

# Strategic Plan 2022-2026



**UNU**  
**CRIS**

# Table of Contents

Foreword	3
Our Next Chapter   Challenges and Opportunities	4
Our Guide   The UNU Strategic Plan	6
Our Contribution   Mission and Objectives	8
Our Voice   Research Programmes	11
For Tomorrow   Capacity Building and Training	26
A Centrepiece   Outreach and Networks	29
The End Goal   Impact	30

# Foreword

Our most important work lies ahead of us. This strategic plan will guide the operations and activities of UNU-CRIS for the period 2022-2026.



This strategic plan has been drafted in accordance with articles IV and V of the Statute of the United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies and articles 5 and 6 of the Second Memorandum of Understanding between the Flemish Community (Kingdom of Belgium), the United Nations University, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Ghent University concerning the Funding of UNU-CRIS. This Strategic Plan is also aligned with the United Nations University Strategic Plan 2020-2024.

The Key Performance Indicators, as foreseen in article 6 of the Memorandum of Understanding, have been agreed upon with the Flemish Community and are contained in a separate document.

The Strategic Plan is the fruit of a process involving the UNU-CRIS management, the research cluster coordinators and staff, representatives of our direct stakeholders (UNU, the Flemish Community, Ghent University and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel), our Advisory Committee, external evaluators, an international expert panel, and other experts worldwide.

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to UNU-CRIS's activities over the past year, who have provided inputs for this Strategic Plan, and who will be our partners and audience in the coming years.

**Philippe De Lombaerde**  
Director, UNU-CRIS

# 1 | Our Next Chapter

## Challenges and Opportunities

**Never have we been so connected, no longer bound by geography to our specks on the world map. In our truly global age, underpinned by the movement of people, data, capital and ideas across hemispheres, land and sea, the challenges we face have followed suit, no longer respecting natural and national borders.**

Yet, instead of coming together to fight these challenges, we find ourselves in a period of fracture and facing the return of geopolitics. Faith has been lost in decision-making bodies, at a crucial moment in history when collective action is needed most. Good governance driven by effective policy is needed to restore confidence, reverse the trend and address the many challenges we collectively face. Targeted, rigorous research to inform these policies is the first step. This is why we, with our global network and mandate as the UN's think tank on cooperation and governance across different policy areas and levels, can play a vital role in the coming years.

This strategic plan for the coming five-year period builds upon the foundation laid during the previous strategic programming period of 2017-2021 and the evolution of the world throughout this period, which brought new problems to the fore and illuminated the need for engagement and interaction across the multiple levels of governance to address them.

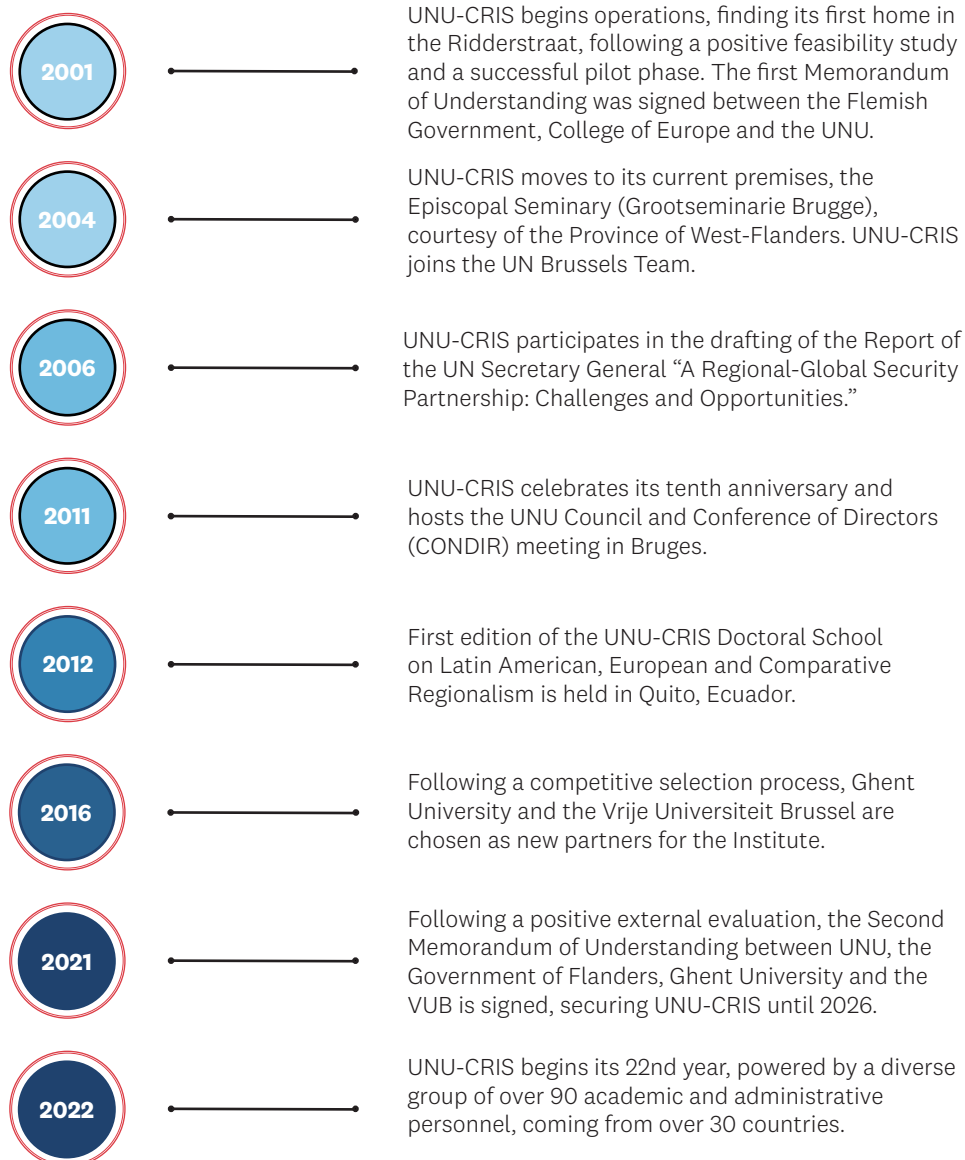
Our experience during this period allowed us to mould ourselves and our research to what is needed by the world around us and forms the pillars of the new strategic plan – clear, in-demand, policy-relevant research programmes and clusters that utilise our expertise and its network to address current and emerging challenges of governance and cooperation. This is underpinned by the understanding that these are often cross-border and/or multi-level, ranging from the supranational (multilateral and regional) to the nation-state, and subnational entities such as regions and cities. The interaction between these levels of governance, in terms of their coordination, their congruence and their conflicts, is often a key factor in the success of their policies.

