

United Nations University

Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies

2024

Annual Report



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United Nations University

Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies

2024 Annual Report

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United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies

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

Director: Philippe De Lombaerde

UNU-CRIS is grateful to the following partners for their core support:



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UNU-CRIS personnel and the
UNU-CRIS Advisory Committee in October
Photo: Andrew Dunn

Director's Welcome

2024 illustrated, once again, the cost of non-cooperation, regionally and globally, for citizens worldwide. This cost can be calculated by the lost lives of thousands of people in armed conflicts, and by the cost in terms of poverty and quality of life of multiples of these numbers. It only strengthens our conviction that in the interdependent world we live, there is no alternative for (horizontal) multilateral and regional cooperation and (vertical) multi-level governance.

How this can be done by taking regional context into account, what can be learned from success stories and failures, how impact of regional policies can be assessed, how supranational and sub-national regions can play a role in multi-level governance contexts, are all questions that are at the core of the research and capacity-building activities at UNU-CRIS, with its unique comparative perspective, pluralistic character, and global mandate.

In 2024, UNU-CRIS has further consolidated its activities and produced impactful output, of which you will find a summary here in this Annual Report. The highlights include: the 1st edition of our Doctoral School on Asian and Comparative Regionalism, the co-organisation of high-level interregional dialogues (EU-LAC, EU-AU), our presence at the 2024 COPs, 5 PhD defences, to name just a few.

We have also started to roll-out the new UNU strategy to increase our presence worldwide. MoUs were signed (or are being negotiated) with UN-ECLAC and universities in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Our aim is to upgrade these collaborations to UNU hubs soon.

2024 was also a record year: we have never had so many visitors (22 visiting researchers, 29 interns), and so many associate research fellows (45). External research funding has never been higher since the introduction of the new governance structure in 2016 (67% of core funding in 2024). This all points to the unaltered relevance of our work.

Finally, the RIKS and Economic Interactions clusters, which already worked closely together, have merged into the Economic and Political Interactions (EPI) cluster. The cluster will continue its work on the economic aspects of regionalism, the impact and effectiveness of regional policies and institutions, and will continue its transversal function within UNU-CRIS of data collection and quantitative methods knowledge centre, as well as the maintenance of the RIKS platform.

Philippe De Lombaerde

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



2024 in Numbers

156 publications



Journal Articles	47
Books	08
Book Chapters	34
Policy Briefs	13
Reports	10
Working Papers	16

74 presentations and lectures



Presentations	19
Lectures	55



160 People	47 Nationalities
47% Women	53% Men

61 events



Conferences	4
Workshops, Research Seminars, Webinars and Fora	52
Other events	5

Financial Overview



Total Budget	€2.288.807
Core Funding Flemish Government	45.39%
External Project Funding*	30.25%
Ghent University	19.12%
VUB	5.24%

*These include: FWO (via UGent); BOF-DOS (via UGent); Swiss Research Fund; EU-LAC Foundation; Caritas International; McMaster University; Scottish Association for Marine Science; Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA); The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS); University of Urbino Carlo Bo.

External project funding corresponds to 66,63% of core funding from the Flemish Government.

Handbook of Regional Cooperation and Integration

Regional cooperation and integration are more important than ever.

The world is confronted with a series of overlapping 'poly-crises', including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and military conflicts. These crises highlight the importance of effective cooperation at the regional level as a key component in finding solutions.

Beyond addressing the importance of cooperation for its own sake, it is also important to consider a series of policy areas where regional cooperation is vital. These include trade, security, human rights, environmental protection, digital governance, migration, and health.

The Handbook of Regional Cooperation and Integration, edited by Philippe De Lombaerde and published by Edward Elgar Publishing, offers a detailed cross-policy assessment on the need, locale and impact of regional cooperation and integration, addressing how the principles of regional integration have affected multi-level governance and subsequent public policy.

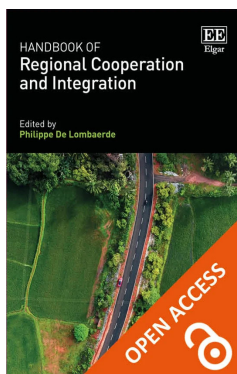
This book, comprised of 22 chapters examining different policy areas, responds to three fundamental questions: 'Why do we need regional cooperation and integration?', 'Where has it been implemented?', and 'What does the empirical evidence tell us about its effectiveness and impact?'

It not only looks at why regional cooperation and integration are important, but also at where it has been implemented and what the outcomes and effects are.

In doing so, it covers regional cooperation and integration worldwide, and it includes cases from the African Union, ASEAN, the Eurasian Economic Union, the European Union, and others.

The book is also another illustration of the value of intra-UNU collaboration, involving in this case contributions from UNU-CRIS, UNU-INRA, UNU-MERIT and UNU-IIGH, as well as from UNESCO.

Its in-depth study of practical applications makes this also suitable for public officials in the sector, as well as regional organisations and think tank staff.



‘This book is very timely because the challenges of climate change, peace and security and sustainable development we face require regional collaboration and solidarity to successfully tackle. The collaboration between regions in the global South and global North is also crucial for resolving these issues.’

Tshilidzi Marwala

United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Rector of United Nations University

‘An enlightening exploration of regional cooperation’s profound impact. This book navigates the complexities of integration, revealing its potential to foster progress and prosperity while illuminating the significance of regional integration in shaping international trade dynamics. An essential read for policymakers, economists, and trade enthusiasts alike.’

Alfred K’Ombudo

Principal Secretary, Trade, Kenya

‘Philippe De Lombaerde and his ardent team of fearless experts have produced more than a timeless reference manual on the economics of cooperation. This innovative, rigorous, and readable compendium is also a blueprint for thinking about the economy of togetherness—and practicing it happily but without illusions or regrets in a globalized world of dilemmas and trilemmas.’

Célestin Monga

Adjunct Professor, Harvard University

‘This extraordinary book presents and analyzes the multi-dimensional universe of regional cooperation and integration. Across seventeen policy areas, it explores the potential of innovative regional frameworks with solid economics and beyond. This is a product of UNU-CRIS’s extensive research networks and Dr. De Lombaerde’s superb leadership.’

Fukunari Kimura

Professor Emeritus and Senior Professor, Keio University; and President, Institute of Developing Economies, Japan External Trade Organization (IDE-JETRO)

First Doctoral School on Asian and Comparative Regionalism

Asia has long been a rich source of study for regionalism scholars. Its blending of aspects from different regional projects around the world gives it a distinct profile and, as Asia continues to grow in global importance, understanding the fluid dynamics of regional integration and cooperation in the region, and how they compare to other regions around the world, will be vital.

To address the need for high-quality scholars in the region, in 2024 we upgraded what was previously our Summer School on Asian and Comparative Regionalism to a doctoral programme, adapting our doctoral school model that has thrived in Ecuador for more than a decade. For the inaugural edition, UNU-CRIS, together with our partners Airlangga University (Indonesia), the International School of Economics at Maqsut Narikbayev University (Kazakhstan), and the International Forum on the Future of Constitutionalism (North America), welcomed 29 students from nine countries to Surabaya for a week-long programme that focused on providing new knowledge through multidisciplinary lectures and shaping their ongoing research through personalised tutorial sessions for each student.



