

Strategic Priorities

2022-2026



UNU
CPR

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1. About UNU-CPR

United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR) is a think tank within the United Nations that carries out policy-focused research and capacity-building on issues of strategic interest and importance to the United Nations and its Member States. The Centre prioritizes urgent policy needs requiring innovative, practical solutions oriented towards immediate implementation and sustainability over the long term.

The Centre offers deep knowledge of the multilateral system and an extensive network of partners within and outside of the United Nations. The United Nations

University Charter, formally adopted by the General Assembly in 1973, endows the Centre with academic independence, which enables impartial research, grounded in an objective and impartial assessment of policy and practice.

With offices in New York and Geneva, on-the-ground research activities in Latin America, the Middle East, Asia, Australia, and Africa, and a wide range of partnerships worldwide, UNU-CPR is a global think tank designed for networked solutions.

2. Policy Research for a Networked United Nations

We live in a deeply interconnected world where both global risks and their solutions depend upon a dispersed network of actors. There are few major issues today that do not reverberate across borders, societies, and generations.

This highly networked, interdependent world requires global cooperation to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and address challenges associated with climate change, sustainable finance, the use and governance of emerging technologies, increasingly diverse forms of international migration, multiplying inequalities, and spreading conflicts. But rapid changes on the global stage also present difficulties for the United Nations: a system that tends to be State-centric, inflexible to change, and often paralyzed by its own membership.

Facing a moment of deep geostrategic uncertainty and fragmentation in the multilateral system, Secretary-General Guterres has called for an ambitious programme of action to respond to the 2020 Declaration of

Commitments by the General Assembly on the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. Building on the reforms of the UN system in 2018, his “Common Agenda” is a vision of an inclusive, networked, effective multilateral system, able to respond to cross-cutting challenges in a flexible and dynamic manner.

This means the UN acting more as a hub, building strong partnerships across a range of actors, including in the private sector, academia, and civil society; developing cross-pillar approaches that bring together peace and security, development, and human rights; and preparing the UN for emerging challenges through improved use of data and foresight with an eye to managing the lasting intergenerational impacts of decisions taken today. The UN will need to become a more focused learning organization, capable of identifying impactful practices, providing solutions on demand to a revitalized Development System, and scaling these practices across a wide range of programme areas and geographies.

3. Our Programme Areas 2022–2026

Our priorities are guided by the goal of supporting the Secretary-General’s vision for a “UN 2.0” that is more networked, inclusive, and effective. In this, we acknowledge that several factors will play an outsized role in shaping the multilateral system, from the post-pandemic rebuilding process to the growth of frontier technologies, to the increasingly acute combination of climate change, debt, and demographic shifts. Our aim is to ensure that the resulting analysis serves as the

basis for common, networked solutions that support the realization of the SDGs and Our Common Agenda and the ambitions of both our partners and stakeholders.

UNU-CPR will refocus its programmes under three broad pillars, which reflect the major debates, policy needs, and strategic objectives in UNU-CPR’s key stakeholder communities: the United Nations Secretariat, the UN Development System, and Member States. Each pillar is linked to leadership positions within the Centre.



UN 2.0 Quinet of Change

DATA, ANALYSIS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Building on the overarching UN Data Strategy, turning the organisation into the state-of-the-art data analyst and communicator for the benefit of the world.



STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Engaging in strategic foresight, linking up with other entities around the world to enable anticipatory action and the design of more forward-looking policies and programmes.



INNOVATION AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Based on all available means, using our innovation infrastructure to discover and implement new ideas to create value and help us do our job in a more digital world.



PERFORMANCE AND RESULTS ORIENTATION

Ensuring the UN family is focused on impact, learning, and continuous improvement.



BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE

Leveraging behavioural science to improve UN family programme and policy effectiveness and reduce bureaucratic processes.