The interplay between these challenges – climate-induced migration, pandemic-induced recessions, cybersecurity, cities and regions operating in the international sphere, to name just a few – demonstrate the need for an interdisciplinary approach, working across themes and forming a community of expertise and backgrounds.

UNU-CRIS has the expertise, scope, and network to be a key knowledge producer as we navigate this challenging moment in history.



## Milestones



## 2 | Our Guide

### The UNU Strategic Plan

**As part of the UNU family, UNU-CRIS' activities are formed and governed by the UNU Strategic Plan 2020-2024.**

UNU is uniquely placed to deliver independent policy research. It is a bridge between academia and policy, with its role as a knowledge partner within the UN system; the developed and developing worlds, with its institutes across the globe; and as a hive of interdisciplinarity, with its diverse but related areas of research across and within its various institutes.

UNU is guided by four overarching objectives:

- 1. Pursue policy-relevant programming:** by continuing to make policy considerations central to its research programmes and, in addition, actively shaping policy agendas through targeted and strategic collaborations.
- 2. Invest in a dynamic, innovative, and diverse institutional culture:** by encouraging innovation in all dimensions of the University's work, which is undertaken by a diverse and gender-balanced community of scholars, communicators, and management professionals, and by promoting collaboration across spatial and disciplinary boundaries.
- 3. Strengthen collaboration, communications, and visibility:** by leveraging the expertise and networks spread across the UNU system, promoting collaboration, impactful communications undertakings, and ensuring that UNU research meets actual demands.
- 4. Strive for financial sustainability across UNU's architecture:** by addressing the financial constraints that would otherwise undermine ambitious, long-term, research planning, and ensure through participatory management practices that fundraising objectives are realistic, achievable, and complement other strategic priorities.

These four objectives permeate the objectives of UNU-CRIS and act as the foundation upon which the UNU-CRIS strategic plan for 2022-2026 is built. Any new orientations contained in the next UNU Strategic Plan guiding UNU from 2025 onwards will also be taken into account.



United Nations University  
Sustainable Development: Exposure  
[www.unu.org/eng/eng](http://www.unu.org/eng/eng)



# 3 | Our Contribution

## Mission and Objectives

### Our Mission:

UNU-CRIS focuses on new patterns of regional cooperation and multi-level governance worldwide, centring on the implications of these changing patterns for public policy.

Through its research and capacity-building activities, it connects scholarly knowledge with policy, and directly contributes to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

**UNU-CRIS is driven by the goal of assessing the evolving needs of the UN and its stakeholders in the areas of regional cooperation and multi-level governance. For the period 2022-2026, it has identified some of the most pressing and complex policy areas where research can align with the strength of its expertise and network, forming research programmes and clusters as hubs of knowledge and engagement.**

These clusters aim to produce rigorous policy-relevant research that can inform decision-makers at all levels in their efforts to address some of the major societal challenges of our time. They focus on key policy areas with a multidimensional governance component. Building upon its strong reputation in the field of regionalism studies, the new programmes and clusters deepen the regional dimension of these key policy areas, examining the interplay between and across supra- or sub-national levels.