Photo: Airlangga University

This programme fills a gap for researchers looking for short-course training on regionalism in the region, and contributes to a better understanding of world's most populous region.

Defining the Paradiplomacy Research Agenda

In our complex, interconnected world, diplomacy is no longer solely the domain of nation states. Subnational regions and cities, like Flanders, California and Shanghai are increasingly developing their diplomatic efforts, bypassing traditional diplomatic structures and forging new ones, reflecting the growing importance and power of subnational regions and cities.

To help contribute to this growing scholarship and to identify and shape the research agenda, we organised a roundtable on 19 April in Brussels, together with the Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office and the University of Lodz, to discuss the priorities for ongoing research and the missing pieces in current paradiplomacy research.

Seven leading paradiplomacy scholars shared their views on guiding questions such as what are interesting/priority research avenues for the paradiplomacy research agenda for the coming years, which novel research questions should be addressed (and why), and in which direction should the scope of paradiplomacy studies expand?

Africa's Perspectives Unpacking the AU-EU Partnership

Africa and Europe are undergoing major transformations in demography, economics, and security domains. The global system's foundational principles and decision-making processes are also increasingly questioned. In this context, the partnership between Africa and the EU continues to be crucial in addressing mutual expectations and aspirations.

To explore this further, we organised a workshop on 28 November with the European Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) to gather diverse perspectives on the AU-EU partnership and provide recommendations on how the partnership should evolve, considering sub-regional perspectives, sectoral differences, and better alignment of mutual expectations and feasibility.





Cluster Reports

The heart of our knowledge generation.

In this section, you will find a selection of each cluster's activities in 2024. For all publications and events, please visit our website.

Regions and Cities Governance Lab (Re-LAB)

In 2024, global governance experienced setbacks and fragmentation but also new impetus, notably through the Pact for the Future and a continuous expansion of activities by both subnational and supranational actors. The Regions and Cities Governance Lab followed these developments closely and contributed to debates on the evolution of regionalism and interregionalism.

As part of our mission to bridge the gap between research and practice, we were involved in several policy dialogues, notably on cognitive biases in the relationship between the African Union and the European Union, and on climate interregionalism between Europe and Latin

America. To foster comparative regionalism in the Global South, Re-LAB was also heavily involved in the the two UNU-CRIS doctoral schools in Ecuador and Indonesia.

Our Unit on Non-Traditional Diplomacy (UNTRAD) continued its activities with a special focus on science diplomacy.

2025 is set to further accelerate tectonic shifts in the global environment, and Re-LAB will continue to analyse how regional actors respond to them.

Frank Mattheis

Cluster Coordinator
Regions and Cities Governance Lab



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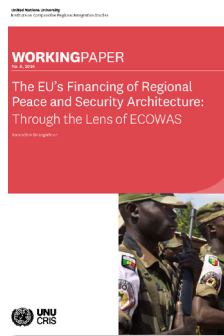
Gelot, Linnéa and Frederik Söderbaum. 2024. Legitimation Struggles in International Organizations: The Case of the African Union. Globalizations, 21(5): 821-838.

Genna, Gaspare M. and Paul Vierra. 2024. Uncooperative Leadership: US Public Opinion and Limited Commitments to Region Building. Contemporary Politics, 30(5): 618-638.



Regions and Cities Governance Lab (Re-LAB)

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Litsegård, Andréas and Frank Mattheis. 2024. Broadening the Concept of Interregionalism: Beyond State-Centrism and Eurocentrism. Third World Quarterly 45(7): 1273–1290.

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Piaget, Eric and Philippe De Lombaerde. 2024. Laboratories and City Halls: The Science Diplomacy-Paradiplomacy Nexus. Insight Brief 2024-02. UNU-CRIS.

Pueppke, Steven G., Norman A. Graham, Volodymyr Tarabara and Marc Uzan. 2024. Central Asia and the Geopolitical Crisis: Reforms, Prospects, Future. Research Report 2024-03. UNU-CRIS.

Ribeiro Barao, Giulia. 2024. The Role of Multilateral and Regional Cooperation in Leveraging UNESCO's "Culture and Arts Education Framework for Sustainable Development". PB-2024-10. UNU-CRIS.

Spandler, Killian, Julia Hartelius, Alva Monti and Frederik Söderbaum. 2024. Sovereignty Scripts and Regional Governance: ASEAN's Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, The Pacific Review, 37(3): 604–633.

Theodoro Luciano, Bruno and Catherine Ortiz-Morales (Eds). 2024. Los

desafíos globales de la Unión Europea: transformación digital, participación ciudadana y relaciones con América Latina. Editorial de la Universidad de Alcalá and Ediciones Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia. ISBN: 9789587604597.

Valenza, Domenico. 2024. “Do Not Forget your Pain”: Identities, Affect and Emotions in Russian and EU Cultural Diplomacy in Armenia. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. 1-18.

Vanassche, Sarah. 2024. Georgia’s Path Towards Gender Equality: The Interaction Between its EU Ambitions and Local Values. WP-2024/11. UNU-CRIS.

SELECTED EVENTS

Authority and African Regionalisms (24 January): Bruges

APSA@20: Lessons Learnt and Way Forward for the African Peace and Security Architecture (8 February): Bruges (Hybrid)

Achieving Sustainable Governance within the Regions and Cities in European Union through Management of Conflict and Individual Differences (28 February): Bruges (Hybrid)

Managing Shocks: Connecting Regional and Global Responses Past and Present (7 to 8 March): Oxford

Inter-Ethnic Relations in Times of Wars: the Case of Georgian/Abkhaz and Armenian/Azerbaijani Relations (2 April): Bruges (Workshop)

Roundtable: Defining the Paradiplomacy Research Agenda (19 April): Brussels (Hybrid)

What Determines the Depth and Institutional Strength of Regional Integration Agreements? A Joint International Economics / UNU-CRIS Seminar (24 April): Ghent

Authority and Latin American Regionalisms (25 April): Tours

Doctoral School on Asian and Comparative Regionalism (19 to 23 August): Surabaya, Indonesia

Perspectives on Regional Integration in the Context of Growing Fragmentation and Polycrisis (11 September): Online

Localising the Sustainable Development Goals: Asian & European Perspectives and Beyond (18 – 19 September): Brussels (Hybrid)

Narcos and Addicts: The Opioids Crisis in America (17 October): Bruges

Researching Non-State Actors: Methodological Issues and Challenges (6 November): Bruges (Hybrid)

The Functioning of International Norm Diffusion: A Case Study of EU Geographical Indications (12 November): Bruges

Africa’s Perspectives: Unpacking the AU-EU Partnership (28 November): Brussels

Economic and Political Interactions

Because of the substantial overlap in topics and associated researchers, the Economic Interactions cluster merged in 2024 with the RIKS cluster, enabling the pooling of resources and simplifying UNU-CRIS' structure.

The newly formed cluster has been exceptionally active, fostering a vibrant research environment with frequent presentations of ongoing work at internal seminars and international conferences.

In 2024, the cluster doubled its number of PhD Researchers from three to six. Their research addresses the complexities of the “spaghetti bowl” of regional integration, explores citizen participation in regional

organisations (ROs), and investigates trade agreements' direct and indirect impacts. We also welcomed eight new interns and several visiting researchers, broadening the cluster's academic and professional network.

