

Strategy 2025-2029

*Developing Multilateral Solutions Through
Research, Education and Innovation*

United Nations University Strategy 2025-2029

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The world faces multiple global crises amidst major geopolitical shifts and escalating economic pressures. Global peace and security are threatened by renewed political tensions, deepening divisions and inequity, and a resurgence of power competition where politics prioritise narrow national interests. The future of international cooperation within the multilateral system is uncertain, caused by an erosion of trust and commitment to work on common solutions. At the same time, the world is becoming increasingly interconnected.

Amid this dire reality, pressing issues such as poverty, educational access and outcomes, gender equality, climate change, and environmental conservation struggle to hold the attention of governments and the media. With less than six years left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a sobering reality emerges: merely 15 percent of the 169 targets are on track to be met by 2030. In fact, progress on many of these targets has not only stalled but regressed.

The world is undergoing rapid changes. Artificial intelligence has catalysed a technological revolution, offering unprecedented transformative potential and innovative solutions for sustainable development. Yet, it also heightens the risks of disinformation, labour displacement, the digital divide, existing inequities and the development of new weapons.

UNU's mission is to research "the pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare that are the concern of the United Nations."
(UNU Charter, Article I)

In times of growing uncertainty and instability, a renewed commitment to global solidarity and cooperation is essential. The United Nations University (UNU) holds a unique dual identity as both a research institution and as a trusted knowledge partner within the United Nations system and beyond. Comprising 14 research and training institutes across 13 countries, UNU collaborates and coordinates with a wide

range of other UN and government entities, civil society, and academic institutions. These partnerships facilitate UNU's contribution to achieving the SDGs, advancing Our Common Agenda, and supporting UN 2.0.

UNU is guided by the universal values enshrined in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The University is uniquely positioned to address global challenges, without catering solely to national interests. This global perspective distinguishes UNU from other research organisations. Adopting multidisciplinary approaches and maintaining an unbiased focus enables UNU to devise multilateral solutions for challenges of global importance.

Guiding Principles and Values

Throughout its work, UNU is guided by the universal values of human dignity, equality, diversity, and justice, as enshrined in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

UNU employs academic rigour to drive transformative policies and generate positive impact. Integrity, professionalism, independence, and academic freedom are fundamental to UNU's approach. The network of UNU research institutes addresses the full spectrum of the SDGs through cross- and inter-disciplinary synergies and collaboration efforts, pursuing an all-inclusive approach.

Through participatory management practices, the University fosters shared ownership and efficient information flow throughout the UNU system. UNU operates inclusively, respecting and valuing the diversity of its personnel. These commitments are reinforced by robust policies on gender equality, disability inclusion, and initiatives that support the mental health and well-being of its staff.

Looking Back: UNU's Strategic Plan 2020-2024

The UNU Strategic Plan 2020-2024 focused on aligning the University's work programme with the policy needs of the United Nations and its Member States.

Over the past five years, UNU collaborated with universities and think tanks worldwide to respond to the policy needs of the UN system and Member States on a range of critical issues. The University made significant contributions to thematic networks and conferences, including the Conference of the Parties (COP), the UN High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and many other UN system forums.

UNU upheld its commitment to maintaining a fair, supportive, and diverse workplace. It increased for example the percentage of female personnel to 63 percent, including filling 50 percent of leadership positions with women, and raised the proportion of personnel from developing countries to 47 percent. The University also reached a broader audience through its flagship event series and publications, significantly expanded its media presence, and launched a unified web platform.

Since 2019, UNU's project fundraising has consistently outperformed projections, with institutes raising three times the forecasted amount of project funds. Additionally, in 2022, the University transitioned its endowment fund to sustainable investments that consider environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors.

UNU in 2024 and Beyond: A Catalyst for Ideas and Timely Solutions

The demand for timely, independent research and evidence-based solutions has never been greater. UNU's strategic approach, characterised by its impartiality and practicality, delivers tangible solutions to pressing global issues in sustainable development, including climate change, human rights, peace and security, global governance, and transformative technologies. This Strategy positions UNU to shape global discourse on these issues by providing decision-makers with responsive, high-quality analysis and informed advice.