Between 2022 and 2026, UNU-CRIS will be guided by the following general objectives:

## **1. Exploring Multi-Level Governance**

- Provide rigorous world-class academic research to inform the UN system, its member states and policymakers at all levels of governance about regional cooperation and integration via the Institute's thematic research clusters.
- Explore how the various levels of governance – supranational, national, and subnational – interact with one another in the provision of a variety of public goods.
- Assess the evolution of regional organisations, assess their effectiveness, and identify the potential for reform that may strengthen their utility to other levels of governance.
- Provide conceptual and methodological frameworks and tools for the study of regions and multi-level governance.

## **2. Studying New Actors**

- Study the growth and impact of new actors on the international scene, such as subnational regions and cities, and how they are affecting the structures of international cooperation and interaction.
- Study governance innovation and actorness at the supranational regional level.
- Better understand how new international interactions, such as science and cultural diplomacy or digital governance initiatives, are influencing and changing policy.

### **3. Developing Innovative Data Tools and Indicators**

- Build upon the Regional Integration Knowledge System 2.0 platform to position UNU-CRIS as a leader and reference for reliable data on regions and the various facets of regional integration, in applying quantitative techniques to these data.
- Design indicator-based monitoring systems for regional organisations.
- Analyse the challenges and opportunities realised in the implementation of the SDGs, how coordination across the levels of governance can support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and build SDG indicator systems at various levels of governance, including the local level.

### **4. Strengthening our Network and Collaborations**

- Nurture the growing interdisciplinarity and interplay between the research programmes and clusters at UNU-CRIS, reflecting the real-world need for comprehensive, all-encompassing solutions across fields.
- Strengthen cooperation with leading researchers and research institutes worldwide, in relevant areas, thereby further diversifying and renewing the pool of experts working with UNU-CRIS, and explore the possibility of establishing new research programmes in other locations worldwide.
- Further strengthen cooperation with the relevant institutions within the UN and UNU system, as well as with our partner universities (Ghent University and Vrije Universiteit Brussel).
- Strengthen cooperation within the broader Flemish academic landscape by forming new partnerships with local institutions and attracting world-renowned researchers to Bruges to develop Flanders as a model hub of research and innovation.

### **5. Sharing Our Expertise**

- Create more opportunities for capacity development through developing targeted, practical training programmes for academics, policymakers and professionals alike.
- Utilise our global network to tap into local capacity development wants and needs, so as to help influence and impact how practitioners and policymakers design and implement their policies on the ground.
- Provide an environment for researchers to incubate new project ideas that contribute to UNU-CRIS' overall mission and goals, and help to realise them.

# 4 | Our Voice

## Research Programmes

At UNU-CRIS, our research is organised into three research programmes and several clusters. Both the Regional Integration Knowledge System and the Regions and Cities Governance Lab act as transversal programmes, providing input and support for the Regional Public Goods programme and its clusters, each focussing on a particular policy area.

Below is a visual representation of this structure, with the following pages providing more detail about these programmes and clusters, and how they will contribute to our mission.





## Regions and Cities Governance Lab (Re-LAB)

**Over the past decades, regional organisations have become an essential element of the global governance structure.**

These organisations now cover almost every part of the globe, with additional ones being created every year. With the proliferation of regional organisations, there is also increasing overlap, adding a further level of complexity. It is also a dynamic and volatile process: regional configurations expand and retract, as they constantly redefine the delineations of inclusion and exclusion. And even established regional organisations remain vulnerable to nationalist sentiments that call for disintegration.

Regional governance is also becoming increasingly complex due to the number of actors involved. Beyond the autonomous nation-state, various actors at the supra- and sub-national levels shape a multitude of domains, from value chains to humanitarian action. In many cases, the administrations of regional organisations have attained a notable level of agency. They conduct their own external relations with non-members, international institutions of the United Nations system and with other regional organisations. This includes non-state actors, such as transnational corporate groups and civil society organisations. Substate regions and cities are following suit and have gained stature on the international stage.

The Regions and Cities Governance Lab is about understanding the institutional dynamics surrounding regional organisations. In addition to internal developments, Re-LAB studies interregionalism within a multi-level governance ecosystem, exploring how regions and cities engage in an international system that is under stress and in need of reform. Re-LAB considers transnational governance as a laboratory of continuous institutional adaptation and thereby provides a transversal linkage for all other research programmes and clusters at UNU-CRIS.





## Goals

- Consolidate UNU-CRIS as a central node for the provision of methodological foundations of comparative regionalism (ontologies, theories, issues of comparability).
- Examine the external relations of regional organisations, including relations with the UN and interregionalism.
- Examine the substance and forms of transnational governance mechanisms.
- Deepen the understanding of institutionalised regional cooperation and integration.

## Research Questions

- How do regions emerge? What narratives, policies and practices drive them?
- What agency do regional organisations possess?
- What are the reciprocal effects between regional organisations and the multilateral system?
- How effective are regional security mechanisms?

