



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



Future challenges for global governance

INTRODUCTION

What are the main challenges for global governance in the current decade and how can the EU address these? Building on more than three years of research, this GLOBE Policy Brief answers this question by summarizing the project's key findings on the functioning of global governance. Our research has identified major challenges of the current global governance institutions, namely in the governing structures of international organizations (IOs) and their decision-making rules, in misaligned mandates, and in limitations to available resources such as funding and information. Moreover, we show how formal IOs such as the EU give assistance to informal institutions, which could solve the current gridlocks in global governance. Lastly, we discuss the implications of these findings and give recommendations to the EU and its member states for how they can contribute to fostering a stable rules-based international order.

This Policy Brief is informed by qualitative and quantitative original research of the GLOBE project. It draws mostly on two recent reports, [The Coral Reefs of Global Governance - How Formal IOs Make Informality Work \(GLOBE Report 8.3\)](#) and [Shortcomings of the Current Governance and Institutional Models \(GLOBE Report 8.1\)](#). In addition, the findings are substantiated and contextualized with novel data on IO staff perceptions from the GLOBE Survey [International Organizations and the Future of Global Governance](#). This is a unique, large scale survey targeting employees from 30 different institutions to gain insights into how IO staff perceives current and future challenges to global governance. After analyzing the 1,004 responses obtained, we observe considerable differences between the perceptions of staff members from the EU Commission, the UN system organizations, or other

IOsⁱ on questions relevant to this Policy Brief. To capture this variation, we disaggregated the results into the three groups (EU, UN, Other). For more detailed data on the survey results, we also prepared a [dedicated website and a Technical Report](#) with more thorough explanations of the survey, a presentation of first aggregate findings and an in-depth discussion of the results.

While the previous GLOBE Policy Brief looked at [Current Challenges of Global Governance](#), presenting the results of sectoral mapping papers as well as some cross-cutting issues relating to the EU's role in the contemporary global system, this brief is more forward-looking, discussing the future of global governance. To substantiate this foresight exercise, the empirical foundations of the above-mentioned GLOBE reports used in-depth case studies and quantitative analyses, which will not be fully repeated in this Policy Brief due to limited space.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Organizational challenges to current global governance institutions

When looking at the challenges of the current governance and institutional models, GLOBE research identified the following problem areas: governing structures of international organizations (IOs), decision-making rules, mandates and autonomy, and available resources such as funding and information. While these are not universal problems, the observed trends and patterns around these three areas affect many IOs across multiple sectors and types of organizations.

A) *Governing structures and decision-making rules*

Firstly, IOs face difficulties balancing the needs of a diverse set of members and stakeholders due to rigid decision-making rules and/or the inflexibility of governance structures and/or stark differences in preferences between member states. Within trade governance, for example, the World Trade Organization (WTO) has failed to reach consensus on the Doha development agenda after nearly 20 years of negotiations. Because the WTO rules are made through consensus, decisions on important changes have been difficult to achieve, due to fundamental divisions between member states regarding core elements of the negotiation agenda, for example regarding granting “Special and Differential Treatment” to developing countries (Marx et al. 2019). As a result, many member states have sought out to establish bilateral and plurilateral arrangements instead, which, while not necessarily at odds with a multilateral approach, make it less of a priority for some member states.

These consensus-based governance structures of “one country, one vote” are only one way in which IOs flexibility and decision-making capabilities can be constrained. On the opposite side, IOs that grant greater weight to certain member states' votes may also confront difficulties. In some cases, an IO grants extra voting privileges (such as veto power or votes with more weight) to a particular member or set of members either to gain their support or as a response to greater financial

contributions. This distorts member states' share of the weighted votes with regards to their perceived or actual contribution to an IO, or their increasing global footprint (Hallaert 2020). Such a situation may also face rejection or resistance by less powerful members for being unfair and unrepresentative. Examples include the UN Security Council (UNSC) or the International Monetary Fund (IMF), where decision-making powers, vote shares, and disturbed veto rights no longer reflect a fair distribution of power and global influence.

