

Concept Note of the Fourth UNITAR International Research Conference (4UIRC)

Educating for Futures | 18–19 November 2026 | UN House Brussels, Belgium and Online

Empowering Individuals and Institutions for Innovation in the Domain of Human Security, Peace, and Sustainable Development

The UNITAR International Research Conference (UIRC) is an annual flagship initiative of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), convened by the Division for Peace through its Online Learning and Education Unit in collaboration with international partners. Since its launch in 2023, the UIRC series has provided a global platform for interdisciplinary dialogue at the intersection of education, peace, security, and sustainable development.

Following the inaugural focus on Climate Security (2023), the second edition's emphasis on higher education and peacebuilding (2024), and the third edition's commitment to bridging knowledge and action to deliver the SDGs (2025), the 4th UNITAR International Research Conference (4UIRC) will advance the discussion toward future oriented capacity development for the creation of a Peace Learning Innovation Lab.

The 2026 edition takes place at a particularly significant moment for the United Nations and the global sustainable development agenda. It aligns with the midpoint review period of the 2030 Agenda, as Member States assess progress and intensify efforts to accelerate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. It also coincides with the first full year of implementation of the United Nations Pact for the Future, marking a shift from global commitments to operational priorities across the UN system. At the same time, the approach to 2030 represents a critical phase for climate action, resilience, and sustainable development, as the international community confronts increasingly narrow timelines for achieving agreed targets.

In an era characterized by accelerating global transitions, including the intensification of climate-related disasters and displacement, the widespread adoption of artificial intelligence and digital platforms across economies and governance systems, the reconfiguration of global supply chains, and the increasing strain on multilateral cooperation frameworks—there is a growing need to strengthen the capacities of individuals and institutions to anticipate, prevent, and respond to complex and interconnected challenges. Higher education and lifelong learning play a critical role in this context, serving as catalysts for human security, institutional resilience, and transformative governance.

Objectives

The overarching purpose of the 4UIRC is to examine how education, training, and applied research can empower individuals and institutions to advance peace, security, and sustainable development in line with UNITAR's vision and mission.

The specific objectives of the conference are to:

1. Strengthen the capacities of individuals, particularly students, early career researchers, and practitioners, to contribute to multilateral diplomacy, public sector performance, and the SDGs.
2. Explore the role of higher education institutions in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Pact for the Future.
3. Promote robust and inclusive learning ecosystems that foster long-term impact and resilience.
4. Enhance the quality and effectiveness of UN and partner capacity building efforts through shared learning, research, and evidence-based dialogue.

Methodology

Alignment with UNITAR Identity and Strategic Objectives

The 4UIRC is fully aligned with UNITAR's vision of a world where empowered individuals and institutions advance peace, security, and sustainable development, and its mission to bridge gaps in knowledge and skills through impactful training, research, and innovative learning solutions.

Guided by the United Nations Charter, the UN Leadership Framework, and UNITAR's core values of inclusion, integrity, humility, and humanity, the conference will uphold principles of impartiality, independence, and evidence-based inquiry.

It contributes directly to UNITAR's four Strategic Objectives by:

- Empowering individuals with future ready capacities (SO1);
- Strengthening institutional capacity to implement global and national priorities (SO2);
- Supporting the development of learning ecosystems (SO3);
- Enhancing UN capacity building through research and shared learning (SO4).

Expected Outcomes

The 4UIRC is expected to:

- Strengthen individual and institutional capacities aligned with UNITAR's mandate;
- Generate policy relevant and practice oriented research insights;
- Foster partnerships across academia, policy, and practice;
- Contribute to UNITAR's knowledge base and future capacity building initiatives.

Target Audience

The conference will convene global scholars, practitioners, policymakers, students, community leaders, and UN stakeholders through a combination of:

- Research presentations and panels;
- Applied and practitioner-oriented sessions;
- Roundtables and collaborative dialogues.

The 4UIRC will promote interdisciplinarity, plurilingualism, gender balance, and inclusive participation.

Application

If you wish to join us **IN-PERSON**, [please apply here](#).

- In-Person Registration Deadline: 4 September 2026.
- In-Person Registration Fee: 360.00 USD - Payment Deadline: 11 September 2026.

If you wish to join us **ONLINE**, [please apply here](#).