## Methodologies and data

- Qualitative and mixed methods
- Comparative and single case study analysis
- Primary and secondary sources



## Regional Integration Knowledge System (RIKS)

**At the core of the RIKS cluster is the Regional Integration Knowledge System (RIKS) platform. This platform provides researchers, policymakers, and journalists with reliable information on regionalisation patterns in the global system and on the evolution of regional organisations.**

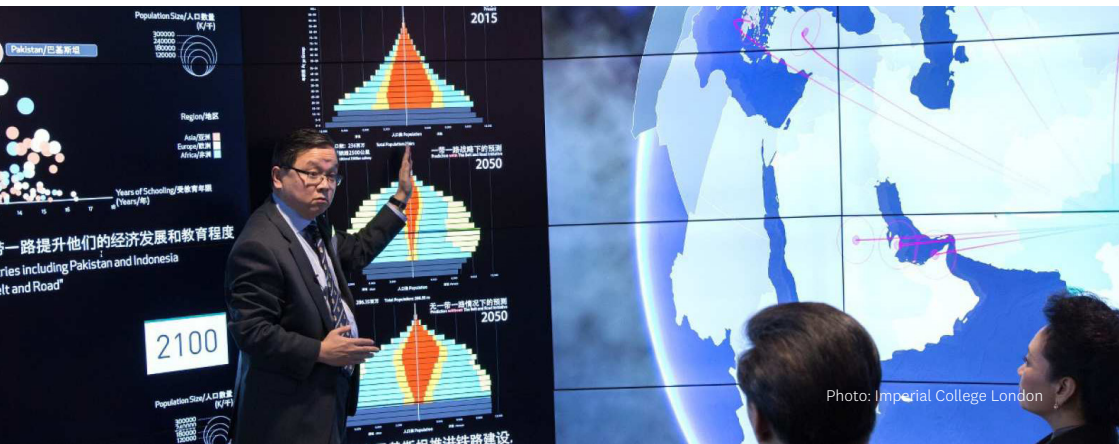
The platform includes information on the membership of these organisations, the legal content of the treaties on which they are based. It also provides information as to the actual level of economic integration these organisations engender, in particular concerning migration, trade, and investment. The platform is open-access and freely available ([riks.cris.unu.edu](https://riks.cris.unu.edu)). Beyond the RIKS platform, the RIKS cluster conducts research on quantitative methods and their application to regionalism studies.

First, it creates estimation methods for coping with missing data, such as bilateral migration flows. Second, it explores methods from social network analysis to study regional integration from a global perspective, allowing us e.g. to disentangle the so-called ‘spaghetti-bowl’ of regional organisations. Third, it constructs tailor-made indicator systems to monitor regional integration processes and sustainable development achievements in a multi-level governance context, as shown e.g. in our SDG-monitor of Flemish communities.

Through this development of data and methods, RIKS serves as a transversal cluster that supports all other programmes and clusters at UNU-CRIS.

### Goals

- Collect new systematic data on regional organisations, including treaty texts, budgets, and human resources.
- Deepen relationships with other producers of relevant databases in the UN system, regional organisations and academia, particularly those focusing on treaty texts and migration data.
- Expand intra-regional flow data into other fields of human activity and look at these from an interdisciplinary perspective.
- Help stakeholders create more qualitative and impactful agreements.
- Make the current complexity of international agreements underlying regional organisations more manageable, e.g. by using network analysis to identify their fundamental structures.
- Assist regional organisations in designing indicator-based monitoring systems.



- Develop gravity models and social network analysis for the study of intra-regional flows.

## Research Questions

- How can de jure and de facto levels of regional integration be measured?
- What are the features of relevant and usable indicator-based monitoring systems for regional organisations?
- How can gravity models and network analysis help in mapping and understanding the complex structure and evolution of regional interactions and regional integration agreements on a global scale?
- How can the SDGs be translated into sustainable development indicators in a multi-level governance context, including at the local level?

## Methodologies and data

- Econometric methods (gravity models), machine learning, social network analysis
- Composite indices
- Official statistics and ad hoc databases