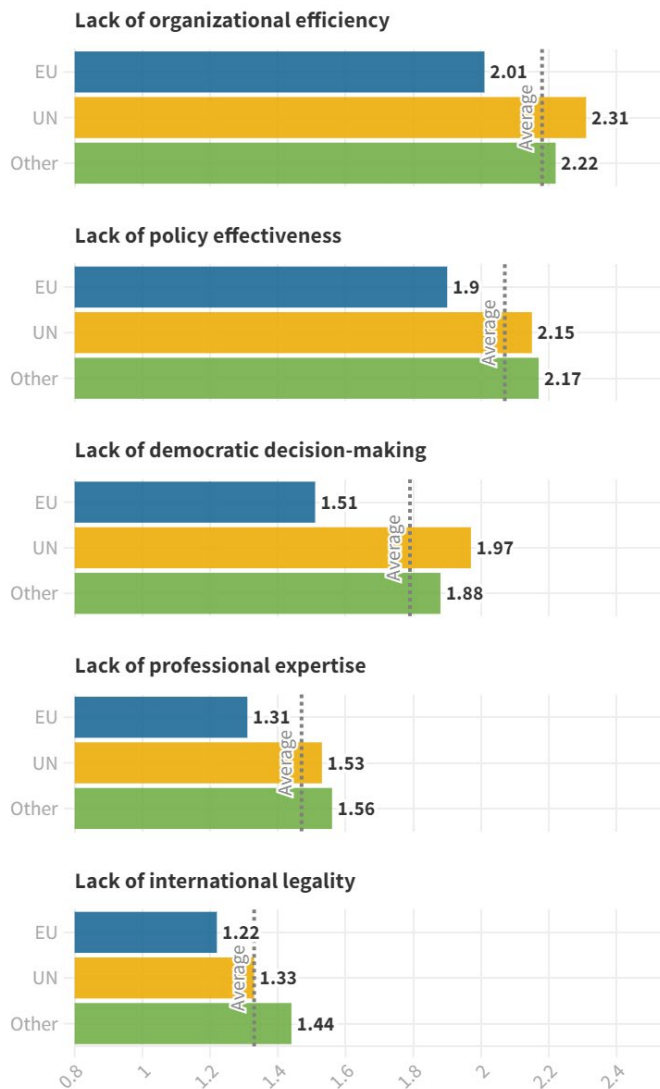


Figure 1: GLOBE Survey results on perceived organizational challenges by IO group. Higher numbers indicate that respondents saw this lack as more likely to occur and affect their IO.

These concerns are also reflected in the answers of IO staff to the [GLOBE Survey on “IOs and the Future of Global Governance”](#) (Jordana et al. 2022). When asked about the likelihood of their IO facing certain problems, a lack of organizational efficiency as well as a lack of policy effectiveness ranked highest (figure 1). But notably, concerns over a lack of democratic decision-making were almost as prevalent as the previous two, whereas other possible problems (lack of professional expertise, lack of international legality) received much lower ratings. Beyond overall responses, the disaggregated numbers also reveal something interesting: while organizational efficiency and policy effectiveness are rated relatively similarly across groups of IOs, there is a marked difference regarding democratic decision-making. Respondents from the EU Commission perceive significantly fewer issues with a possible lack of democratic decision-making than their counterparts from the UN or other IOs.

B) Mandates and autonomy

Secondly, IOs face limitations on their mandates, and they are often not granted with sufficient policy autonomy or scope of action to meet their goals (Globe Report 8.1). On the one hand, an IO's mandate may be too narrow and therefore not allow an IO to undertake all the necessary activities to meet its expected governance goals nor grant the IO enough independence and flexibility to adapt to changing global conditions. Several IO's are confronted with new demands which they cannot address since it falls outside their mandate. For example, the WTO is increasingly pushed to address climate and sustainability issues but its current mandate does not allow to do so.