A notable highlight of the year was the organisation of a conference on the localisation of the SDGs. This event was a collaborative effort with the Brussels office of Waseda University, ULB and UNU-IAS.

Samuel Standaert

Cluster Coordinator
Economic and Political Interactions



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Baiocchi, Giovanni, Francesco Scotti and P. Lelio Iapadre. 2024. The Impact of Natural Disasters: How the 2009 Earthquake Transformed the Economy of L'Aquila's Labour Market Area. *Papers in Regional Science*, 103(6): 100058.

Bui, Linh, Ruben Dewitte, Simon Happersberger, Nidhi Nagabhatla and Glenn Rayp. 2024. Environmental Impact Assessments of Trade Agreements. *UNU-CRIS Research Report 1*.

De Beule, Filip, Philippe De Lombaerde and Haiyan Zhang. 2024. The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative: Strategic Responses of Governments and Multinational Companies. *Asia Pacific Business Review*. 30(2): 209-219.

De Lombaerde, Philippe, Kairat Moldashev, Ikboljon Qoraboyev and Servaas Taghon. 2024. Strategic responses of regional economic organizations to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative: the cases of ASEAN, EAEU, and EU. *Asia Pacific Business Review*. 30(2): 399-419.

De Witte, Ruben, Bruno Merlevede and Glenn Rayp. 2024. Gains from Trade: Demand, Supply and Idiosyncratic Shocks. *Journal of Applied Econometrics*, 39(5): 870-886.

Genna, Gaspare M., Zining Yang, and Mark Abdollahian. 2024. Regional Integration and Economic Development: Optimal or Messy Networks? *Journal of Economic Integration*, 39(3): 557-589.



Economic and Political Interactions

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Joint International Economics - UNU-CRIS Seminar on Colonial Trade Linkages, Revisited (17 January): Ghent

Multi-Vector Foreign Policies of Central Asian States in the Context of International Sanctions Related to Russia-Ukraine War (28 March): Bruges

Mitigating Barriers to Digital Trade in Asia (15 May): Bruges

Joint International Economics - UNU-CRIS Seminar on Mapping the Policy Space of SDGs: Insights from Signed Networks at the Local Level (22 May): Bruges

Possibilities for Advancing Energy Transition in Latin America at Regional Scale(s) (11 June): Bruges

Joint International Economics - UNU-CRIS Seminar on Multilateral Trade or Bilateral Labour Agreements: What Matters More for Migration? (22 November): Ghent

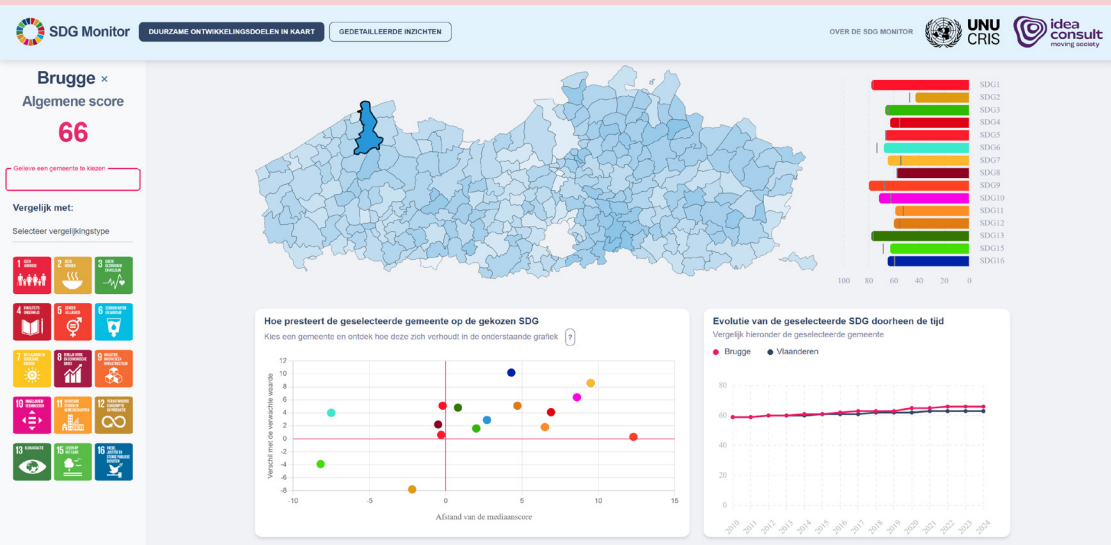
THE SDG MONITOR

In collaboration with the Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten (VVSG) and IDEA Consult, UNU-CRIS developed a comprehensive index and website to monitor the SDG readiness of Flemish municipalities.

This initiative is designed to empower municipalities with the necessary tools and resources to assess, monitor, and enhance their progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2024 SDG Monitor serves as a pivotal policy instrument, guiding local municipalities in their endeavours to meet the SDGs.

The Monitor encompasses data on 208 indicators that comprehensively detail the socioeconomic and environmental outcomes of all 285 Flemish municipalities.

These indicators, selected based on their relevance to Flemish municipalities and their capacity to measure specific development outcomes, facilitate municipalities in comparing their scores to a diverse range of pertinent groups. Furthermore, the SDG tool (www.sdgmonitor.be) enables municipalities to establish a baseline expectation based on their income, population, and other attributes over the past decade.



Migration and Social Policy

In 2024, the Migration and Social Policy cluster saw the successful completion of three PhD research projects, and also welcomed three new researchers focusing on migration aspirations, geopolitics within social welfare policy and return mobilities between Belgium and Ukraine.

This year, the cluster significantly strengthened its collaboration with associate fellows, which, in most of the cases, are former staff who now climbed up to post-doctoral level or assistant professorships at a diversity of research institutes in Africa, Asia and Europe.

Research mobility in the context of data collection on internal displacement and

youth (im)mobility and the context of data dissemination was another focus of several cluster members. First publications on these data sets are expected in the course of 2025.

Finally, also important steps have been taken to strengthen the social policy research in the cluster, through dedicated seminars and broadening the cluster's research network on this topic.

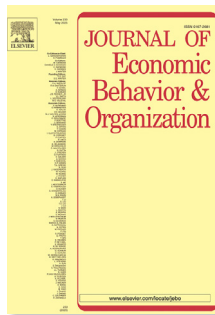
Ine Lietaert

Cluster Coordinator
Migration and Social Policy



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Debray, Alix, Charlotte Scheerens, Ndiémé Sow, Doudou Dièye Gueye, Sorana Toma, and Ilse Ruyssen. 2024. Policy Recommendations for Enhancing Capabilities of Senegalese Youth Navigating Immobility: Qualitative Data

Insights from the “Migration Aspiration, Immobility and Wellbeing” Workshop. Afrika Focus 37(2): 393-418

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Migration and Social Policy

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Capacity to Aspire, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 1–16.