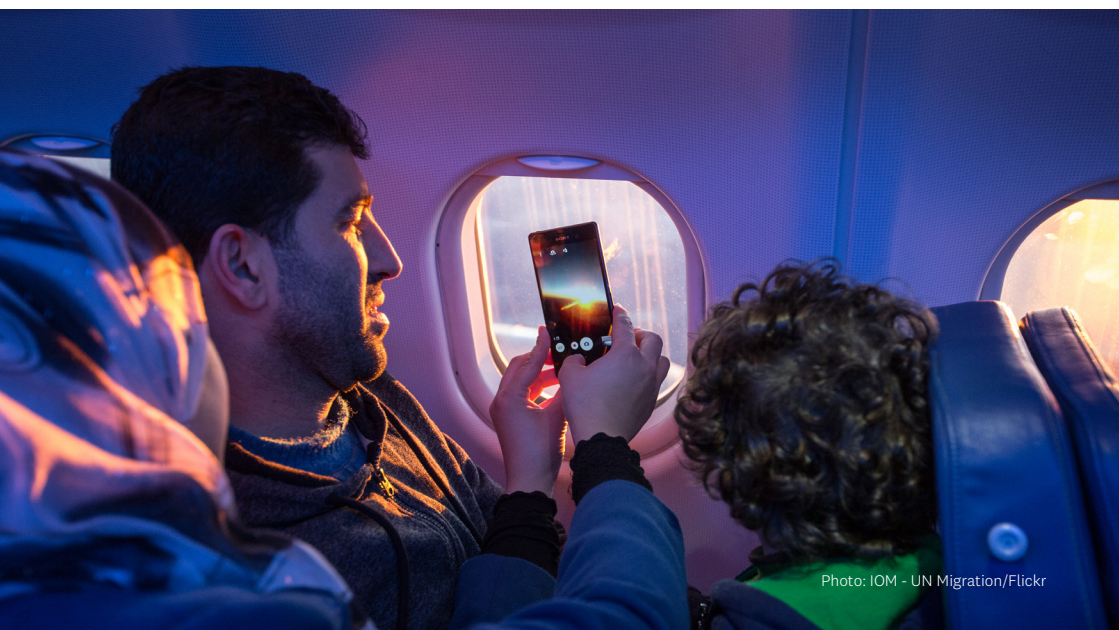
## Regional Public Goods

### Migration and Social Policy

**The scale, visibility and impact of international, interregional and internal mobility has increased sharply in recent decades.**

This is felt globally, regionally and locally and poses complex social and political challenges, as it impacts the lives of migrants, the countries of origin, countries of 'transit' or temporary residence, countries where people settle or resettle permanently, as well as the communities to which they return. There is a strong call for better management of migration processes, in all their forms, and for more international and regional cooperation in the framework of migration management, such as the Global Compact.

The Migration and Social Policy Cluster investigates mobility processes and patterns within and across nations and regions, as well as the regimes, infrastructures and practices developed at the national, regional and global levels that govern mobility and people's access to resources. The research on social policy follows the same two-pronged approach of increasing understanding of the social needs of individuals and groups, in interaction with the social welfare policies and social services developed at the national, regional and global levels.





## Goals

- Boost research on social policy and the role of regions, widening the scope of regions and regional actors that are studied
- Strengthen the critical engagement with the debates on power and (in)equality, and relatedly questions about ‘decentring’ social sciences, through both a critical engagement with academic debates on ontological, epistemological and methodological approaches within research and the perpetuation of North-South divisions
- Establish bridges with the border studies research programme
- Further develop collaboration with institutions with a migration-related mandate in the UN system and beyond

## Research Questions

- What is the (potential) role of regional organisations, non-state actors and normative regimes in the governance of multi-level human mobility and social welfare?
- What are the patterns, drivers, infrastructures and experiences of return and circular migration?
- What are the implications of bordering practices and border zone realities for the provision of social services?

## Methodologies and data

- Primarily qualitative (e.g. interviews, observations, focus groups, analyses of policy documents) and quantitative data collection (e.g. surveys)
- Analyses of secondary data (e.g. survey data, policy documents, official statistics)
- Mixed methods

## Regional Public Goods

### Economic Interactions

**The economic interactions cluster analyses the structure of international trade, investment, and migration flows and the impact of regional organisations and arrangements on them.**

The cluster studies the policy scope and the institutional structure of regional organisations using quantitative indicators and analyses the effectiveness of regional organisations and arrangements using the impact of de jure on de facto economic integration. The impact on de facto integration is considered from a comprehensive perspective, including the effect on international investment and migration in addition to trade, given the contemporary relevance that international flows of capital and labour have in international economic relations.

Beyond the regional management of flows, this cluster has also an interest in the regional coordination and integration of economic policies (including the role of regions in tax policy, regional monetary cooperation and integration), as well as in the political economy of regional economic policy.

#### Goals

- Improve and expand the characterisation of the institutions and scope of regional organisations and identify the determinants thereof.
- Assess the impact of institutional characteristics on the performance of regional organisations, in terms of regional economic flows (trade, migration and investment) and develop new perspectives on performance in terms of social welfare and income distribution.
- Assess the regional public good dimension of economic interactions in terms of sustainable development and, in particular, their environmental impact.
- Engage with regional economic organisations and UN regional economic commissions.





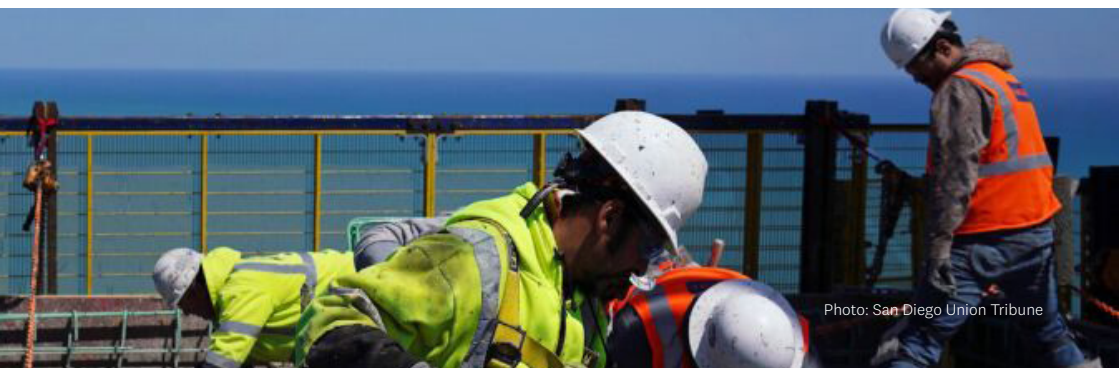


## Research Questions

- What is the impact of economic integration agreements on trade, investment and migration, considered in an integrated framework?
- What are the policy and institutional characteristics and diversity of regional organisations and their determinants?
- To what extent have regional organisations and economic integration agreements had an impact on regional flows of goods and services, people and capital; to what extent does this impact social welfare and equity; and which regional economic governance gaps can be detected?
- How can the environmental impact of economic integration agreements, economically as well as institutionally, be assessed?