On the other hand, an IO's mandate might be seen as too broad, limiting their ability to meet different targets, particularly when it lacks the means to meet its mandate. For example, some UN agencies have a very broad agenda, such as the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) creating challenges to deal with a wide range of environmental issues including climate change making them less effective (Globe Report 5.1, Coen et al. 2020).

This mandate 'conundrum' creates challenges for IOs which they are seeking to address. Our research shows that IOs frequently engage in activities beyond those articulated in their mandates. Over time, **IOs rarely stick within the confines of their mandate but rather expand their missions and take on new activities – a process sometimes referred to as “mission creep”** or mission expansion. This can have a dual effect. On the one hand, it might allow them to respond to new challenges and respond to an evolving global context more effectively. On the other hand, it may undermine their legitimacy and support by member states or a broader group of stakeholders, also diverting resources to multiple goals.

But who actually sets the mandates of IOs? On paper, most IO mandates are subject to their member states' authority, but on an operational level, IOs may have considerable autonomy as to how they fulfill their mandate. What is more, IOs secretariats are themselves agents able to influence policy discussions and set agendas, and can thus often indirectly shape the direction in which their mandate is evolving.



Figure 2: GLOBE Survey results on perceived levels of autonomy by IO group. Higher numbers indicate higher levels of autonomy.

To shed more light on how these dynamics work, the GLOBE Survey asked to staff questions relating to the perceived autonomy of their IO (Jordana et al. 2022). Respondents were confronted with a number of activities that IOs are typically engaged in and asked to assess how autonomous their IO is in respect to member

states (on a five-point scale from ‘not at all autonomous’ to ‘extremely autonomous’). Notably, it finds a significant contrast between civil servants of the European Commission compared to those of the UN system and other IOs. With regards to their institution’s autonomy, answers by EU staff were markedly more positive (i.e., higher levels of perceived autonomy) than those by staff from other surveyed IOs, especially for questions around internal review and dispute settlement (figure 2). While those from the UN system perceived slightly higher levels of autonomy than the remaining IOs, the UN also fell quite short of the EU levels, except for the question about setting of policies and strategies, where EU staff also reported relatively low levels of perceived autonomy.

The upbeat overall picture from an EU perspective underlines the great strides made in EU integration since the Lisbon Treaty and also feeds into arguments about the EU’s unique actorness. However, the low levels of autonomy with regards to the perhaps most important long-term aspect of its mandates, setting policies and strategies autonomously, should also serve as a reality check for ambitions by the EU’s executive arm to install itself as a more independent actor. It seems that even according to its own staff, the European Commission at the end is still largely subject to the directions of its member states.

C) Limited resources and budgetary prospects

Thirdly, many IOs struggle with limited resources, which can take different forms. Our research found that **IOs frequently lack the necessary resources, including funding, staff and access to information**, with the latter two usually being a function of the first. These budget gaps are partially still due to the 2008/2009 financial crisis, after which some member states of IOs limited their financial contributions to IOs.

This creates uncertainty for IOs and demonstrates the difficulty for an IO to perform (Globe Report 7.2). Recent research has shown that when an IO is less financially secure – often reliant on voluntary contributions earmarked for specific purposes – it is likely to have fewer permanent staff, which is likely to negatively impact its autonomy and performance (Ege and Bauer 2017).

For example, the lack of access to funding and information is a major challenge for both the UNEP and the UNFCCC in climate governance (GLOBE Report 7.2). Moreover, lack of support is likely to be self-perpetuating in many IOs. For instance, in security governance, the lack of financial support from some member states to NATO has led the biggest funder – the US – to reconsider its own support (GLOBE Report 4.2, p.44). As states limit the resources available to an IO, it is increasingly unable to fulfill its roles and is likely to face further difficulties in garnering sufficient support.