- Online Registration Deadline: 11 September 2026.
- Online Registration Fee: 300.00 USD - Payment Deadline: 11 September 2026.

Note: Conference registration will be considered complete only after the submitted application has been selected and the corresponding payment has been received. Applicants are kindly advised to monitor their email inboxes for further instructions and next steps following application.

Themes

Under the overarching theme “Educating for Futures”, the 4UIRC will address the following interconnected thematic areas. In line with the established tradition of the UIRC and as reflected in previous editions, each theme is intended to accommodate diverse disciplinary, regional, and methodological perspectives, and to integrate cross-cutting considerations such as gender equality, inclusion, youth participation, and equity in access to education and opportunity.

Educating for Human Security and Social Resilience

- Learning systems for peace, protection, prevention, and social cohesion.
- Education in fragile, conflict-affected, and crisis contexts.
- Peace education, social cohesion, and prevention approaches.
- Protection of civilians, humanitarian learning, and education in emergencies.
- Migration, displacement, and inclusive learning systems.
- Gender-responsive and community-based education for resilience.

Educating for Anticipation and Adaptive Governance

- Futures literacy and strategic foresight in education and training
- Anticipatory governance, early warning, and prevention-oriented learning.
- Institutional learning for crisis preparedness and systemic resilience.
- Capacity development for policy innovation and public sector transformation.
- Inclusive and intergenerational approaches to shaping futures.

Educating for Digital Futures and Ethical Innovation

- Capacity development for responsible AI, data governance, and inclusive digital transformation.
- Responsible AI, ethics, and human-centred digital education.
- Digital learning ecosystems and technology-enabled capacity development.
- Data governance, cybersecurity, and digital public infrastructure.
- Bridging digital divides and advancing equitable access.
- Gender, technology, and inclusion in digital transformation.

Educating for Climate and Ecological Futures

- Learning for resilience, sustainability, and just transitions.
- Climate education and green skills development.
- Disaster risk reduction, anticipatory action, and resilience learning.
- Environmental peacebuilding and resource governance education.
- Education for sustainable livelihoods and just transitions.
- Indigenous, local, and gender-responsive climate knowledge systems.

Educating for Youth Leadership and Intergenerational Futures

- Empowerment, participation, and dialogue across generations.
- Youth leadership, civic engagement, and peacebuilding education.
- Student-led research and innovation.
- Intergenerational learning models and dialogue spaces.
- Education for wellbeing, inclusion, and agency.
- Gender-transformative and youth-centred pedagogies.

Educating for Impact and Systems Transformation

- Translating knowledge into policy, practice, and institutional change.
- Research-to-policy and science–practice interfaces.
- South–South and triangular cooperation in education and training.
- University–UN–community partnerships.
- Monitoring, evaluation, and learning for impact.
- Co-creation of knowledge with underrepresented communities.

Call for Abstracts

Abstract Submission Deadline: 31 August 2026.

[Submit your Abstract here.](#)

The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) invites the submission of abstracts for presentation at the conference and possibly inclusion, as a full paper, in a special edited volume of selected papers developed in connection with the 4UIRC.

Abstracts should propose original, analytically rigorous contributions that examine how education, training, and applied research can empower individuals and institutions to address current and future challenges in the domains of human security, peace, and sustainable development.

Proposed contributions should demonstrate clear relevance to:

- The [Sustainable Development Goals](#) and United Nations mandates;
- The [UN Pact for the Future](#) and the Secretary-General's [New Agenda for Peace](#);
- The thematic priorities of the 4UIRC.

Submissions that function primarily as conference documentation (e.g. session summaries, speeches, or narrative reports of events) are not eligible for inclusion in the special volume.

All abstracts must represent original work not currently under review elsewhere.

If you wish to present your paper at the conference, please note that acceptance is also subject to review and approval by the 4UIRC Organising Committee. All selected presenters will be required to register and pay the conference fee for either the [Online](#) or [In-person](#) modalities, depending on their choice.

Please carefully read the instructions and guidelines provided before completing your submission. This includes format requirements, evaluation criteria, timelines and other important information. For any questions, contact elarning.ptp@unitar.org.