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SELECTED EVENTS

Supporting Youth in the African Region (1 February): Online

CESSMIR Breakthrough Breakfast 'Re-making it Here: Returnees and Non-State Actors in the (European) Externalisation of Return Migration Management to the Gambia' (6 February): Ghent

Taking Stock and Looking Ahead: Research on the EU as Actor in Social Policy (23 February): Bruges

Return and Reintegration Counselling Workshop (8 March): Brussels

Migration Aspiration, Immobility and Well-Being Workshop (20 March): Ziguinchor

Kick-off of the Decolonization of Education and Research on Migration (DERM) project

(27 March): Cape Town

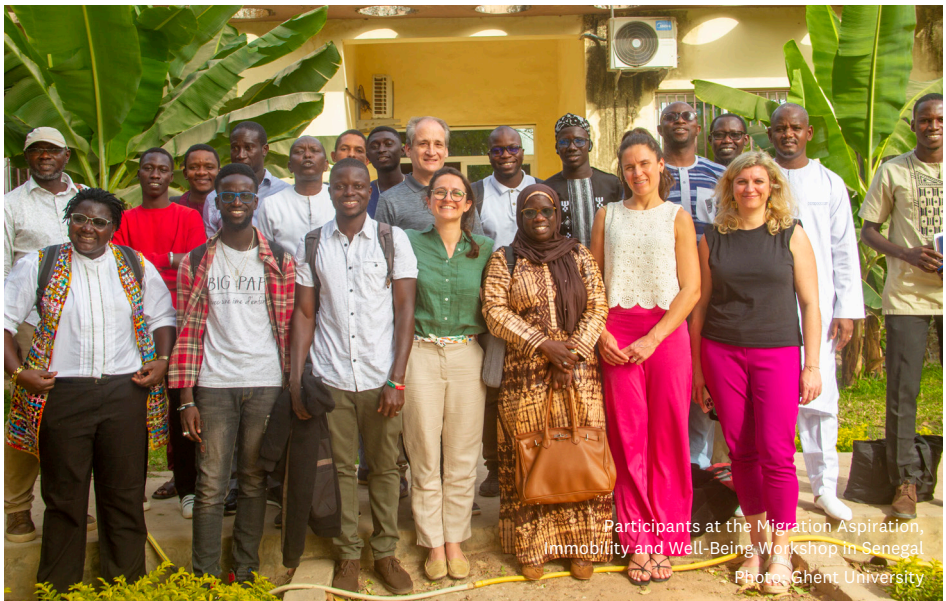
Developments in Social Welfare in Georgia
(13 May): Ghent

The Status of Forced Displacement and
Migration in Ethiopia: Developments,
Challenges in Responding to It and the
Role of Social Work (12 June): Ghent
(hybrid)

Is ECOWAS a Tool or an Obstacle to
Decolonization? Migration Governance and
Beyond (15 October): Bruges (Online)

Joint International Economics - UNU-CRIS
Seminar on Irrigation as a Mitigator for
Migratory Aspirations following Drought (6
December): Ghent

Meet the PhD Jury - Social Work,
Homelessness, Migration, and the Borders
of the Welfare State (16 December): Ghent
Workshop on SRC-Project: Concepts,
Steps and Roles in Return Processes (10
December): Amsterdam



Participants at the Migration Aspiration,
Immobility and Well-Being Workshop in Senegal
Photo: Ghent University

Nature, Climate and Health

In 2024, the Nature, Climate and Health Cluster amplified its impact by strategically engaging stakeholders and utilising new technology to enhance research and policy recommendations.

Our primary thematic domains of focus were cross-border water security, climate action, public health policies, and diplomacy, aligned with the SDGs.

Through our work, we fostered global and regional partnerships, particularly related to natural resources management and climate change adaptation, to study how multi-level governance operates in these spaces by analysing data and facilitating discussions.

The capacity-building agenda of the cluster attracted young professionals and promoted interdisciplinary research across geographical and gender domains, with a focus on candidates from the Global South.

We are proud of our work supporting UNU-CRIS's mission, developing partnerships to seek external funding for supporting our cluster activities, and advocating for effective governance solutions for climate resilience, health diplomacy, water security, and sustainability.

Nidhi Nagabhatla

Cluster Coordinator
Nature, Climate and Health



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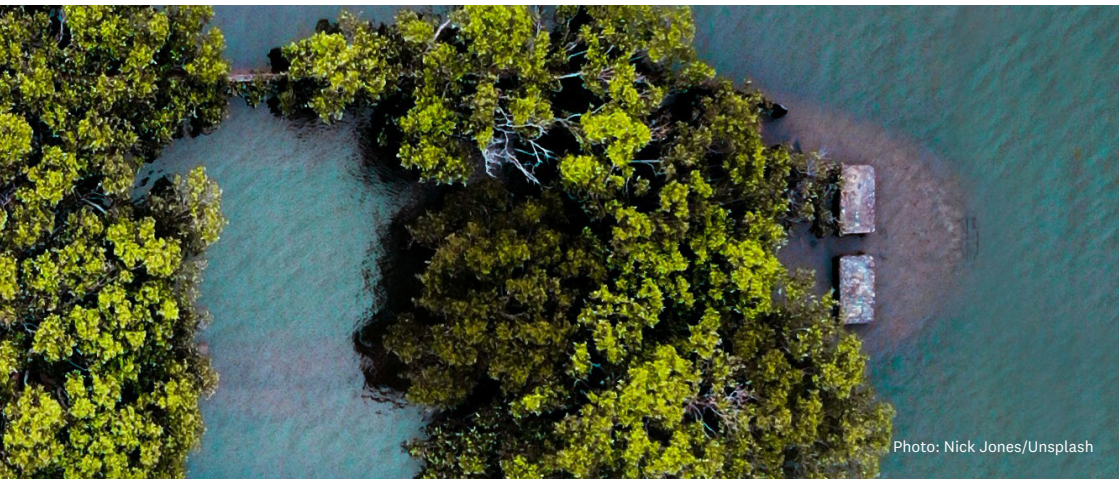
Hellberg, Sofie, Fredrik Söderbaum, Ashok Swain and Joakim Öjendal (eds.) 2024. Routledge Handbook of Water and Development. Routledge.

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Nelson, Cara R. James G. Hallett, Nidhi Nagabhatla et al. 2024. Standards of Practice to Guide Ecosystem Restoration: A Contribution to the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030 - Full Report.



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Schunz, Simon and Ediz Topcuoglu. 2024. A European Union 'Water Diplomacy? Frames of Water in EU External Action, The Hague Journal of Diplomacy, 19(1): 340-275.

Steiner, S. Nadja, Andrea Bryndum-Buchholz, Nidhi Nagabhatla, et al. 2024. Large Changes in Canada's Oceans and their Impacts on Ecosystems and Fisheries. Edited by Ussif Rashid, Sumaila Derek Armitage, Megan Bailey and William W.L.Cheung, SEA CHANGE: Charting a Sustainable Future for Oceans in Canada. Chapter 4, UBC Press.