The UNU Strategy provides guidance and sets priorities for the work of the University overall for the next five years. The Strategy is intentionally broad and will be supplemented by internal Implementation Plans for each UNU Institute that operationalize and implement the overarching strategy by considering the specific focus, structure, and context of each institute.

Looking ahead, UNU will strengthen its research and educational initiatives focused on **climate change and environment, peace and security, and economic and social development**. It will also expand into emerging global challenges, such as **transformative technologies** to better navigate the rapid changes in this field, promote and leverage technology for research, knowledge dissemination and increased collaboration, while also paying attention to its proper regulation and governance.

Such initiatives will introduce new work streams for UNU, foster connections between researchers and policymakers, expand UNU's partnerships and presence in the Global South, and facilitate the integration of research from the Global South into UN discourse and policy-making, contributing to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

UNU formulates evidence-based policy recommendations, cautions against simplistic 'blueprint' solutions, facilitates structured exchange between academia and policy, and encourages the use of knowledge to transform the world while bringing stakeholders closer together.

UNU's research will play a key role in formulating the post-2030 Agenda and continue to impact the UN discourse on global development. Navigating a complex and interconnected environment where knowledge and research are often met with scepticism and little trust in global institutions, requires a flexible, convincing, inclusive approach. In this context, the UNU Strategy provides a vision for finding multilateral solutions through research, education and innovation while enhancing capabilities for assessing and managing the opportunities and risk environment in which UNU operates.

Priority Areas for 2025–2029

The vision guiding the UNU Strategy focuses on three priority areas: Knowledge, Partnerships, and Impact. By expanding its research and educational activities, strengthening partnerships, and enhancing its presence and visibility, UNU will create lasting impact.

A. KNOWLEDGE: Enhancing knowledge and capacity through research and education

UNU will strengthen its research activities, enhance its academic programmes and engagement with youth, and improve mechanisms to disseminate knowledge relevant to the UN system and its Member States.

B. PARTNERSHIPS: Strengthening partnerships, particularly in the Global South, and enhanced collaboration within the UN system

UNU will engage meaningfully with a diverse range of stakeholders, including academia, civil society, youth, the UN system, Member States, and the private sector, with a particular focus on partnering with low- and middle-income countries and enhancing mechanisms to collaborate with other UN agencies. UNU will also expand its global networks, foster collaboration among its institutes, bridge academic and non-academic communities, and amplify South-North and South-South scientific collaborations, bringing the Global North and South closer together and foster partnerships on an equal footing.

C. IMPACT: Greater visibility and impact through expansion and outreach, particularly in the Global South

UNU aims to enhance its impact by being globally visible and present in relevant forums, debates, and policy processes, expanding the opportunities for its research to be cited, acknowledged, and utilised. The University will aim to actively increase its presence in spaces that deserve greater attention, particularly in the Global South. Together, with the result of knowledge creation and partnership building, enhanced presence and visibility will ensure that UNU's work is widely recognised and has tangible impact.

Cross-cutting Enablers

Increased funding, innovative technology, strategic partnerships, and a supportive institutional culture are fundamental elements that will support and enable all UNU activities.

- **Unlocking funding** from traditional and new donors, alumni networks, and key stakeholders in the Global South will allow UNU to reinforce the capacity of its headquarters and institutes to deliver meaningful results. UNU will mobilise new significant players, such as governments of emerging economies, major private sector players, and international philanthropic organisations interested in supporting UNU's work.
- **Increased use of technology** and development of innovative technological tools for researchers, the UN system, and the private sector will enhance UNU's analytical capacity and operational efficiency.
- **Strategic engagements** will maximise the effectiveness of UNU's limited resources. This includes carefully determining which tasks to handle in-house, when to collaborate with external partners, and when to utilise affiliation models that leverage UNU's brand for broader impact.
- **A dynamic and engaged workforce and a positive institutional culture** are key drivers for UNU's ability to innovate, engage, and deliver results. Communication flow between leadership and personnel, staff surveys, active performance management, and offers for training will further support the degree of innovation, creativity, and speed at which the University operates as well as its attractiveness as a workplace.

