how regions help to provide public goods, including the United Nations' SDGs. A main focus is on the role of regional integration in the attainment of peace, stability and human well-being. It also continues the salient work of the earlier focus of UNU-CRIS in terms of the study of comparative regional integration.

How do regions contribute to the provision and management of public goods, including the SDGs? This research area focuses on tensions between globalization, nation-statehood and democracy and explores the role that regional organizations and integration processes can play in contributing to the achievement and maintenance of peace and stability. Projects in the program area will also focus on push and pull factors of migration, the role of the rule of law and regulatory instruments in terms of enhancing human security and well-being, notably at the regional level.

3. Changing Patterns of Regional and Global Governance

This program area focuses on the search for new patterns of regional and global governance. Projects in this research area take into account a variety of actors, from states and intergovernmental organizations to non-governmental organizations and civil society actors, in the analysis of adapted patterns of regional and global collective action and decision-making.

How are decisions made at the regional and global level as regards collaboration and collective action in areas such as energy and climate governance, trade policies and economic stability? In this thematic area, projects will focus on changing patterns of decision-making at the regional and global level in different policy areas, including environmental protection, migration policies, trade, energy governance and measures to improve conditions for peace and stability. It explores how, in changing circumstances at the regional and global level, effective and legitimate patterns of governance can be achieved and implemented.

4.2. Teaching and Capacity-Building Activities

a) Training

UNU-CRIS will provide policy support to public institutions at all levels of government — sub-national, national, regional and global. Bruges, and by extension Flanders and Belgium, will develop a reputation as a center of global expertise addressing salient political issues in the management of regional and global public goods amidst the persistent tensions between globalization, democracy and nation-statehood.

UNU-CRIS will target both the governmental and international level through policy briefs and policy-oriented studies, while organizing, at least once per year, training sessions on the outcomes of one of the research topics described above (section 4.1).

b) Academic Capacity Building

UNU-CRIS will train researchers and young scholars in areas relevant to the work programs of the Institute, through lectures, seminars and workshops. The Institute also offers possibilities for visiting researchers, trainees and PhD students to stay at the Institute for a period ranging from a few weeks to several months.

UNU-CRIS will conduct selected activities, including the training of students and young scholars using tools such as simulation games that can be played in classroom settings, and producing online lectures based on the research conducted at UNU-CRIS. Moreover, UNU-CRIS may offer summer schools, locally or in specific locations, as well as individual modules to existing teaching programs.

4.3. Networking

a) UNU-CRIS as a catalyzer for research within the partnership

Knowledge can be shared, nurtured and expanded through interaction with colleagues and other researchers within and across academic disciplines between UNU-CRIS, UGent and VUB. Synergies between UNU-CRIS and its partners can notably be expected in terms of research concerned with regionalism and the provision of global, regional, national and local public goods.

Both partner universities have research centers focusing on such topics, including VUB's Institute for European Studies (IES) and its Department of Applied Economics (APEC), UGent's Centre for Global Studies (GCGS), the Centre for the Social Study of Migration and Refugees (CESSMIR), the Conflict Research Group (CRG), the Ghent Institute for International Studies (GIIS) and the Centre for EU Studies (CEUS). Together – and coordinated by UNU-CRIS – they can form a research cluster with the potential to assume a prominent role academically that considers new and effective styles of governance.

b) Networking at 'Brussels'-level

From its location in Bruges, Belgium, UNU-CRIS works in partnership with institutes and initiatives throughout the world concerned with issues of integration, governance, stability and cooperation. It has the added advantage to be close to other UN agencies in Belgium, and to the main institutions of the EU (the European Commission, the European Council, the Council of the EU, the European Parliament and the European External Action Service) with which it aims to be actively in contact. Brussels is also an ideal place to pursue informal networking ventures such as lunchtime meetings with high-level operatives of the European institutions, think tanks, NGOs and other interested parties. Such initiatives provide a very good basis from which to build EU-UN policy links.

c) Networking within UNU

Due to the focus of UNU-CRIS on the provision and management of global and regional public goods, the Institute expects to foster strong links with several United Nations entities and to establish close ties with other UNU institutes (e.g., with UNU-GCM in Barcelona, UNU-MERIT in Maastricht, or through the UNU Migration Network).

4.4. Communication and Outreach

a) Communications

UNU-CRIS aims to strengthen efforts to ensure that the findings generated by its research and its researchers are increasingly 'visible' and accessible. In accordance with UNU's strategic vision, UNU-CRIS will endeavor to have its research published in high-quality international peer-reviewed journals and by highly ranked publishing houses. It will reduce the overall number of academic outputs in favor of fewer, but more high-impact, publications. UNU-CRIS will also encourage its researchers and experts to actively seek out key policy circles and to generate greater awareness of UNU's policy development capacities, while offering evidence, insight, knowledge and individual expertise to policy-makers.