SELECTED EVENTS

Water Security Capacity Development Programme in Latin American Region (23 January): Online

UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030. Sharing Insights from the Recent FAO Report, Focussing on Standards of Practice and Implementation

Strategies (28 February): Bolivia (Hybrid)

Green Politics and Policies in the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Organizations (28 May): Bruges (Hybrid)

Exploring Regional Science Diplomacy (30 May): Brussels (Hybrid)

Ecological Conflicts: Judicial and Non-Judicial Responses in Central Asia (30 May): Online

UNU Vice-Rector in Europe and UNU-EHS Director Xiaomeng Shen on the Research Programme of UNU-EHS (4 June): Bruges

Report Launch: Supporting Sustainable Mining Practices and Pathways in the Congo Region (5 June): Online

Harnessing Resilience at Regional and National Levels: Disaster Risk Management Strategies in the Amazon River Basin (26 September): Online

Retain Factors and Staying Preferences in Climate-Vulnerable Regions in West Africa (18 October): Ghent

Responding and Adapting to Climate Change in the European Union and in Latin America and the Caribbean: Fostering Cooperation at the Interregional Level (7 November): Brussels

The Ethics of Environmental Upgrading in the Aftermath of the European Green Deal (12 November): Bruges

COP29 Side Event: Synergy Solutions: Overcoming Silos and Policy Incoherence

to Close the Climate & SDGs Ambition Gap (15 November): Baku

COP29 Side Event: Operationalizing Multilevel Policy Coherence for Targeted Climate Action (15 November): Baku

GAPSYM17: Africa at the intersection of Climate, Migration & Health challenges (26 November): Ghent

Supply and Demand: Recentring the Multilateral Debate on the Atlantic (29 November): Bruges (hybrid)



Photo: Leo Visions/Unsplash

Digital Governance

Digital Governance at UNU-CRIS grew in 2024, with the addition of new members from Ghent University and different departments in the VUB (LSTS and SMIT).

Our team has also solidified relations with external partners, including the Journal 'Policy & Internet' and the academic communities 'Giganet' and GIG-ARTS.

In 2025, we aim to consolidate our position as a hub for research, engaging with partners to develop knowledge-based impacts. We hope to engage more with expertise in regions such as Latin America, Western Asia, and South East Asia, in order to engage globally.

In terms of content, our focus in 2024 was on regional digital governance, digital sovereignty, and participation in multistakeholder organisations. We also addressed AI governance questions and examined policies around disinformation.

Looking forward to 2025, we aim to seek global solutions to increasing tensions around digital governance, extending our reach to other policy domains, including outer space.

Jamal Shahin

Cluster Coordinator
Digital Governance



SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Akcali Gur, Berna and Joana Kulesza. 2024. Equitable Access to Satellite Broadband Services – Challenges and Opportunities for Developing Countries. *Telecommunications Policy*, 48(5): 102731.

Akcali Gur, Berna. 2024. Reflections on the 2024 United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs Space Law and Policy Conference. IB-2024-3. UNU-CRIS.

Arnold, Stephanie. 2024. Africa's Roads to Digital Development: Paving the Way for Chinese Structural Power in the ICT Sector?, *Review of International Political Economy*, 31(4): 1148–1172.

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Christou, George, Trisha Meyer and Rosanna Fanni. 2024. The European Union: Assessing Global Leadership through

Actorness in Artificial Intelligence. *Journal of European Integration*. 47(3), 383–401.

Meyer, Trisha and Agnieszka Vetulani-Cęgiel. 2024. Transparency as an Empty Signifier? Assessing Transparency in EU and Platform Initiatives on Online Political Advertising and Actors. *Policy & Internet*, 1–21.

Pohle, Julia and Mauro Santaniello. 2024. From Multistakeholderism to Digital Sovereignty: Toward a new Discursive Order in Internet Governance. *Policy & Internet*: 1-20.



Radu, Roxana, Riccardo Nanni and Jamal Shahin. 2024. New Challenges in Internet Governance: New challenges in Internet governance: Power shifts and Contestation from “within”, *Telecommunications Policy*, 48(5): 102740.



Digital Governance

Shahin, Jamal. 2024. Dancing to the Same Tune? EU and US Approaches to Standards Setting in the Global Digital Sector. *Journal of European Integration*, 46(7): 1111-1131.

Tjahja, Nadia. 2024. The Dynamics of Meaningful Youth Participation: Mapping the Purpose of Participation of Youth Dialogue on Internet Governance Participants, Policy and Internet (P&I).

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EVENTS

Beyond “Data Colonialism”: Shaping Data Governance through African Cultural Realities (25 April): Online

The Role of Disinformation in 2024 Elections: A Tool for Manipulation or a Game-Changer? (16 May): Bruges

East Meets West: Contrasting Asian and Latin America’s Trade in Digital Services dynamics (11 June): Bruges

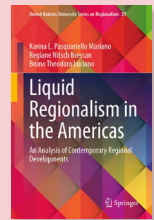


UNU Series on Regionalism

In 2024, four new additions (volumes 26-29) were added to our United Nations University Series on Regionalism, published by Springer Nature.

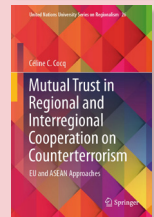
Liquid Regionalism in the Americas: An Analysis of Contemporary Regional Developments

Karina L. Pasquariello Mariano, Regiane Nitsch Bressan, Bruno Theodoro Luciano



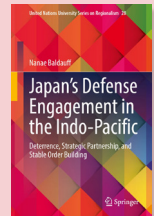
Mutual Trust in Regional and Interregional Cooperation on Counterterrorism: EU and ASEAN Approaches

Céline C. Cocq



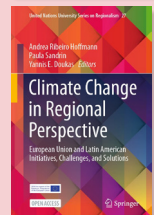
Japan's Defense Engagement in the Indo-Pacific: Deterrence, Strategic Partnership, and Stable Order Building

Nanae Baldauff



Climate Change in Regional Perspective: European Union and Latin American Initiatives, Challenges, and Solutions (Open Access)

Andrea Ribeiro Hoffmann, Paula Sandrin, Yannis E. Doukas (eds.)







Capacity Building

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

Students of the 12th Doctoral School on
Latin American, European and Comparative
Regionalism in Quito, Ecuador.