Connecting UNU's Priority Areas, Strategic Goals, and Activities for 2025 – 2029

A. KNOWLEDGE: Enhancing knowledge and capacity through research and education

Strategic Goal 1: Strengthening influential and timely research

UNU will continue to produce high-quality research on global issues and develop programmes that influence policy and practice. It will effectively communicate its research within relevant academic circles, to youth, and to practitioners within the UN system and its Member States. By ensuring that research is timely and addresses the right questions, UNU consistently considers the potential policy implications and pathways for the uptake of its work across its programmes.

Among researchers and policymakers, awareness of the nexus between climate change and resilience, and issues of peace, security, and sustainable development is growing. This makes adaptation strategies, lessons learnt processes, and the continuous development of solutions key priorities for the coming years. Many UNU institutes are already active in these areas, and moving forward, enhanced knowledge-sharing, complementary and multidisciplinary approaches, as well as inter-institute collaboration and synergies will become even more critical.

To strengthen UNU's research quality, future efforts will focus on the following activities:

- Ensuring that its research is **policy-relevant**, capitalising on UNU's unique position as an academic institution within the UN system.
- Increasing and incentivising **inter-institute collaboration** to harmoniously address cross-cutting themes such as climate change and resilience, security, water, migration, AI, gender, education, global health, human rights and justice and disaster risk reduction, thereby avoiding duplication and generating greater effect of UNU's work.
- Enhancing responsiveness and improving **communication flows to anticipate emerging research areas** and exploring joint opportunities when they arise.
- Providing **proactive research support** for member states on relevant topics.

- Advancing **evidence-based knowledge solutions from the Global South** by fostering collaboration and joint fundraising efforts to contribute to global knowledge production.
- Supporting the **development of research (infrastructure)** in the Global South.

To achieve this goal, UNU will develop and monitor quantitative and qualitative metrics of progress. These metrics will include the publication of high-quality, policy-relevant research; the quantity and quality of research outputs; and the scope of events and joint initiatives both among UNU institutes and those involving or led by the Global South.

Strategic Goal 2: Increasing capacity development, teaching, and degree programmes

As the only United Nations organisation mandated by the General Assembly to grant degrees, UNU enjoys an unparalleled position within the global academic community. It provides students with a unique educational opportunity within the UN system, contributing to globally relevant projects with tangible impacts.

UNU will continue to offer its postgraduate degree programmes alongside a wide range of short and medium-term courses, including online options and capacity development initiatives. Further training programmes, partially in cooperation with other UN agencies including UNESCO can be integrated with UNU's research, providing students with unique access to innovative research and critical policy discussions that other academic institutions cannot provide. Additionally, educational activities can be streamlined and potentially formalised into new (joint) degree programmes with other universities.

To expand UNU's educational and training capacities, future efforts will focus on:

- Exploring opportunities to establish **joint degree programmes and wider accreditation of UNU degrees**.
- Engaging UN agencies in co-designing and co-delivering courses and training of youth and other stakeholder groups relevant to the UN agenda, where feasible.
- Increasing **inclusivity in UNU's educational offerings** by expanding the range of free and open-access courses.
- Strengthening **student networks** through enhanced opportunities for visits, exchanges, and fellowships.

To achieve this goal, UNU will develop and monitor quantitative and qualitative metrics of progress. These will include the creation of joint degree programmes with other academic institutions, advocacy initiatives undertaken with UN sister agencies such as UNESCO in support of education, the allocation of scholarship funds, creation, and expansion of UNU alumni networks, and metrics on the number of students, fellowships, student exchanges, and faculty deputations, particularly from the Global South. This will also encompass the accessibility of UNU's open-access and free courses.

B. PARTNERSHIPS: Strengthening partnerships, particularly in the Global South, and enhanced collaboration within the UN system

Strategic Goal 3: Strengthening partnerships and collaborations

It is crucial for UNU to increase its engagement, particularly in the Global South. This will be achieved through unlocking new funding, avoiding duplication of work, and identifying areas of complementarity with UN sister agencies and other players as well as through exchange and active collaboration with scholars, academic institutions, and private sector institutions.

