

Partnering with the UNU Regions Institute

A Global Network Producing Research
to Build Lasting Solutions

The Foundation: A Leading UN Research Centre

The UNU Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) is a research and training institute that has shaped thought, academia and policy for 25 years from its base in Bruges, Belgium.

It is a global reference centre for the study of regional cooperation and multi-level governance, researching and supporting policy development at the international, national, and subnational levels, informing solutions in areas such as trade, energy, digital governance, security, human mobility, climate, and health, as well as the study of how supranational, national, and subnational governments and organisations can improve and be more effective.

Our core local partners are Ghent University and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, and our network is made up of over 150 academics around the world, all working on topics with a regional dimension.

UNU-CRIS is an institute of the United Nations University. UNU's mission is to contribute, through collaborative research and education, to efforts to resolve the pressing global problems of human survival, development, and welfare that concern the United Nations, its Peoples, and Member States.

In carrying out this mission, UNU works with leading universities and research institutes in UN Member States, functioning as a bridge between the international academic community and the United Nations system.

A Needed Evolution: Introducing UNU Regions

The importance of regions has grown significantly over the past 25 years, and as the world shifts towards more decentralised multilateralism, we have identified a growing need and desire for a more inclusive structure that reflects the growing importance of regions, recognising their integral role in the current geopolitical era, while also providing an international outlet for their knowledge and allowing them to learn from one another.

To meet this need, we plan to build on the foundation laid by UNU-CRIS and create the UNU Regions Institute, a network of world-class research centres that will work together, utilising knowledge from regions around the world, to build lasting solutions both at home and abroad.

This evolution, from a classical research centre to a decentralised global network of campuses in several key regions, will make UNU Regions the world's first integrated network of research and policy centres that not only study regional cooperation and multi-level governance but are also actively present and engaged on the ground.

Each UNU Regions campus will be the focal point for the network's activities in the region and focus on issues of local and regional importance, ensuring value for local communities, while also feeding into an interregional network that seeks to enrich the practice of transboundary cooperation and collective action through regional cooperation and integration, giving local and regional knowledge a global pathway.



UNU Regions Headquarters in Bruges, Belgium

Your Gateway to the UN System

While local and regional academia and policy may engage with the United Nations system, very few are part of it.

A UNU Regions campus brings a United Nations agency to your doorstep, granting you direct access to the United Nations system and to the United Nations University, as you will join one of only 13 institutes worldwide.

UNU Regions researchers have been involved in major UN forums such as the Internet Governance Forum, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, COP, ACUNS Annual Meetings, and the Summit of the Future. The researchers at your campus could potentially be part of UNU delegations to these major forums, which are often difficult to access and participate in. UNU Regions researchers also have the opportunity to join key UNU networks on topics such as AI and migration, which operate as spaces for people from across the UNU system to share their research and co-create academic output and roadmaps to solutions.

Being part of UNU Regions will open doors and grant a seat at the table of processes at the highest level, unlocking unparalleled opportunities for local and regional voices to be heard on the international stage.

Bringing the World To You

Ideas flourish through exposure and exchange, and creating the right space and setting for this is crucial.

Your UNU Regions campus would be the forum for major discussions on topics of local and regional importance, using the convening power of the UN to bring stakeholders from all levels of governance together with the explicit goal of co-creating lasting and comprehensive solutions. UNU Regions will host and be the academic partner of these meetings, meaning the roadmaps to solutions they produce will be informed by your campus's research.

Within the network, mobility is a core principle of UNU Regions, and each campus would regularly host visiting stays from researchers in our extended network. It would also host the UNU Regions annual meeting on a rotational basis with the other campuses, bringing the institute's leadership and advisory committee to your city/country.

Being the host of a UNU Regions campus will make you an attractive option for the world's top research talent and bright young minds and changemakers of tomorrow, and give them an opportunity to call your city and country home while contributing to local and regional development.



What Does UNU Regions Provide?

Research

A Leading Research Centre at Home:

A UNU Regions campus will provide you with an internationally renowned UN research and education centre of your own, with an established international network within a proven and prestigious organisation and structure.