It is hard to forecast or speculate on the evolution of IO budgets, as they are subject to many fluctuating factors. To get an approximation of the most plausible pathways for how IO budgets may evolve in the upcoming years, GLOBE relied on the unique and privileged insights of those directly affected by budgetary changes, IO staff. While also operating under incomplete information and with similar bounded capacities to predict the future, they draw on vast experience working

within the institution and the wider system, and hence their expert opinion may wield more reliable indications as to future developments. Hence, in the GLOBE Survey we also asked IO staff about their perceptions regarding the likely future evolution of their IO's budget. Through two different questions (likelihood of IO increasing its annual budget; likelihood of IO suffering from a shortage of financial resources), we are able to draw a detailed picture of how IO staff anticipate their IOs budgetary situation to evolve (figure 3).

The numbers draw a stark picture of the EU being more pessimistic about their budgetary outlook than the UN, whereas the remaining IOs from our sample are even more optimistic. This may be partially due to the fact that the EU can be considered to have a relatively large budget already, hence future expansion may be perceived as less likely, less pertinent, or less desirable. However, looking at the historic trajectory of how the EU's budget grew relatively constantly over time, the current negative outlook may also suggest that EU staff foresees a leveling off of this growth. Notably, while UN staff was more optimistic about future budgetary increases (figure 3, left panel), they also more acutely feared financial shortages (right panel). This apparent paradox seems to express expectations of greater overall instability regarding IO's budget, which arguably is indeed a bigger source of political contestation in the case of the UN.

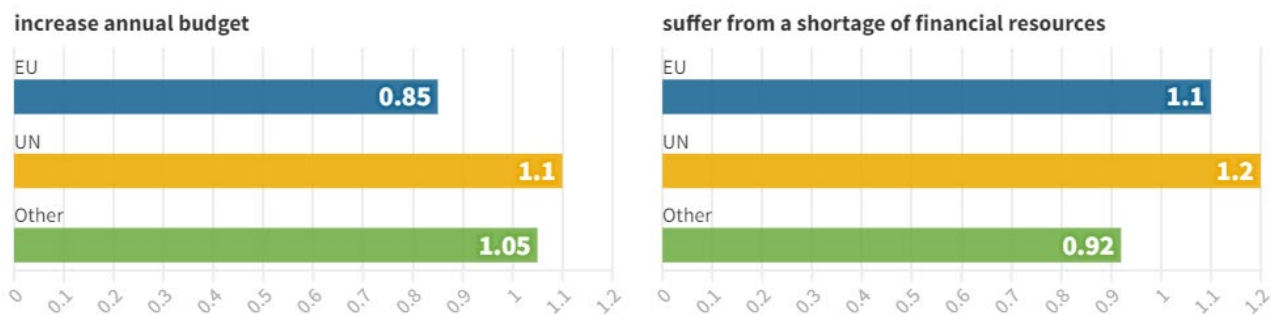


Figure 3: Budgetary outlook for IO groups, based on results from the GLOBE Survey. Higher numbers indicate that respondents assessed higher the likelihood of a scenario to occur.

D) What this means for global governance

Taken together, the challenges discussed in this section can undermine IOs' capacity and ability to perform as core global governance actors. What then, are the implications of these findings? First, by distilling the major institutional challenges of the traditional main actors in global governance, we have the opportunity to reflect on different reform pathways. The policy recommendations presented in the last section of this brief list several policy options. Moreover, some challenges are being resolved or compensated through the inclusion of additional institutions, especially alternative forms of governance - informal lawmaking, experimentalist governance and multistakeholder initiatives (Globe Report 8.1).

While these innovative, entrepreneurial governance approaches may circumvent gridlock and prove more flexible and adaptive to emergent challenges, we should ask if they also risk further undermining the authority of existing formal IOs, making them less relevant. Moreover, it is not granted that these interactions between different types of new global governance actors are conducive to better

governance. So what do people from the inside of say about the functioning of their IO's interactions with other IOs populating global governance spaces?