Relevant Documentation:

- Call for Abstracts (PDF)
- Publishing Guidelines for the Special Volume of Selected Papers (PDF)
- Declaration of Originality (PDF)

Call for Editorial Board Members

Editorial Board Expression of Interest Deadline: 31 August 2026.

[Express your Interest to join our Editorial Board Here.](#)

The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) invites Expressions of Interest (EOIs) from qualified scholars and practitioners to serve on the Editorial Board of the special edited research volume developed in connection with the 4UIRC.

The Editorial Board is established to provide scholarly leadership, peer-review oversight, and thematic guidance throughout the development of the special volume. The Board supports the 4UIRC Editorial Coordination Team in ensuring academic integrity, analytical coherence, policy relevance, and alignment with internationally recognised publishing standards and United Nations publications requirements. Editorial Board members serve in an independent scholarly capacity.

Interested candidates are invited to submit an Expression of Interest by completing the [application form](#) and providing all requested information.

Only complete applications submitted through the designated form will be considered. Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.

Relevant Documentation:

- Open Call Guidelines (PDF)
- Peer Review Ethics Policy (PDF)
- Editorial Board Terms of Reference (PDF)
- Publishing Guidelines for Special Volume of Selected Papers (PDF)
- Conflict of Interest Declaration (PDF)

Call for Partners

Partners Expression of Interest Deadline: 31 August 2026.

[Click here to discover how you can become our Partner.](#)

UNITAR invites institutions and organisations to join us as partners for the 4th UNITAR International Research Conference (4UIRC). We welcome collaboration from universities, research centres, civil society organizations, international institutions, foundations, government bodies, and the private sector. Together, we can amplify impact, bridge knowledge and action, and drive meaningful progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals.

Opportunities to collaborate include:

- Co-hosting sessions.
- Sponsoring participation.
- Joint promotion and research exchange.
- Student awards and engagement initiatives.
- Contributing to event funding to help offset logistical and operational costs.

Delegation Participation and Fee Waivers

Many partner institutions participate by supporting a delegation of participants to attend or contribute to the conference. As a gesture of appreciation, and within UNITAR's limited operational budget, the following provisions may apply:

- Delegations of 3–5 participants may receive one participation fee waiver. Partnering institutions often allocate this waiver to a Master's or PhD student or an early-career researcher.
- For pre-existing collaborative partners, up to two participation fee waivers may be granted depending on the nature and scope of the collaborative partnership.

Partner institutions benefit from visibility within the conference programme and communications, as well as opportunities to engage with an international network of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.

Leave No One Behind

In support of the [Leave No One Behind](#) principle of the 2030 Agenda, UNITAR is offering four free online participation spots for individuals who face financial or systemic barriers to participation.

This opportunity is only open to:

- Women and youth, especially early-career researchers and students
- Participants from the Global South (including LDCs and SIDS)
- Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and displaced individuals
- Grassroots practitioners and community leaders without institutional support

Leave No One Behind (online fee waiver) application deadline: 5 June 2026.

[Click here to submit your application through the form.](#)

All application requirements and instructions are outlined in the form. Kindly read them carefully before submitting. Please note that the selection process for the four limited free online participation spots will be rigorous, based on alignment with the specified UN inclusion criteria. This ensures the opportunity is reserved for individuals who genuinely face systemic barriers to participation, as outlined above.

- If **you meet** the inclusion criteria above, and applied, please do not register for the conference until you are informed of the selection outcome.
- If **you do not meet** the inclusion criteria outlined above, we kindly ask that you proceed with standard registration for either the [online attendance](#) or [in-person attendance](#) modalities of the Conference.

We appreciate your understanding and encourage early registration through the standard fee-paying channels secure your spot, as interest in past editions of the Conference has been high.

UNITAR International Research Conference (UIRC)

The First Edition, 2023

The inaugural UNITAR International Research Conference on Climate Security was held on 23–24 November 2023 at the UN Bonn Campus. The conference brought together policymakers, experts, practitioners, and representatives from governments, international organisations, civil society, and academia to explore the complex relationship between climate change and security.

Key discussions centred on several crucial areas: Firstly, the conference emphasised conflict prevention and climate resilience as essential components of climate security. Participants explored the need to address root causes of climate-exacerbated conflicts and build social cohesion in vulnerable communities.