The groups UNU-CRIS will primarily target throughout 2017-2021 are:

1) **United Nations system representatives:** The United Nations system has always been, and will remain, a target public for UNU efforts. UNU-CRIS communications will place an increased emphasis on this public given UNU's re-doubled focus on producing policy relevant research. Among the key players the Institute aims to communicate/collaborate with are the UNDP, UNHCR, DPKO, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

2) **Advocates:** To affect policy, it is important to focus efforts on change makers outside government who effect change at the local/grassroots level. NGOs, activist groups, and other organizations need data and research as proof points for their campaigns. UNU-CRIS communications will target these groups regionally and nationally as well as beyond to help effect change from the grassroots level, including on initiatives aimed at regional peace and stability.

3) **Influencers:** UNU-CRIS will actively engage with appropriate influencers, such as current donors, Advisory Committee members and academic partners who can offer extensive personal networks to increase the impact of its work and expand its reputation locally, regionally and globally.

b) Outreach

UNU-CRIS aspires to enhance its ties and interaction with the Flemish Community by providing policy-oriented research findings on the scope and activities of the United Nations and on new methods of regional and global governance, to various members of the political establishment. UNU-CRIS seeks the transmission of its research findings to as broad an audience as possible. To this end UNU-CRIS will launch initiatives to increase the common knowledge of the United Nations in general and, more specifically, of its own research. It will issue a bi-monthly newsletter. It will also actively target younger audiences through talks at (high)schools, colleges and universities, and the development of interactive media mediums.

UNU-CRIS will also team up with local civil society groups in Bruges, Ghent and Brussels to enhance visibility and improve knowledge of UNU-CRIS related research.

4.6. Governance

In accomplishing its goals UNU-CRIS, in accordance with UNU's strategic plan, will welcome strategic guidance and support from the UNU rectorate, including strategic support to define benchmarks in research excellence, entrepreneurship, management and planning.

UNU-CRIS has an Advisory Committee, composed of a chair, a member appointed by the Flemish government and additional academic experts. The Committee provides active guidance and support, including on management issues and also in championing UNU research within its members' own networks of expertise.

The Committee continuously supports the UNU-CRIS director in identifying new ways of applying UNU research expertise to emerging inhibitors of stable regional and global governance. UNU-CRIS will discuss with its Advisory Committee fundraising and publication benchmarks in the framework of its annual meeting – its targets will reflect an entrepreneurial spirit and be sufficiently ambitious in scope. Overall, the UNU-CRIS Advisory Committee will play an important role in monitoring the quality of work emanating from the Institute's research programs.

4.7. Targets and Key Performance Indicators

Taking into account performance expectations from both UNU as well as the Flemish Government, preliminary key performance indicators (KPIs) have been defined for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2017-2021 for the full five-year span. The KPIs will be further defined and monitored in coordination with the Advisory Committee.

a) Research Quality

- Academic publications: Based on the synergies created with its two partner universities and its associate fellows, UNU-CRIS will seek to publish at least 10 publications per year in highly ranked peer-reviewed journals (measured based on the journals' impact factors). At least five of these publications will be by UNU-CRIS resident staff. These publications will clearly mention the UNU-CRIS affiliation. It also aspires to publish, in collaboration with the Partnership, at least four books per year with internationally renowned publishing houses.
- Hosting of Visiting Researchers: At least two well-known international academics to be hosted on average per year as visiting researchers at UNU-CRIS for a period of minimally three months.
- Best Thesis Award: A global best thesis award to be offered annually for a thesis that considers in an innovative way challenges to regional and global peace and stability and the work of the United Nations.
- Co-organization of at least two major international conferences in the five-year time span.
- Ensuring UNU's involvement in research applications by holding at least two sessions focused on research grant acquisition annually at UNU-CRIS.
- Organization of at least 20 joint partnership research seminars and colloquia to be held at the premises of UNU-CRIS per year.

b) Policy impact

- Active participation by UNU-CRIS members in at least five policy expert groups and at least three policy advisory committees.
- At least two major announcements to be made annually on the value, relevance and impact of the work of UNU / UNU-CRIS to audiences in the form of policy briefs on the UNU-CRIS webpage (the impact of which will be measured by the number of downloads); b) at least five UNU-related presentations for stakeholders including policy think tanks and civil society organizations annually; c) outcomes to be communicated at least five times per year in local or international media; d) the UNU-CRIS webpage to be actively maintained and kept up-to-date at all times e) at least one major initiative to be undertaken on a yearly basis to strengthen ties with another UNU institute.
- Publication of at least ten UNU-CRIS working papers per year, focusing on topics that are relevant to the Institute's program areas.
- Development of the RIKS database, providing indicators of regional integration and organization, to be made available online.
- Publication of at least 10 UNU-CRIS working papers per year on the UNU-CRIS website.
- Publication of a bi-monthly UNU-CRIS newsletter.