I. Conflict Prevention and Sustaining Peace

Preventing violent conflict has been a stated priority of the UN for decades and remains a core aspect of the UN's work. Conflict risks do not emerge in isolation, but are the result of interdependent dynamics, deeply rooted structural drivers, shocks to fragile systems, and the political decisions of leaders.

UNU-CPR's work in this area includes in-depth field-driven research on conflict dynamics, armed groups, and transborder issues like arms flows, organized crime and illicit financial networks, and climate-security dynamics. The Centre's work has demonstrated that powerful insights can be generated from improved data sharing, integration, and analysis. UNU-CPR uses these methods in its work with UN partners to build more effective approaches to conflict prevention, peacebuilding, rule of law, and the broader work of the multilateral system. The Centre also maintains a group of recognized experts on the multilateral system itself, advising Member States and the Secretariat on Security Council dynamics, geopolitical trends that affect the UN's peace and security work, and country-specific challenges.

Our current and past programming in this pillar includes:

- Managing Exits from Armed Conflict
- Climate-security
- Non-state Armed Groups and Hybrid-Security Governance
- Mediation and Peacemaking
- Mercenaries and Private Security Companies
- Women, Peace, and Security
- Transitional Justice and Human Rights
- Security Sector Governance
- Rule of Law Strengthening and Global Accountability Mechanisms
- Improving Peace Operations
- Security Council and Conflict Prevention
- Global Sanctions Practice.

II. Equitable Development

Development is not an inherently equitable process. While some groups benefit from processes of economic and social development, others are at risk of being left behind and could even become more marginalized. This includes those who move in order to take advantage of development opportunities, as well as those who find themselves subjected to various forms of exploitation, including modern slavery and trafficking.

Research in the Equitable Development pillar generates new evidence, and assesses and develops policy tools that support the delivery of the SDGs, specifically SDGs 5 (gender equality), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 10 (reducing inequality), and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).

This includes research and policy analysis on specific thematic issues including, but not limited to, better understanding the drivers of migration in the Global South, tackling rights violations associated with migration, including modern slavery and human trafficking, and maximizing the benefits of development for Member States, individuals, families, and communities.

The pillar of work is of relevance to UN agencies, international organizations, civil society organizations, and other actors in the development, humanitarian, and social protection domains, as well as those working in the migration policy space, including modern slavery and human trafficking.

Our current and past programming in this pillar includes:

- UN Development System reform
- The Migration for Development and Equality (MIDEQ) Hub
- Access to Justice for Migrants in the Global South
- The Role of Political Will in Development and Peace Responses to Forced Displacement
- Finance Against Slavery and Trafficking
- Support to the UN Development Coordination Office (UNDCO), UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), and the UN High-Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP)
- Collective Action and Global Public Goods.

III. Anticipatory Action and Innovation

The Secretary-General's call for "prevention, prevention, prevention" as the top three priorities of the UN is a demand for a more future-oriented organization, prepared for emerging challenges and capable of innovating to meet them. Indeed, his Common Agenda places particular importance on foresight and long-term thinking to address challenges today and our commitment to future generations, or intergenerational solidarity. This will require reorienting the work of the UN to address problems that will have an impact for decades to come and, ultimately, supporting the fair allocation of burdens and benefits between present and future generations.

UNU-CPR takes a multi-pronged approach to this challenge. First, it aims to provide guidance to the UN system in the use of predictive analytics for short-term and long-term foresight, notably in contexts of humanitarian crises and climate change. This means providing methodological and policy guidance for the UN system's use of artificial intelligence, innovative data sources, and other new technologies. In addition, UNU-CPR will continue to develop its own dedicated foresight capacities, able to deliver scenario-based futures analyses, identifying new trends that may affect the work of the multilateral system, and offering innovative solutions based on, for example, adaptation, mitigation, and resilience, both for current and future generations.

Finally, UNU-CPR will take a deliberative, participatory approach to this work, aiming notably to develop innovative processes for global goal setting. This will

involve working closely with governments and civil society in the Global South to develop accurate and locally-informed policy recommendations. This also involves consideration of impacts of analytical activities on different population groups, notably women, children, forced migrants, and those living with insecurity.