## Methodologies and data

- Construction and statistical evaluation of indicators, including indicators of institutional strength and policy scope.
- Econometric methods.
- Official statistics and ad hoc databases.



## Regional Public Goods

# Nature, Climate and Health

**The Nature, Climate, and Health Cluster tackles sustainable development challenges resulting from the transactions between the economic, social, and ecological realms, and direct and indirect drivers that influence climate change, water, energy and food security.**

The cluster investigates interconnected problems confronting states and communities, and cross-border regions of maintaining ecological balance and fulfilling socio-economic commitments.

The multifaceted impacts of climate change, complex trade-offs in achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs), and the need to ensure the health and well-being of populations are thereby acknowledged and assessed to outline evidence-backed policy-relevant solutions.

The cluster has a special interest in the management of cross-border natural resources, such as water wetlands and forests, as well as regional cooperation in the areas of health and the environment.

## Goals

- Undertake innovative inter- and trans-disciplinary research on cross-border and multi-level natural resource governance to identify best practices and solutions for transformative change.
- Develop research on regional health cooperation, including in the areas of infectious diseases and mental health and psychosocial well-being.
- Contribute to the implementation of SDGs, Sendai Framework, Paris Agreement, UN Ocean Decade and UN Decade of Ecological Restoration.
- Strengthen UNU CRIS's engagement with the global discourse on cross-border natural resource governance and resilience, and ecological and human wellbeing.
- Further develop capacity and knowledge on three key regions/sub-regions – the Asia-Pacific (Mekong and ASEAN in particular), the Amazon Basin and Central Africa – to explore cross-border governance in natural resource management, climate resilience and related health aspects.



## Research Questions

- Where is cross-border resource management implemented and how do regions organise their competencies, mandates, and capacities from supranational to local levels?
- What does the empirical evidence reveal about the effects and effectiveness of cross-border natural resource management and have such arrangements ensured water, human and political security?
- How do the various levels of governance respond, anticipate, forecast, and share information concerning water and climate risk management?
- What are the modalities and value-added of the ‘One Health’ agenda for regional and global cooperation?

## Methodologies and data

- Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods to assess scalable practical solutions and policy options
- Multi-stakeholder consultations and exchanges with global topic experts on transforming ideas into action
- Survey data, geospatial data, interviews.



## Regional Public Goods

# Digital Governance

**The Digital Governance Cluster provides a space to address the governance and regulatory challenges at the interface between ‘traditional’ ideas of governance and new experiments in ‘digital’ governance beyond the state.**

Tied to this are practical and conceptual issues that need to be discussed: is the state increasingly seen as a relevant basis for political action after several decades of global cooperation across many different policy fields? Can regional actors and states complement each other in ‘managing’ the digital transition?

The debates around policies dealing with recent technological developments, in fields of digital sovereignty and competitiveness, for example, emphasise the feeling that contemporary political institutions are not set up to deal with the 21st Century. In recent decades, there have been huge transformations in the political and economic situation of some of the key industrial and political operators of the digital superhighways, which has led to huge ramifications for ‘design’ and ‘control’ of the key critical infrastructures in our communications networks and our communities. Whereas prior to the turn of the Century, ‘digital technologies’ were seen as key enablers and levellers for global inequalities, power remains concentrated in the hand of a few key actors, and institutions are struggling to identify how to leverage technology to create global sustainable and fair economic and societal growth.

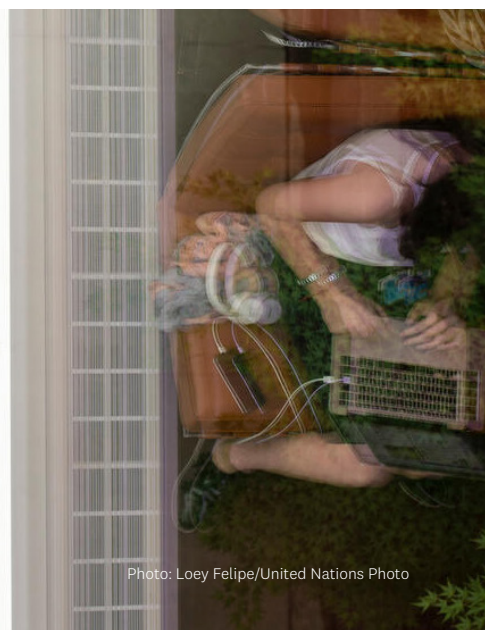


Photo: Loey Felipe/United Nations Photo



## Goals

- Continue engagement at the UN-mandated Internet Governance Forum, the European Dialogue on Internet Governance and other regional IGF events, whilst developing competence in other regions of the world, and relations with other UNU centres.
- Provide consultative input to UN consultations on digital governance issues such as the Global Digital Compact and WSIS 2025, through a range of different stakeholder activities.
- Further develop the UNU-CRIS/VUB Chair in Digital Sovereignty.
- Enhance interactions across clusters and other policy fields (governance ‘through’ technology as well as governance ‘of’ technology).