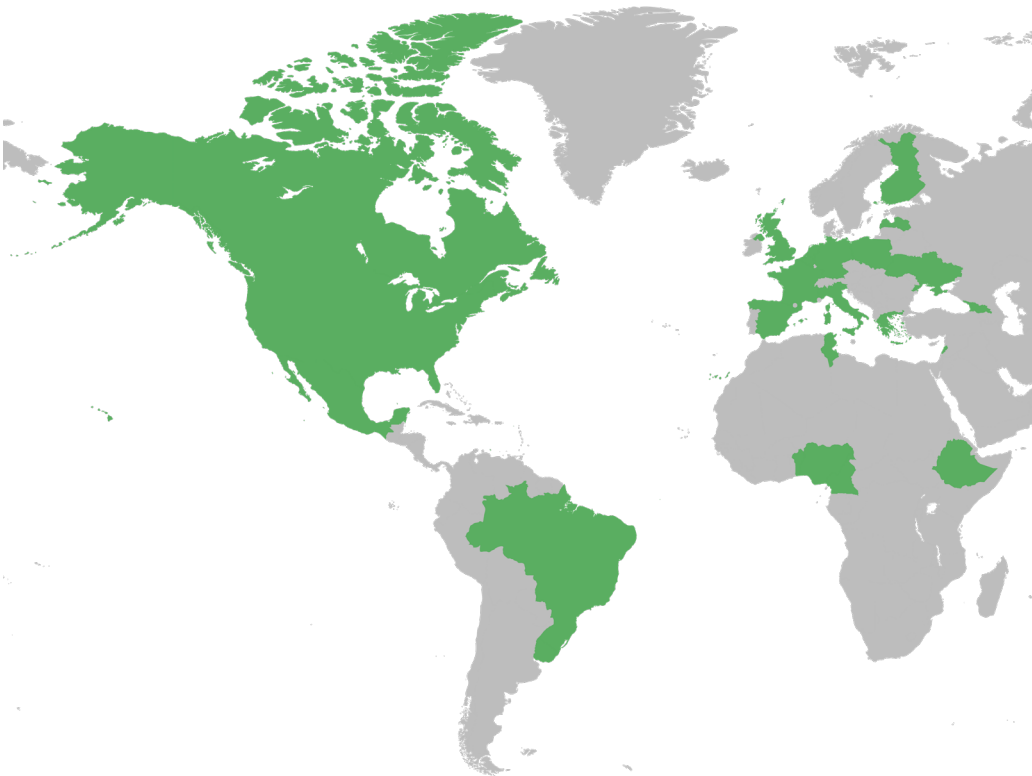
Photo: UASB

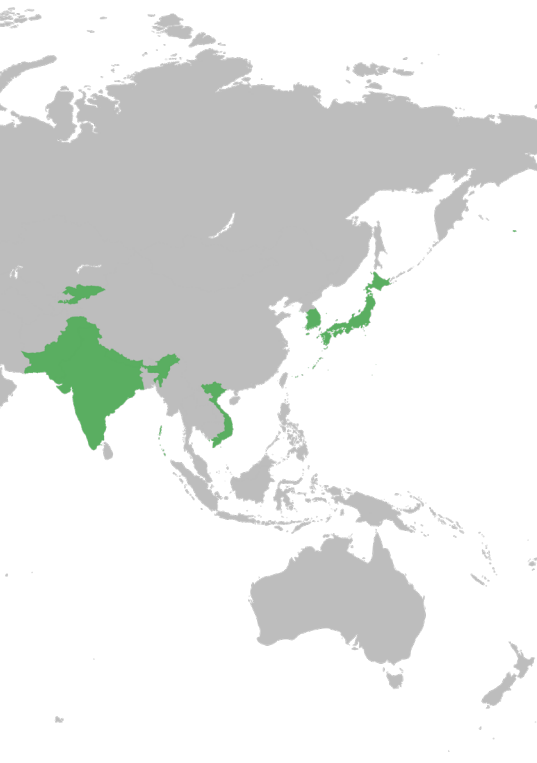
Visiting Researchers and Interns

2024 was a record year for UNU-CRIS, in terms of the number of visiting researchers and interns spending time with us in Bruges and online, with 22 visiting researchers from 17 countries and 29 interns from 19 countries joining the UNU-CRIS team.

These programmes are central to our missions of creating a free flow of knowledge, ideas and experience across the world.

The map below shows the countries we welcomed researchers from in 2024.





“

I was a visiting fellow at UNU-CRIS (April–August 2024), researching regional integration in digital services as a trade driver in Latin America.

The experience in beautiful Bruges was enriching, with a superb work environment. Engaging with staff and researchers enhanced my work.

After receiving feedback during seminars at CRIS and other European universities, my paper has been accepted for publication in a journal of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM).”

Johan Mulder

Chief of the International Trade Unit,
International Trade and Integration
Division of the United Nations
Economic Commission for Latin
America and the Caribbean (ECLAC),
Santiago (Chile)



Short Training Programmes

First Doctoral School on Asian and Comparative Regionalism: Regionalism and Crisis Mitigation

Surabaya, Indonesia | 19 - 23 August

Partners: Universitas Airlangga, Maqsut Narikbayev University and the International Forum on the Future of Constitutionalism

Twelfth Doctoral School on Latin American, European and Comparative Regionalism

Quito, Ecuador | 08 - 12 July

Partners: Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar and FLACSO-Argentina

School of Modern Diplomacy

Online | September - December (weekly)

Partners: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of Ghana

Training of Indonesian Public Servants on Regional Cooperation in Higher Education

Bruges, Belgium | 14 October

Partners: Katholiek Onderwijs Vlaanderen

Return Migration Workshops

Ghent/Amsterdam | 08 March/10 December

Partners: Caritas International



Photo: UASB

PhD Programme

UNU-CRIS had 41 active PhD Fellows in 2024, with five successful PhD defenses throughout the year.

Rebuilding Home and Identities: Ukrainian Mothers Navigating War, Migration and Return

Alina Penkala (UGent)

Promoters: Ine Lietaert and Ilse Derluyn

Social Services Within and Across Contested Borders: Insights from Transnistria, Abkhazia and Samegrelo.

Gaëlle Le Pavic (UGent)

Promoters: Fabienne Bossuyt, Ine Lietaert and Giacomo Orsini

Contextualising the Economic and Social Dimensions of Forced Returnees' Reintegration Processes in Rural Ethiopia.

Ashenafi Tirfie Tizazu (UGent)

Promoters: Ine Lietaert and Ilse Derluyn

Living in the Split: The Agency of the Shared Neighbourhood in-between Russia and the EU

Louise Amoris (UGent)

Promoters: Fabienne Bossuyt, Laure Delcour and Olga Burluk

The International Politics of Digital Development: A Multi-Method Analysis of ICT Infrastructure and Policies in Africa.

Stephanie Arnold (University of Bologna/VUB)

Promoters: Francesco Niccolò Moro and Corrado Tornimbeni





United Nations
Climate Change





Global Impact

From Bruges to the World: Our Global Footprint

Policy Engagement with the UN, Regional
Organisations and Governments

UNU-CRIS researchers contributed three policy briefs to the Think20 Brasil, the G20 academic engagement group.

PUBLICATION

Environmental Impact Assessments of Trade Agreements Towards a Systematic and Comprehensive Application

Linh Thi Thuy Bui, Ruben Dewitte, Nidhi Nagabhatla, Glenn Rayp



PUBLICATION

Decolonizing Global Governance and Multilateralism for an Equitable Healthcare

Sumbal Javed, Vijay Kumar Chattu, Aamer Ikran



PUBLICATION

A Strategic Framework for Good Regulatory Practice in Services Trade

Advaiyot Sharma, Shruti Meheshwari, Beatrice Chaytor, Sherry M. Stephenson, Nanno Mulder



Photo: Ricardo Stuckert/PR

OUTREACH

Partnerships With Mexican Research Institutions

A key component of the revitalised United Nations University Strategy 2025–2029 is greater visibility and impact through expansion and outreach. In service of this priority, UNU-CRIS is exploring the creation of research hubs in various regions around the world.

In August, Philippe De Lombaerde visited Mexico City, a natural hub for the promotion of research activities on North and Central American regionalisms and home to a rich and international community of regionalism scholars spread over several institutions.

During this visit, initial MoUs were signed with UN ECLAC and Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE) and contacts were established at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (CIALC) and El Colegio de México, in a first step towards developing a lasting and impactful UNU-CRIS presence in the country and the region.



Photo: ECLAC

EVENT

Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS) Annual Meeting

Eight UNU-CRIS researchers took part in the 2024 Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS) Annual Meeting on *Global Governance and Sustainable Development: Revitalizing Research to Support Multilateral Solutions*.

They were involved in several panels and roundtables, covering topics such as cross-border cooperation, urban resilience, African Union peace and security initiatives, conflict early warning systems, climate change and public health, health and human security, gender health inequalities, and migrant citizenship.

