

UN & INNOVATION: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Current Concerns:

Progress on the world's greatest challenges is dangerously slow. Mitigation of climate change, for instance, requires a more effective global response and the UN has little, if any, power to drive the process forward. Intergovernmental decision-making is often based on consensus which more often than not, leads to lowest common denominator solutions that are of a low ambition, voluntary and cannot be enforced. This is also illustrated by the implementation levels of the Sustainable Development Goals which lag significantly behind where they need to be to meet the 2030 deadline. Similarly, it shocked many when, one year ago, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in a blatant war of aggression, and the UN Security Council was unable to take action. It is evident that the challenges currently facing the world require a stronger UN than we currently have. Lack of political will on the part of a number of member states and lack of agreement among member states as to what changes should be pursued, if any, are ongoing obstacles. At the same time, a stronger UN also requires a more legitimate UN. The level and quality of accountability, representation, inclusiveness and accessibility of the UN, going beyond the dogma of intergovernmentalism, influences the organisation's actual and perceived legitimacy which in turn impacts the trust it receives and its overall effectiveness. Reducing the UN's trust deficit identified by the UN Secretary-General is thus a critical concern that needs to be addressed.

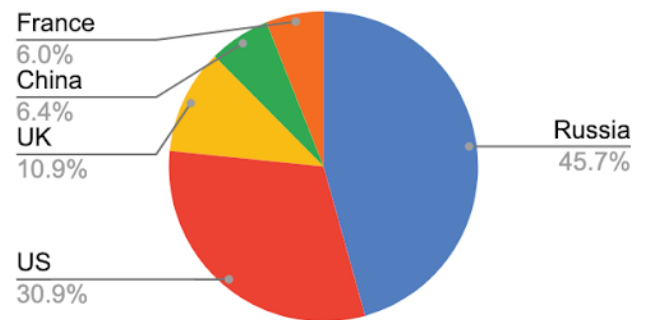
Key terms and concepts:

Veto - according to the 1945 UN Charter, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (P5), USA, Russia, China, UK, and France, have a veto power which allows them to block any decision that otherwise would pass the Council. A recent infamous example is Russia vetoing a Council resolution condemning its war of aggression against Ukraine on 25 February 2022.

UN Charter - the UN Charter acts as the constitution of the UN, and sets out the rights and obligations of Member States and the main bodies and procedures of the UN. For the GFF's UN & Global Governance Innovation track, there are some useful articles to know:

- Article 22: The General Assembly may establish such subsidiary organs as it deems necessary for the performance of its functions.
- Article 108: Amendments of the UN Charter require a 2/3 vote of the General Assembly, and ratification of 2/3 of UN member states including the P5. This means that any of the P5 can block any amendment by not ratifying it.
- Article 109 (3): A Charter Review conference can be convened by a majority vote of the members of the General Assembly and by a vote of any seven members of the Security Council. This means that no P5 veto applies in this case.

Veto Use by Each P5 Country




Intergovernmentalism - the UN and most organisations and entities of the UN system are exclusively intergovernmental - their membership is made up of states. This means that, with few exceptions like the International Labor Organisation, decision-making and deliberation bodies are composed of delegates appointed by member state governments.

UN & INNOVATION: WHAT TO THINK ABOUT

Key Recommendations:

An independent and qualified UN Secretary-General - The UN Secretary-General (UNSG) plays a key role in global agenda-setting, providing global leadership and good offices. The office bearer needs to be qualified, independent and impartial. Previous steps towards making the selection and appointment of the UNSG more open and transparent need to be continued and expanded. The UN Security Council (UNSC) should be required to recommend at least two candidates, so that the UNGA makes the real selection. The UNSG should serve a single and longer term of 7 or 8 years, which will allow full independence and freedom from the first day in office. No Charter amendments are required for these changes.

Creating a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly - The UN Charter was declared on behalf of "We, the Peoples" but the UN is governed exclusively by member states. A UN Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA) would give elected representatives, who reflect a broader political spectrum, a formal voice at the UN. A UNPA can be established by a majority vote of the UNGA as a subsidiary body using Article 22 of the UN Charter. Through its portfolio committees and transnational groups set up by its members, the UNPA



Creating the instrument of a UN World Citizens' Initiative - UN consultations that allow individual citizens to voice their views are ad hoc and top down, if they are conducted at all. The participatory mechanism of a UN World Citizens' Initiative (UNWCI) for the first time will provide citizens with a formal way to present proposals to the UN's main bodies. A group of citizens from different world regions could register a proposal at the UN and if this proposal manages to receive a certain threshold of global support from individual citizens within a given time, it would qualify for submission either to the UNGA or UNSC. The latter would then be required to consider and vote on the submission or a revised version thereof.

Article 109 Charter Review Conference - The Summit of the Future should acknowledge the need of a major overhaul of the UN and global governance. For this purpose, a Charter Review Conference according to Article 109 of the UN Charter should be convened and determine an appropriate date for such conference to commence. The Charter review needs to: 1) reform the UNSC and eliminate the veto power; 2) empower the UNGA, including by making its decisions legally binding; 3) address climate change as a major global threat and its mitigation as an additional purpose of the UN; 4) upgrade the UNPA from a subsidiary to a principal organ; 5) replace or re-purpose the defunct Trusteeship Council; 6) upgrade the Peacebuilding Commission into a Peacebuilding Council.

Creating a UN Civil Society Envoy - A civil society champion is needed because levels of engagement with civil society within the UN system are currently insufficient. Engagement is piecemeal, inconsistent, and reactive. Grassroots organisations whose politics cause member states to deny them accreditation are locked out of the conversation. An Envoy can help carry a wider reform agenda to open up the UN system to civil society, allow the UN to hear from a broader, more diverse and representative cross-section of voices by proactively seeking out, through field visits and consultations, their views.