## Research Questions

- Which (potential) role is there for regional organisations in the regulation and governance of the digital space and digital technologies?
- How can we develop ways to conceptually deal with the increased sovereignty claims for globalised digital networks that are emerging in different national and regional discourses?
- What role do international (technology-specific) standards organisations play in the increasing politicisation of global digital spaces?

## Methodologies and data

- Eclectic, pluralist approach to research designs, innovatively drawing together IR theory, psychology, networked governance, and critical theory, amongst others.
- Qualitative and quantitative methods, including social network and discourse analyses.
- Survey data, expert and stakeholder panels, interviews, official statistics

## Unit on Non-Traditional Diplomacy

**Throughout the 20th century into the 21st, the face of diplomacy has changed drastically.**

While still the dominant player, the Westphalian nation-state – the traditional unit of analysis in international relations – is increasingly seeing its power diffused on the world stage to other actors, be they businesses, NGOs, universities, international institutions, or sub- and supranational regional organizations. All the while, the subject of diplomatic interactions has moved beyond the traditional foci of forging alliances, establishing trade routes, and securing peace to an endless list of areas where transborder cooperation can exist: from astronomy to zoology.

UNTRAD, the joint Unit on Non-Traditional Diplomacy, was established by UNU-CRIS and the Brussels School of Governance at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, to look at this changing nature of diplomacy. It has an active interest in digital diplomacy and sub-national or paradiplomacy, however its great strength at present is science diplomacy – the nexus of foreign affairs and international scientific collaboration. UNTRAD unites researchers and practitioners on the national, regional, and global levels to better understand and improve the practice of science diplomacy, which in turn, offers insight into other dimensions of non-traditional diplomacy.

### Goals

- Develop cross-cutting research and drive the theorizing of the intersection of foreign affairs and scientific cooperation.
- Consolidate UNTRAD as a key science diplomacy player through its continued leadership of the European Union Science Diplomacy Alliance and make a strong policy impact through ongoing collaborations with the European Commission to develop the EU Science Diplomacy Agenda, while expanding its scope towards science diplomacy developments in other world regions.
- Develop a platform on science diplomacy that fosters dialogue between different science diplomacy actors, and provide consultations and trainings to stakeholders.
- Explore the relations between the various areas of non-traditional diplomacy, such as science diplomacy, public diplomacy, digital diplomacy, paradiplomacy and city diplomacy.

### Research Questions

- How can international scientific cooperation act as a bridge across different ideologies and modes of government and what role can and should science diplomacy play in times of crisis and conflict?





Photo: New China TV

- When should knowledge be reserved for security and sovereignty, and when should it become a part of the global commons?
- How can universities and HEIs utilise their positions and resources to become key science diplomacy actors?
- What does science diplomacy theory contribute to public diplomacy theory, and vice-versa?
- How do countries holding the rotating leadership positions of multilateral regional organisations use this position for public diplomacy objectives?

### Methodologies and data

- Research designs that draw upon international relations theory, social psychology (e.g. positioning theory), socio-technical theory, and the assemblage approach.
- Qualitative and mixed methods
- Expert interviews and official data



# 5 | For Tomorrow

## Capacity Building and Training

**Through our training programmes, we aim to nurture the passion for learning and development of those bringing about change in the world today, and those who will do so tomorrow.**

We will work with our global network to understand the local capacity building gaps and the needs of people on the ground, using this knowledge to develop targeted trainings, bringing a global bank of knowledge directly to those making and implementing policy, by:

- **offering training and short courses:** further developing the School of Modern Diplomacy to become the premier diplomatic short course, training diplomats, policymakers and scholars in the various facets of modern diplomacy, and integrating the course into the trainings programmes of national and regional diplomatic academies.

We will continue training young scholars with our Doctoral School on Latin American, European and Comparative Regionalism in Quito, and explore a possible expansion to other regions, aiming to better facilitate the sharing of knowledge and expertise across regions to the benefit of the new generations of regionalism scholars and (regional) policymakers.

We will also further develop our Summer School on Comparative Regionalism, which is geared towards a broader audience, including bachelors' students, journalists, public officials and interested members of the general public.

Harnessing our refocused and developed expertise, we will offer short-course training across the subjects covered in our research programmes, tailored for academia, policymakers, and professionals.

- **developing the next generation:** through continuing to promote and strengthen our internship programme, making use of the traditional and new virtual modes of internships to offer opportunities to more promising scholars from around the world, while ensuring fair remuneration for their hard work.