This year's edition was held in Tokyo (and online) from 20-22 June and was co-hosted at UNU and the University of Tokyo.

Tshilidzi Marwala, Rector of the United Nations University and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, delivered the Opening Keynote Address on the topic of *Multilateral Solutions Through Research, Technology, and Innovation*.



EVENT

APSA@20: Lessons Learnt and Way Forward for the African Peace and Security Architecture

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of APSA's creation and the launch of the French translation of the book *Researching the Inner Life of the African Peace and Security Architecture - APSA Inside-Out*, we organised a workshop on 8 February, together with Leipzig University, Swedish Defense University and Södertörn University, that brought together researchers, experts, civil society, as well as European and African organisations representatives.

The workshop included panels on *APSA in a Changing Geopolitical Context* and *The Future of APSA: Opportunities and Challenges Ahead*.

EVENT

COP29 & UNCCD COP 16 Side Events

UNU-CRIS co-organised several side events at COP29, which convened in Baku, Azerbaijan from 11–22 November, and at UNCCD COP16 in Riyadh from 2–13 December.

At COP29, Nidhi Nagabhatla was involved in two events: *Operationalizing Multilevel Policy Coherence for Targeted Climate Action and Synergy Solutions: Overcoming Silos and Policy Incoherence to Close the Climate & SDGs Ambition Gap*.

At COP16, UNU-CRIS was part of the UNU delegation and involved in an event discussing sustainable land management for human well-being.

LEADERSHIP

EU Science Diplomacy Working Groups

Luk Van Langenhove was appointed as Coordinator of the *EU Science Diplomacy Working Group* co-chairs.

Launched in late 2023, the European Commission set up informal working groups composed of individuals from both the science and diplomacy communities to develop potential elements of a future European framework for science diplomacy.

The main aim of the working groups is to bring together the relevant stakeholders in an innovative format, to develop jointly recommendations in a co-creation process, expected to be released in early 2025.

EVENT

Internet Governance Forum

Jamal Shahin and Sophie Hoogenboom were present at the *Internet Governance Forum* (IGF) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabi, where they presented at the Global Internet Governance Academic Network (Giganet) Annual Symposium on 15 December.

Sophie presented her work on constructivist/relational approaches to (digital)-sovereignty, and Jamal was the discussant of a panel that examined the right of data portability in China, and cyberspace as a new sphere of oppositional struggle in Iran.

Giganet aims to foster multidisciplinary research on internet governance, and the symposium plays a crucial role in shaping discussions, policies, and research directions in the field of internet governance, bringing together academics, practitioners, and policymakers from around the world.

EVENT

The Future of Peace Support Operations in Africa

On October 31, Dimpho Deleglise was a panelist in the FES-AU Cooperation Office/ Amani Africa policy dialogue on the theme *The Future of Peace Support Operations in Africa*.

She shared her insights on the topic with special emphasis on the protection of civilians and women and peace and security issues in peace support operations.

EVENT

International Law of Critical Internet Infrastructure: A Comparative Analysis of Europe and China

On December 13, Berna Akcali Gur took part in a workshop co-organised by UNU-CRIS and the Lodz Cyber Hub (LCH) at the University of Lodz Law School, which was held to examine regional approaches to the governance of Critical Internet Infrastructure (CII).

The workshop raised in-depth discussions on the unique legal frameworks adopted in Europe and China, analysing the challenges and opportunities each region faces in the protection and management of CII.

By comparing these governance models, the workshop provided insights into their effectiveness and adaptability within the broader context of international law.

EVENT

Harnessing Resilience at Regional and National Levels: Disaster Risk Management Strategies in the Amazon River Basin

The hydrological cycle of the Amazon has significantly intensified over the past two decades, resulting in more frequent and severe flooding and droughts.

In the framework of *Amazon Week 2024*, we organised a roundtable on 26 September to facilitate a collaborative dialogue among stakeholders and to identify actionable strategies that address governance challenges and enhance community resilience in the Amazon River Basin.

EVENT

KRAFT Conference: Can We Cooperate?

Philippe De Lombaerde was invited to attend the 10th International Kraft Conference, held in Kőszeg, Hungary from 02-04 December.

The conference, titled *Can We Cooperate*, aimed to address the challenges, achievements and opportunities of cultural heritage-based urban and regional development, through international examples to local best practices.

The discussions covered regional science in the light of domestic and cross-border cooperation, history of Kraft's development through national and international projects, and plans for the future with a focus on knowledge hubs. Philippe De Lombaerde presented on the Comparative Regionalism research programme.

MEDIA

On Space Technology and Data with the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs

In July, Nidhi Nagabhatla gave an interview to the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs' Space4Water platform, discussing the work of the Nature, Climate and Health cluster and how water and space technology are critical drivers in achieving the agenda 2030.

In the interview, she emphasized the critical role that space technologies play in achieving sustainable water management and security, and highlighted the various ways in which actors, agencies, and regions are leveraging geospatial technologies.

EVENT

Responding and Adapting to Climate Change in the European Union and in Latin America and the Caribbean

The 2023 high-level EU-CELAC Summit made climate change a priority for EU-LAC cooperation. However, policymaking and implementation have so far fallen short of expectations.

On 7 November, UNU-CRIS, in partnership with the EU-LAC Foundation, the Université libre de Bruxelles and the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, organised a policy dialogue to discuss cooperation between Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and the European Union (EU) in finding common solutions to environmental and climate change problems.

The event, which was carried out in the framework of EU-LAC's seventh Annual Call for the co-organisation of events on strategic topics, explored the opportunities and challenges for bi-regional cooperation between the European Union (EU) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in addressing climate change, renewing alliances and providing recommendations to policymakers.

It generated useful recommendations aimed at international organisations and policymakers, bolstering the argument for deeper EU-LAC joint efforts to tackle the worldwide climate challenge.

A policy brief summarising the principal findings and recommendations is planned for future release.



Photo: Inti Ocon/AFP

Local Impact

Bringing the world home

Engagement with local stakeholders



Andrew Dunn speaking to students at Ter Groene Poorte in Bruges

Photo: Daphne Vandenabeele

PUBLICATION

Blind Spots in Belgian Flood Risk Governance: The Case of the Summer 2021 Floods in Wallonia

This research report by Samuel Lietaer, Nidhi Nagabhatla, Charlotte Scheerens, Max Mycroft and Philippe De Lombaerde presents a strategic assessment of the gaps in Belgian flood risk governance following the 2021 summer floods in Western Europe.

The catastrophic floods of July 2021 in Belgium's Walloon Region underscored the critical need to comprehensively evaluate the country's flood risk governance. Through qualitative discourse analysis and stakeholder engagement, the report's assessment identifies critical governance gaps that exacerbated the impact of the floods.



PUBLICATION

Embedding Strategic Foresight With a Multi-Level Perspective

In this policy brief, Peter De Smedt and Flo Van den Broeck of the Flemish Chancellery and Foreign Office Department explore the importance of integrating strategic foresight through a multi-level perspective, and outline methods to achieve this, drawing upon best practices from Flanders.

One key highlight is an explanation of how Flanders uses four key functions in its strategic foresight work – discover, explore, map and create, to navigate and ensure evidence-informed policymaking.