Retaining and Attracting Top Talent:

A campus creates opportunities for leading local academic talent to remain in the region and contribute to its development—while drawing international talent that brings new perspectives and supports solution development.

Global Insights on Local Problems:

Each campus focuses on key issues of local and regional importance. Where UNU Regions adds value is by using the expertise of the wider network to jointly develop solutions and break down siloes.

Impact & Influence

Access to the United Nations System:

A UNU Regions campus makes the UN system more accessible to local researchers and students, connecting research with global decision-making and opening doors to career pathways in international development and policy.

International Impact Pathway: Being part of the UNU Regions network provides pathways for local ideas and research to reach international academic and policy communities, and to engage with policymakers in other regions through structured network activities.

Direct Policy Interaction: UNU Regions aims to build structured interaction between research and policy communities through regular policy update sessions, joint workshops, and tailored outputs—strengthening research uptake and relevance.

Education & Training

Strengthening the Education Sector:

Campus researchers are accessible to local and regional education and research institutions through structured collaboration, guest lectures, and joint activities, enhancing teaching and research quality beyond the campus.

Dual Degree Programmes: UNU is the only United Nations organ mandated by the General Assembly to grant degrees. Your UNU Regions campus can partner with local universities to work towards offering dual degrees, supporting graduate quality, employability, and talent retention.

Doctoral Schools: Each campus will have the opportunity to host a doctoral seasonal school, drawing experts from across our network, partner institutions and the broader United Nations and UNU families to the campus for a week of lectures and tutorial sessions.

How Does UNU Regions Benefit You?

Host Government

Global Policy Influence: Ensure your region’s specific challenges are represented and prioritised in UN global policy debates.

Enhanced Capacity: Draw on an interregional learning platform that supports practice-oriented exchange and tailored regional capacity-building.

Risk Radar: Receive early-warning policy briefs on external geopolitical shifts that could impact your region.

Diplomatic Hub: Transform the campus’s home city into a convening power for high-level UN dialogue, attracting international delegations and decision-makers.

Universities

The UN Degree Status: Differentiate your university from local competitors by offering the only dual degrees in the world accredited by the United Nations.

Brain Gain, Not Drain: Stop the exodus of bright students by offering them a global career pathway that starts at home.

Research Impact Factor: Move beyond academic journals; see your research directly cited in major UN decisions.

Global Faculty Exchange: Offer your staff structured sabbatical and mobility opportunities across the global network, increasing your institution’s international ranking scores.

Private Sector

Geopolitical Intelligence: Gain access to analysis from leading minds on regulatory and political risks that affect your operating environment.

Future Talent Pipeline: Offer career pathways for high-potential graduates trained to navigate complex international business environments.

Neutral Convening Space: Use the campus as a neutral ground to engage with regulators and policymakers.

ESG Leadership: Tangibly demonstrate your commitment to multilateralism and the SDGs by funding research that solves real-world problems, moving beyond greenwashing.

Operational Framework: Local Autonomy, Global Connection

UNU Regions operates as a federated network. While every campus is integral to the global institute, we recognise that each region has unique realities. Our structure is designed to provide the stability and prestige of the UN system while ensuring the flexibility to meet local needs.

The Campus Team: World-Class Talent: Your campus is not just an office; it is a United Nations entity. To attract the highest caliber of international and local experts, the Unit Director and core research staff are hired on United Nations contracts. This status is a powerful competitive advantage in the global talent market. Beyond the core team, the model supports secondments from local universities and research institutes, allowing you to integrate existing local expertise directly into the UN structure, and to build strong partnerships with other leading research centres in the region.

Governance: A Partnership of Equals: We believe in co-ownership. Your campus is governed by a Joint Steering Committee created in partnership with you. The committee brings together UNU leadership, the Campus Unit Director, and representatives from your institution/government, alongside key local stakeholders (e.g., municipal leaders, private sector partners). This body ensures the campus remains aligned with local strategic priorities while adhering to the global standards of the United Nations University.