We will continue our partnership with local schools to offer tailored, interactive learning sessions, while also seeking new opportunities and groups of young people to both inform them on key contemporary issues and to hear their perspectives.

Knowledge is nothing if not shared, and that is why it is a core value of UNU-CRIS to share its expertise, developing capacity both at home and abroad through a range of capacity-building activities.







† ALLE POESTEN IET SCAPENDOW  
VAN BRUGGE TOEGEDIGT JOE HADDE  
SIN VAN SO EVER DEED ET DADIGE



Photo: Robbe Oeloeft

# 6 | A Centrepoin

## Outreach and Networks

**With our inherently interdisciplinary nature and overlapping fields of research, UNU-CRIS is perfectly positioned to be not just a producer but a facilitator of knowledge.**

In the coming five years, we will develop this in three ways by:

- **acting as a middle point and bringing together expertise and interested stakeholders on a topic:** organising events, workshops and forums that bring together different actors working within the same sphere, bridging academia, policy, civil society and the public. These initiatives will be targeted based on topic and will evolve according to the needs of the participants and demand, with the intention of forming communities that meet regularly. These encounters will be held both physically and virtually, so as to ensure the greatest potential inclusion of all relevant actors.
- **actively expanding and strengthening its existing networks and identifying new partners for collaboration:** as an institute with a global focus, we place great importance on the strength and breadth of its networks. We will develop our research programmes as integral parts of the most important and impactful research networks, integrating into those already in existence by highlighting the Institute's value added as a UN agency with an interdisciplinary focus, and through creating new networks that serve as forums for the exchange of the latest research and ideas, to discuss emerging trends and formulate collective research agendas.

Additionally, we will provide our partners, Ghent University and the VUB, with a gateway to the United Nations system and its many other global connections, encouraging the exchange of knowledge and ideas between Gent and Brussels and the wider academic world.

We will also play an active role in developing existing UNU networks, such as those on Migration and Water, and seek to play a leading role in the establishment of others, bringing together expertise from across the UNU system in areas such as climate change and health. UNU-CRIS, given its overlap with the research activities of many other institutes, should position itself and act as a central point and facilitator for many of these networks, and aim to link and translate the work of its sister institutes up and down the governance scale.

- **providing a space for the incubation of new projects:** offering our premises in Bruges as a location for emerging young scholars as well as established experts in their respective fields to spend time developing their ideas into concrete project proposals, infusing the expertise of our researchers into the research and projects influencing tomorrow's policy.

# 7 | The End Goal

## Impact

**As an institute understanding the importance of multi-level governance and action, UNU-CRIS will coordinate its activities across all levels, to ensure the greatest possible impact for our work.**

We will consolidate our position as one of the leading research hubs on multi-level governance, understanding that all issues we covers within our research programmes require coordinated, multi-level action to address. To maximise impact, we will:

- **act as a facilitator between the various levels of governance and cooperation:** bringing together research on them as a collective and individually, to provide the base from which strong, informed, impactful policy can be built.
- **continue our efforts to engage with regional organisations worldwide:** working with them to identify areas of potential reform to reverse the trend of disintegration in recent years. To do so, we will be available for policy-oriented research, as well as for capacity-building initiatives.
- **broaden our international reach:** through deepening collaborations in other regions by forming partnerships and consortiums with local institutions and universities, which will act as facilitation points between its researchers and local actors of importance for UNU-CRIS, such as governments or NGOs; to promote field research; and for events to amplify the institute's research.
- **ensure uptake and accessibility:** by continuing to provide open access to its research and output as much as possible, removing a major barrier to knowledge and providing equal opportunity for all to benefit from our work.

Although a UNU institute with a global-facing mission, we will also actively engage with local actors and stakeholders. To increase its impact on Flemish policy and on the local level, we will:

- **be available for consultations with Flemish policymakers:** and seek to develop structural ties with the relevant government departments, to assist them in developing concise and evidence-based policy.
- **further develop the Regions and Cities Governance Lab:** and, with its subsequent focus on the actorness of subnational regions, we will aim to become one of the leading authorities in this area of growing prominence, providing Flanders and others with key insights into research that works directly for their benefit. In light of the current Flemish administration's outlined plans to further interaction and deepen ties with other





Photo: UN Photo/Mark Garten

subnational regions and national governments, UNU-CRIS' work in the Re-Lab cluster on multi-level governance and interaction will be of increasing interest and value for Flanders.

- **act to further engage with and strengthen relationships with other actors in the Flemish academic and research community:** acting as a bridge between them and the UN system, and together working to establish Flanders as a hub of high-quality research and innovation.
- **work to support the city of Bruges, other cities and the Province in formulating policy towards the attainment of the SDGs:** through developing and maintaining monitoring indicators and presenting the results to local stakeholders.

## About UNU-CRIS

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

UNU-CRIS focuses on new patterns of regional cooperation and multi-level governance worldwide, centring on the implications of these changing patterns for public policy. Through its research and capacity-building activities, it connects scholarly knowledge with policy, and directly contributes to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

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