PUBLICATION

De Kwetsbaarheid van de Belgische Productieketen: Identificatie van Kritieke In-En Uitvoergoederen

This report by Michel Dumont, Bernhard Michel, and Glenn Rayp uses detailed Belgian trade data to show that aggregated data misrepresents import/export dependencies. They found that Belgium's non-EU import reliance remained stable (2014-2023), with export growth in non-strategic goods. China leads in non-strategic imports, while the US dominates strategic, structural goods.

ADVISORY ROLE

Evaluation of HOWEST's Business Management Programme

Pascale Vantorre was invited to share her insights during an external audit of HOWEST's Business Management Department.

She took part in a panel that discussed and examined the quality of students produced by the Business Management programme, based on her experience of supervising several students who have conducted traineeships at UNU-CRIS as part of their study programme.

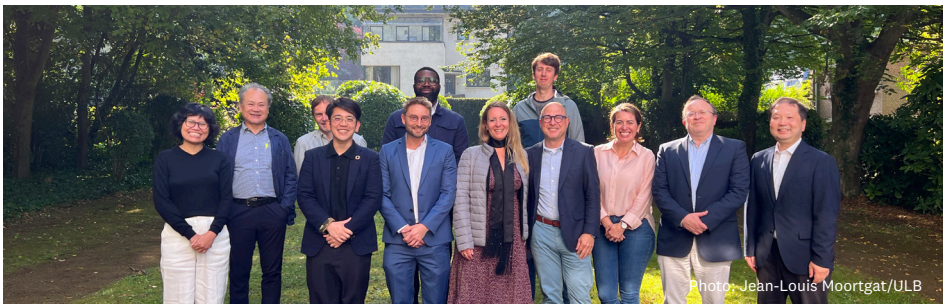
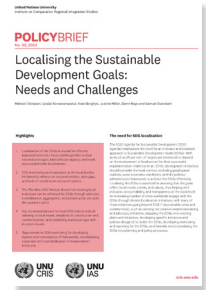
EVENT

Localising the Sustainable Developments Goals

On 18–19 September, UNU-CRIS co-organised a workshop on SDG localisation in Brussels with UNU-IAS, ULB and Waseda University Brussels Office.

It brought together researchers and practitioners from Asia and Europe to discuss adapting the goals to the needs and priorities of a given region or community while aligning with national and global frameworks.

The workshop featured presentations and discussions on assessment of local SDG monitoring, participatory action research in multi-stakeholder processes, initiatives such as the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN), and other topics.



MEDIA

In Belgian Media

UNU-CRIS researchers appeared in Flemish and Belgian media, sharing their expertise through platforms such as VRT NWS, Het Journaal, RTBF, De Standaard, and De Morgen, discussing topics such as the war in Ukraine (Fabienne Bossuyt & Sven Biscop), migration in Flanders (Ilke Adam), the energy transition (Thijs Van de Graaf), and the war in Gaza (Jan Orbie).



EVENT

Fair Trade Presentation

On 10 October, Jan Orbie gave a presentation at the Bruges Town Hall on fair world trade.

The event, organised by Oxfam Fair Trade, dealt with questions such as what is the role of consumers, producers and governments in the current economic model, where do we fall short, and what must be done to achieve fair world trade?

PRESENTATION

Flemish Diplomatic Academy Lecture

Glenn Rayp gave a lecture to the Flemish Diplomatic Academy on 15 May, where he discussed autocratic regimes in the 21st century and the impact on international economic relations.

EVENT

GAPSYM17: Africa at the Intersection of Climate, Migration & Health Challenges

UNU-CRIS co-organised the 17th multidisciplinary conference of the UGent Africa Platform, together with CliMigHealth and the Centre for the Social Study of Migration and Refugees (CESSMIR), on 28-29 November in Gent.

The conference showcased how scientists, policymakers, artists, writers, opinion makers, and educators reflect on present-day developments related to relevant Climate-Migration-Health topics in Africa. The event featured the Ghent University Nelson Mandela Lecture with Gulshan Khan and Adriaan van Dis, and a CliMigHealth photo exhibition by Gulshan Khan.

Our People

Office of the Director (5)

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

Cluster Coordinators (6)

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

Professorial Fellows (15)

Ilke Adam | Sven Biscop | Fabienne Bossuyt | Marijke D'Haese | Dries Lesage | Trisha Meyer | Sebastian Oberthür | Jan Orbie | Ilse Ruyssen | Stefaan Smis | Florian Trauner | Thijs Van de Graaf | Sven Van Kerckhoven | Luk Van Langenhove | Gloria González Fuster

PhD Fellows (41)

Daniel Alejo | Louise Amoris | Stephanie Arnold | Alix Debray | Tancrède Pagès | Dan Orendain | Maria Pilar Lorenzo | Martina Chiara Tallarita | Justine Miller | Reinhilde Bouckaert | Sjorre Couvreur | Kikè Yra Fonton | Sophie Hoogenboom | Orsolya Gulyás | Simon Happersberger | Gaëlle Le Pavic | Katsiaryna Lozka | Alina Penkala* | Dereje Regasa* | Maria Rodriguez Alcazar | Adelina Sharipova | Nadia Tjahja | Ashenafi Tizazu | Flor Vandeveldel | Zonglyu Ma | Padmi Ranasinghe | Kevin Le Merle | Sara Canali | Caroline Londono – Escudero | Sevinj Samadzade | Rashid Sohail Khan | Femke Maes | Martha Cassidy-Neumiller | Stijn Salden | Koen Borghys | Iana Ovsiannikova | Hannah Grondelaers* | Maria Karasani | Thiago Guimaraes Moraes | Nicolás Caso Castellón

Visiting Research Fellows (22)

Zane Sime | Vu Phuong Hoang | Vijay Kumar Chattu | Tamara Avellán | Alexis Berg-Rodriguez | Pasi Hirvonen | Eric Piaget | Bilge O'Hearn Firat | Kazuma Matoba | Hyang Bock Lee | Sajal Kabiraj | Andre Sanches Siqueira Campos | Andrea Ribeiro Hoffmann | Keita Azuma | Robert Mason | Johan Mulder | Santosh Vijaykumar | Slawomir Gromadzki | Matteo Peccini | Alina Cherviatsova | Carlos Alvarado Mijangos | Karolina Kluczewska

Associate Research Fellows (45)

Alina Penkala | Dereje Regasa | Ana B. Amaya | Nanae Baldauff | Els Bekaert | Edward Best | Andrew Bradley | Leiza Brumat | Richard Burchill | Andrew Cooper | Armin Cuyvers | Ludo Cuyvers | Régis Dandoy | Dimpho Deleglise | Gaspard Genna | Amandine Gnanguénon | Berna Akcali Gur | Geert Haghebaert | Rezart Hoxhaj | Lelio Iapadre | Lynda Iroulo | Eric Maertens | Rossella Marino | Philomena Murray | Nahuel Oddone | Kevin Parthenay | Jamie Pring | Ikboljon Qoraboyev | Alexis Roig | Mauro Santaniello | Amal Sarsour | Charlotte Scheerens | Simon Schunz | Timothy Shaw | Fredrik Söderbaum | Ueli Staeger | Bayartsetseg Terbish | Bruno Theodoro Luciano | Hana Umezawa | Ad van Riet | Germán Camilo Prieto | Presca Wanki | Domenico Valenza | David Devlaeminck | Antoni Estevadeordal

Interns (29)

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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.

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