The conference highlighted the vital role of higher education institutions in integrating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through cross-pedagogical and multidisciplinary approaches. A new educational model incorporating cutting-edge research was identified as critical for Higher Education Institutions to support Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

The importance of plurilingualism in education was emphasised as a catalyst for effective interdisciplinary collaboration. The conference also considered the significance of SDG 16 and its relationship to progressing the UN 2030 Agenda through SDG 4.

Discussions also focused on climate change adaptation and mitigation, highlighting the urgent need for investment in climate-resilient infrastructure, sustainable land management, and disaster risk reduction. The role of renewable energy and low-carbon technologies in mitigating climate change and reducing security risks was emphasised.



First UNITAR International Research Conference. *Climate Security: Peace and Security Consequences of Climate Change*. UN Campus Bonn, 23–24 November 2023.

The Second Edition, 2024 (2UIRC)

The 2nd UNITAR International Research Conference (2UIRC) took place on 3–4 December 2024 at the United Nations Offices in Brussels, Belgium, marking a significant milestone in the exploration of higher education's role in global peace and sustainable development.

This event brought together academics, researchers, policymakers, and international organisations to explore the evolving role of higher education in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and sustainable governance. It served as a platform for knowledge exchange, fostering research-based approaches that align with the UN 2.0 vision and the Global Pact for the Future.



Second UNITAR International Research Conference. *Our Common Agenda and the Role of Higher Education in Conflict, Peace, and Development: UN 2.0*. United Nations Offices, UN House, Brussels. 3–4 December 2024.

The Third Edition, 2025 (3UIRC)

The 3rd UNITAR International Research Conference, held in Brussels and online on 3–4 December 2025, brought together a global community of researchers, practitioners, and learners committed to advancing capacities aligned with UNITAR's strategic objectives. Through interdisciplinary dialogue, the conference explored how evidence-based knowledge can empower individuals (SO1), strengthen institutions (SO2), and reinforce the development of robust learning ecosystems (SO3) in support of the 2030 Agenda, the Pact for the Future, and the broader aims of UN 2.0.

Participants engaged in exchanges that connected academic insights with real-world needs, underscoring the critical role of universities, experts, and public institutions in shaping innovative and ethical solutions to global challenges. Discussions highlighted digital transformation, the expansion of accessible and future-oriented learning, and the importance of shared platforms that enhance UN capacity-building efforts and promote best practices (SO4).

The conference reaffirmed the value of collaborative research, cross-sector partnerships, and collective learning in driving resilient, informed, and forward-looking societies. UNITAR expresses its appreciation to all contributors whose perspectives and expertise advanced a shared vision of knowledge as a catalyst for sustainable, peaceful, and inclusive change.



Third UNITAR International Research Conference. *Bridging Knowledge and Action to Deliver the SDGs.* United Nations Offices, UN House, Brussels. 3 December 2025.



Third UNITAR International Research Conference. *Bridging Knowledge and Action to Deliver the SDGs.* United Nations Offices, UN House, Brussels. 4 December 2025.

Conclusion

The 4th UNITAR International Research Conference (2026) will reinforce UNITAR's leadership in capacity development by positioning education and learning as central levers for peace, security, and sustainable development. By empowering individuals and institutions to navigate global transitions, the conference will contribute to shaping more resilient, inclusive, and future ready societies.

Beyond the event itself, the 4UIRC is designed as a sustained process rather than a standalone forum. Through the development of structured research outputs, learning partnerships, and thematic communities of practice, the Conference will seek to ensure continuity, knowledge transfer, and longer-term institutional and policy impact beyond the conference timeframe.

At a moment of heightened global uncertainty, the 4UIRC will serve as a platform for moving from reflection to action. It will convene researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and youth leaders to co-develop forward-looking approaches, strengthen evidence-informed capacity development, and translate research insights into concrete learning, policy, and practice pathways.

What distinguishes the 2026 edition is its explicit focus on educating for futures and on translating learning into implementation. Building on previous editions, the 4UIRC will place greater emphasis on future-oriented education systems, anticipatory learning, and interdisciplinary collaboration, as well as on the co-creation of knowledge across regions and generations. In doing so, it positions education and lifelong learning not only as responses to global change, but as foundational enablers of foresight, prevention, and transformation within the multilateral system and beyond.

Contacts

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