UNU-CPR will ensure uptake of recommendations focused on the role of AI-driven technologies in creating new risks and opportunities, the effects of newly generated large-scale population movements, and how the COVID-19 response may have affected the health and wellbeing of people around the world.

Our current and past programming in this pillar includes:

- AI Governance and Applications
- Global Governance Foresight
- Impact of COVID19 on Humanitarian Access
- UN Resident Coordinator Response to the Triple Planetary Crisis
- Climate-security
- The Future of Multilateralism
- Support to the Secretary-General's Scientific Advisory Board and High-Level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence.

4. How We Operate

UNU-CPR's role in helping fulfil the Secretary-General's vision of a networked UN is to provide research and policy advisory services that identify misalignment, good practices, and challenges on the horizon, helping ensure the United Nations knows what actions to take to better position itself to lead global efforts to build a more just, peaceful world.

In 2024, UNU-CPR celebrates 10 years. Since its launch in 2014, the Centre has honed its approach and practices to ensure creative, reliable, forward-leaning thought leadership for the United Nations.

UNU-CPR acts as a bridge across policy ecosystems:

Responding to the need for increasingly cross-pillar approaches, UNU-CPR established a new Geneva Office in 2022. Acting as a bridge across the two policy ecosystems in New York and Geneva, the Geneva office leads a wide range of research activities and provides policy advice on global governance, human rights, climate change, conflict prevention, sanctions, and support to the Our Common Agenda process. More broadly, UNU-CPR has entered into partnerships with major think tanks, civil society organizations, and researchers in New York, Geneva, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. The Centre draws on the expertise of a range of social scientists and practitioners with deep experience in the fields of conflict prevention and resolution, development, human rights, data science, climate change, artificial intelligence, and population movements. Our networked approach to research responds to the increasingly interdependent and multidisciplinary needs of today's global research agenda.

UNU-CPR participates in inter-governmental and inter-agency agenda setting:

Unlike traditional think tanks, UNU-CPR is formally a part of the UN system. The Centre participates in several UN inter-agency processes and leverages its status to gather insights into the United Nations' evolving research needs. The Centre's knowledge of the UN's intergovernmental and inter-agency policymaking processes results in policy recommendations that are relevant, realistic, and actionable.

UNU-CPR leverages a flexible, agile research agenda for immediate and sustainable impact:

UNU-CPR's flexible thematic mandate ensures a responsive research agenda that generates actionable guidance to support policy and programmatic decision-making within the United Nations and throughout its membership. In some respects, this means UNU-CPR is demand-driven: we respond to emerging needs identified by UN leaders, Member States, and our own research teams and partners. But we are also forward-leaning, using foresight and innovative approaches in data science to help the UN position itself for emerging issues like climate change, demographic shifts, new technologies, fluid geopolitics, decentralized governance, and the changing aspirations of communities.

UNU-CPR leverages the private sector and multi-stakeholder partnerships:

Building on the commitment in SDG 17 to build inclusive partnerships for the sustainable development agenda, and in particular Target 17.17, which encourages and promotes effective public-private partnerships, UNU-CPR is growing its active network of public-private partnerships, recognizing their importance for mobilizing and sharing knowledge, expertise, technologies, and financial resources to support the achievement of the SDGs.

UNU-CPR is committed to gender equality, diversity, and inclusion:

The Centre is committed to achieving gender equality, women's empowerment, geographic diversity and reach, as well as disability inclusion. Guided by the UNU Gender Action Plan 2020-2024, the UNU Policy on Gender Equality, and the University's Disability Inclusion Policy, UNU-CPR actively works to create a diverse and inclusive community of researchers and administrators as well as to mainstream gender in its research activities. Efforts will continue to attract and mentor early career professionals from developing countries and under-represented communities.

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