Beginning with the expansion of UNU's existing partnerships in Africa, Latin America, and the Asia Pacific, by also involving continental organisations, Economic Commissions, and selected higher education and leading think tanks with intersecting interests, the University will work towards becoming a broader, more inclusive platform for scholars and institutions of the Global South, enabling and fostering North-South and South-South collaboration.

Future efforts to strengthen UNU's partnerships will include:

- Identifying and expanding **meaningful collaborations** in the Global South to mobilize the vast diversity present in countries and to enhance research complementarity thereby supporting an active contribution to the global knowledge economy.
- Exploring **new partnerships** in the Global South, including in Africa, South Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Oceania, including the Pacific Islands.
- Revitalising existing **networks** and developing new ones to maximise global impact.

To achieve these goals, UNU will develop and monitor quantitative and qualitative metrics of progress. These metrics will track increases in collaboration with both existing and new global partners globally; engagement with global policy and academic experts through UNU fellowship arrangements; the number of jointly funded UNU initiatives aimed at improving inclusivity and diversity in the Global South; and the types of support provided to build the capacity of institutions in the Global South.

Strategic Goal 4: Connecting researchers and policymakers and facilitating research uptake

As an academic entity within the UN system, UNU serves as a crucial bridge between scholars and policy makers and offers policy-relevant, mission-oriented research. Over the past decade, UNU has leveraged its awareness of and access to the evolving policy needs of the UN and its Member States and enhanced the impact of its work.

UNU will continue to make evidence-based solutions readily available, reinforcing its role as a trusted knowledge broker that connects policymakers with timely, impactful research. This rigorous, policy-relevant work will persist, and UNU will take additional steps to contribute to the global discourse, aiming to set the agenda in key areas of expertise and ensure relevance by bringing policymakers' needs and perspectives to researchers.

Given that a significant portion of UNU's research focuses on pressing sustainable development issues that disproportionately affect the Global South, the University must strengthen its efforts to ensure that research priorities and voices from the Global South are represented in global forums.

To increase uptake of UNU research to influence policy processes, the following activities will be prioritised:

- Utilising **formal and informal networks**, such as UNU's internal Climate Change, Water, Migration, AI, and Gender Mainstreaming networks, to facilitate exchanges between researchers, practitioners, and policy-making communities.
- Balancing long-term research programmes with timely contributions to **emerging global issues**, drawing on its academic rigour, networks, and knowledge of the UN system.

- Engaging with stakeholders at various levels to ensure that pathways for **research uptake** are integrated into project designs.
- Enhancing **communication efforts and means of collaboration** to better publicise UNU's contributions within the UN system, by maintaining liaison with UN agencies, and being aware of their research interests and needs.
- Creating **knowledge platforms** that convene partners.

To achieve this goal, UNU will develop and monitor quantitative and qualitative metrics of progress. These metrics will include the contributions of UNU experts to the policymaking processes of the UN and Member States; recognition of UNU's work by UN partners and Member States; initiatives that integrate students, researchers, and other Global South stakeholders into UN forums and publications; translation of research findings into actionable recommendations and policies; and the dissemination of these outputs via UN platforms to evaluate inclusive strategies for the Global South.

C. IMPACT: Greater visibility and impact through expansion and outreach, particularly in the Global South

Strategic Goal 5: Strategic expansion into new regions and emerging topics

While much of UNU's research is centred on challenges faced by the Global South, the majority of its research institutes are located in the Global North. It is thus important that UNU expands its institutional presence in the Global South by building on existing structures as well as actively engaging with potential host governments, donors, and other stakeholders. Additionally, UNU should explore new institutional structures designed to address emerging development challenges.

Alongside strengthening its traditional thematic focus areas, UNU must also explore cutting-edge themes like emerging technologies, specifically in AI, new energy technology, and life science. It will focus on leveraging technology to enhance research, knowledge dissemination, and collaboration while critically selecting transformative technologies and their adaptation to the local context.