Strategic Alignment & Network Integration: Your Unit campus does not operate in a silo. The Unit Director are a key member of the global UNU Regions Management Team, participating in quarterly strategy sessions and the annual Advisory Committee meetings. This ensures your campus plays an active role in shaping the institute's global direction.

Operational Support: While the campus operates locally, outreach and interaction with the wider UN and UNU systems are coordinated and supported by Headquarters in Bruges, reducing the administrative burden on your team.

The Research Agenda: Answering the Important Questions

Your campus's research agenda is not assigned; it is co-created. The specific topics are defined jointly by UNU Regions, the host government/university, donors, and local stakeholders invited by the major partners.

While the agenda focuses on issues of local and regional importance, it must align with the overarching UNU Regions programme. To ensure coherence and global relevance, all research must meet three criteria:

- **Regional Dimension:** Topics must have a cross-border element or potential for comparative analysis with other regions.
- **Governance Focus:** Research must explore how to improve governance processes and effectiveness.
- **Policy Impact:** Output must be translatable into actionable policy advice, as policy impact is a core tenet of our mission.

Building a Regional Hub: As the sole UNU Regions campus in your area, you will serve as the primary meeting point for the study of regional cooperation. We encourage you to build partnerships with other universities, think tanks, and governments nearby. Integrating these external perspectives ensures your research reflects genuine local needs, maximizes uptake, and positions your institution as a prestigious international leader in the field.

Potential Research Topics: To ensure coherence and impact, research typically falls into key strategic pillars:

- **Regional Cooperation & Economy:** Trade agreements, transport corridors, energy networks, the functioning and effectiveness of regional organisations.
- **Digital & Governance:** Digital governance and digital sovereignty, UN reform, the Post-2030 agenda, federalism.
- **Security:** Regional security, Non-traditional diplomacy, Preventative diplomacy, Regional security structures, Cybersecurity, Critical minerals/infrastructure.
- **People & Sustainability:** Climate, cross-border natural resource management, human mobility governance, regional social and health policies.

How Can You Join UNU Regions?

We are looking for partners, in both the public and private sectors, that believe in the value of science, the necessity of multilateralism and the importance of regions, and have a fundamental desire to contribute to the development of lasting solutions to major challenges, through improving the flow of knowledge and expertise around the world.

Joining the UNU Regions initiative can be done through hosting a campus, or providing funding towards the operation of a campus.

Hosting a UNU Regions campus requires the provision of financial resources and a designated physical space for operations. Each campus must have a dedicated unit director, academic staff, and support personnel, as well as resources to support events, researcher mobility within the UNU Regions network, and investment in the network and access.

The core funding of a campus can come from one or a consortium of sources, and from either the public (national, subnational and/or local) or private sector, however a host-country agreement is required and, therefore, government support is a key component of establishing a UNU Regions campus.

Parties willing to contribute financially to the operation of a campus can do so through a lump sum donation or a multi-year arrangement.

What are the Next Steps?

0. Informal Discussion

If you have an interest in UNU Regions but want more information, before initiating formal proceedings, we can set up a first discussion to present the specific value of a campus for your region and explore potential thematic alignments with your leadership team.

1. Letter of Interest

To initiate proceedings, a letter of interest should be sent to the UNU Regions Director, Philippe De Lombaerde, outlining the nature, scope and relevance of the desire to join the UNU Regions initiative, potential research themes that align with the priorities of all parties, and the scale of investment possible in a UNU Regions campus.

2. Scoping Study and Co-Design Phase

In partnership with UNU Regions, the interested parties will undertake a scoping study and a co-design phase, together determining the thematic focus, structure, local/regional partnerships, policy impact plan, and allocation of resources.

3. UNU Review and Approval

The results of the scoping study will be reviewed by the UNU Rector and the UNU Council. On approval, final negotiations will begin and will conclude with the signing of the agreement between all parties, starting formal activities.

Join UNU Regions

Expressions of interest, and questions about the initiative, can be sent to pdelombaerde@cris.unu.edu