c) Relevance to the United Nations and other Key Players

- Service to the United Nations System: Fostering cross-UNU cooperation; research output to be provided to UN channels in the form of minimally five policy briefs per year; organization of EU/UN policy-link talks in Brussels; interactive InfoQuiz on UN/UNU; organization of UNU-CRIS – UNU coordination meetings.
- Service to Flemish Government/community: At least one meeting per year with the Department of Economy, Science and Innovation (EWI) of the Flemish Government and other interested Flemish parties, where the UNU-CRIS' annual report is presented; organization of at least two UNU talks; organization of high-level lectures on the UN; joint organization of talks with local civil society organizations; at least two presentations annually on UN/UNU for local schools; improvement of visibility and accessibility of UNU-CRIS premises.

d) Financial Sustainability

- Grant acquisition: To match the contributions by the Flemish Government, UNU-CRIS aspires to attract external research funding through open and competitive financing channels of 25% of the Institute's annual core funding (on average over the five-year time span).

e) Capacity-Building

- MA/PhD education: At least one online simulation game aimed at graduate or post-graduate level education to be developed in the 2017-2021 time span, focused on a topic such as the refugee and migration crisis, crisis management in conflict-affected regions or on the mitigation of environmental degradation.
- Events and Lectures: At least ten public lectures to be delivered per year focusing on the work of UNU-CRIS and on challenges to regional or global governance and stability.
- Internships and Traineeships: At least 20 students per year to be offered the opportunity to conduct an internship at UNU-CRIS and to contribute towards the research activities of the Institute.

f) Gender Mainstreaming

- The designated UNU-CRIS Gender Officer shall provide guidance to colleagues on the UNU Gender Equality Policy and Action Plan and will support the director in championing the implementation of it. UNU-CRIS will take into account the need for gender parity when recruiting new staff/interns and will strive to achieve gender parity on panels and events it organizes. UNU-CRIS aims to have a gender balance of at least 40% and will keep track of this for every (research) activity organized. By 2021, UNU-CRIS will endeavor to ensure that at least 45% of new roles are filled by women.



5. Timeline

	No action necessary	Action required	Continuous efforts needed
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Area	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
RESEARCH QUALITY					
Publication of 10 peer-reviewed articles per year in high-quality journals					
Publication of 4 books per year					
2 high-level visiting researchers per year on average (stay of minimally 3 months)					
Call for 4-year research project					
Call for self-funded research projects					
Annual Best Thesis Award					
Co-organisation of at least 2 major international conferences					
Coordination meetings for inter-partnership research					
Fostering cross-partnership cooperation					
Fostering cross-UNU cooperation					
Development of research quality targets					
At least 2 sessions focused on research grant acquisition at UNU-CRIS annually					
At least 20 joint partnership research seminars or colloquia yearly					
POLICY IMPACT					
At least 2 major announcements annually on the work of UNU/UNU-CRIS					
Participation by UNU-CRIS members in at least 5 policy expert groups					
Participation by UNU-CRIS members in at least 3 policy advisory committees					
At least 5 UNU-related presentations for think tanks and civil society annually					
Communications at least 5 times per year in local or international media					
Updating of UNU-CRIS webpage					
At least one yearly initiative to strengthen ties with another UNU Institute					
Development of the RIKS Database					
Publication of at least 10 UNU-CRIS working papers per year (website)					
Publication of bi-monthly UNU-CRIS newsletter					
RELEVANCE TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND KEY PLAYERS					
Fostering cross-UNU cooperation					
Publication of 5 policy briefs per year					
Organisation of EU/UN policy-link talks in Brussels					
Interactive InfoQuiz on UN / UNU					
UNU-CRIS - UNU coordination meetings					
At least one meeting per year with EWI (Presenting UNU-CRIS Annual Report)					

	No action necessary	Action required	Continuous efforts needed
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Area	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
RELEVANCE TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND KEY PLAYERS (pt II)					
Organization of at least 2 UNU Talks					
Joint organization of talks with local civil society organisations					
Organization of high-level lectures					
At least two presentations annually on UN / UNU for local schools					
Improvement of visibility and accessibility of UNU-CRIS premises					
FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY					
Exploration of grant opportunities in collaboration with Partnership					
Acquisition external research funds of at least 25 percent of annual core funding					
CAPACITY-BUILDING					
Simulation Game to be played in graduate-level courses					
At least 10 public lectures per year focused on work UNU-CRIS					
At least 20 internships offered at UNU-CRIS per year					
GENDER MAINSTREAMING					
Gender parity on panels and events					
Gender balance of at least 40 percent for research activities					
At least 45 percent of new functions filled by women					