To increase its institutional presence and enhance visibility, UNU will focus on the following activities:

- Establishing **new research institutes** and exploring **new collaborative institutional structures**, especially involving the Global South.
- Increasing the geographic **diversity** of its personnel.
- Leveraging **UNU's alumni network** to support collaboration among its institutes and strengthening UNU's presence in academia and the UN system.
- Exploring **diverse funding sources** to support institutional development, notably partnerships with the private sector, and developing robust research support structures to assist grant proposals and accreditation to unlock new funding opportunities.
- While continuing to rely on endowment contributions for the long-term stability of UNU entities, the University will also explore **alternative, smaller-scale funding models** and avenues to facilitate its expansion in the Global South.

To achieve this goal, UNU will develop and monitor quantitative and qualitative metrics of progress. These metrics will include the establishment of new UNU research entities and collaborative institutional structures, including in the Global South; the proportion of UNU personnel and students from the Global South; and research and education activities focused on Global South topics with meaningful engagement from native researchers to those regions.

Strategic Goal 6: UNU as a catalyst for ideas and timely solutions

UNU amplifies the impact of its work by engaging with decision-makers, disseminating relevant, evidence-based knowledge through diverse channels, and delivering insights on critical issues, such as the role of and global regulation of AI technologies, the increasing urgency of addressing societal and ecological/environmental tipping points, and the reshaping of global governance institutions to better meet global challenges. Through flagship reports, peer-reviewed publications, concise policy briefs, signature events, and by building trusted relationships with stakeholders, UNU provides high-quality analysis and informed advice, brings together researchers and decision-makers, and fosters exchanges and partnerships.

To enhance UNU’s catalyst role for innovative ideas and solutions, the following activities will guide future work:

- Consolidating research and policy deliverables under **one common UNU brand**.
- Building **trusted relationships through tailored communications** that consistently meet the diverse needs of UNU Institutes’ audiences and stakeholders thereby building on each Institute’s strengths and thematic expertise.
- Actively contributing to **public dialogue** by sharing timely, evidence-based insights on world events and emerging topics.
- Using **events** as platforms to promote UNU’s work.
- Increasing the output frequency of **policy briefs** on various issues, including those addressing emerging technologies.
- Assessing the opportunities and risks associated with expanding UNU’s **social media** presence.

To achieve this goal, UNU will develop and monitor quantitative and qualitative metrics of progress. These metrics will track UNU’s visibility across various media;

the publication of policy briefs, flagship reports and other publications (including in peer reviewed journals); and the participation of UNU’s senior leadership and researchers in events and high-level speaking engagements. Feedback and testimonials from stakeholders regarding the relevance and usefulness of engagements with UNU will also be evaluated.

Outlook

The world faces increasingly interconnected challenges – from the effects of climate change and natural disasters to geopolitical tensions, violent conflicts, cybercrime, and hybrid threats. These challenges profoundly impact societies worldwide and disproportionately affect countries in the Global South, exacerbating existing inequalities and cycles of conflict. In response to these challenges, UNU is committed to embracing a forward-looking, solutions-oriented vision.

Now more than ever, it is crucial to understand the opportunities and risks presented by these changes, find persuasive solutions, be better prepared, and work together towards shaping a global order that fosters development not only for the few but for the many. This requires innovative ideas, courage, and willingness to make a significant impact, which are at the heart of UNU’s new Strategy 2025–2029.

Our Goal

KNOWLEDGE TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD

Our Work

Knowledge, Partnerships, and Impact

Knowledge

Enhancing knowledge and capacity through research and education

Partnerships

Strengthening partnerships, particularly in the Global South, and enhanced collaboration within the UN system

Impact

Greater visibility and impact through expansion and outreach, particularly in the Global South

Our Culture

Cross-cutting Enablers; Guiding Principles and Values

Cross-cutting Enablers

Funding • Technology • Strategic Engagements • Workforce and Institutional Culture

Guiding Principles

- Academic Excellence
- Cross Disciplinary Synergies
- Transformative and Innovative Policy and Practice
- Participatory Management

Values

- Commitment to UN Values
- Integrity and Professionalism
- Independence
- Diversity of Personnel