Here, the GLOBE Survey again reveals interesting differences between European Commission staff and those from other IOs (see figure 4). Commission staff expressed much less concern about interaction problems of hierarchical or competitive nature. Similarly, they were less concerned about possible overlap in IOs activities or responsibilities. The data also shows the UN being the most concerned across all surveyed areas, including implementation of field actions. These high levels of concern are probably due to the wide scope in mandate and membership, but potentially also expressing frustration amongst staff members as to the complexity of governance challenges the UN system is involved in.

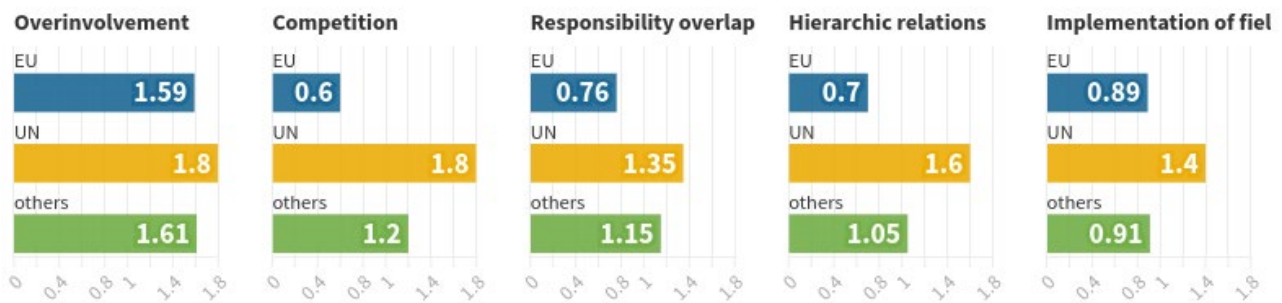


Figure 4: GLOBE Survey results on perceived degrees of interaction problems between IOs. Higher numbers indicate that respondents saw a problem as more likely to occur.

To us, the relatively optimistic picture painted by EU staff suggests at least two possible explanations. The EU has established a sufficiently prominent place for itself in the current global governance landscape that renders competition challenges unlikely and puts it in a comfortable hierarchical position vis-a-vis other IOs. Moreover, operating at the regional level limits some of the challenges that IOs with a global coverage confront. On the other side, it might be also that the EU is better equipped to navigate the complex interactions with other IOs due to long-trained institutional capabilities and tailored structures, such as inter-institutional agreements, liaison officers, and dedicated stakeholder relation units.

How Formal IOs Make Informality Work

In light of current gridlocks and challenges, informal institutions have emerged as one of the above-mentioned alternative forms of global governance – and one in which the EU is a particularly important actor with a considerable footprint. Informal institutions have rapidly not only become a prominent feature of contemporary global governance but, accordingly, also attract significant scholarly attention. Recent GLOBE research (GLOBE Report 8.3) has unearthed a number of interesting findings, inter alia on the instrumental role of the EU and other formal IOs in making informality work, and observed this as an increasing trend.

So what does informality mean in a global governance context? Why does it matter to global governance and how can it contribute to addressing global issues? Increasingly, when states set down international rules and provide public goods they have relied less on treaties and relatively more on soft law, which deliberately eschews legally binding obligations (GLOBE Report 8.3). Similarly, across a range of issue areas, in the place of formal international organizations, like the United

Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), there has been a proliferation of informal IOs that exist in a “twilight zone” beyond the traditional boundaries of international law. Within Europe, this shift has been especially pronounced. European states have made extensive use of informal instruments across numerous domains of world politics. And, even within the otherwise highly legalized integration and foreign policy processes of the EU, traditionally informal bodies like the Eurogroup and the E3—a body central to Iran nuclear negotiations—are becoming increasingly important. Research has demonstrated how certain “problem structures” or the level of conflict between states can generate an incentive for states to establish institutions with informal designs. Especially when issues require speedy decision-making, flexible implementation, or a high level of confidentiality, informal governance appears to have certain advantages.

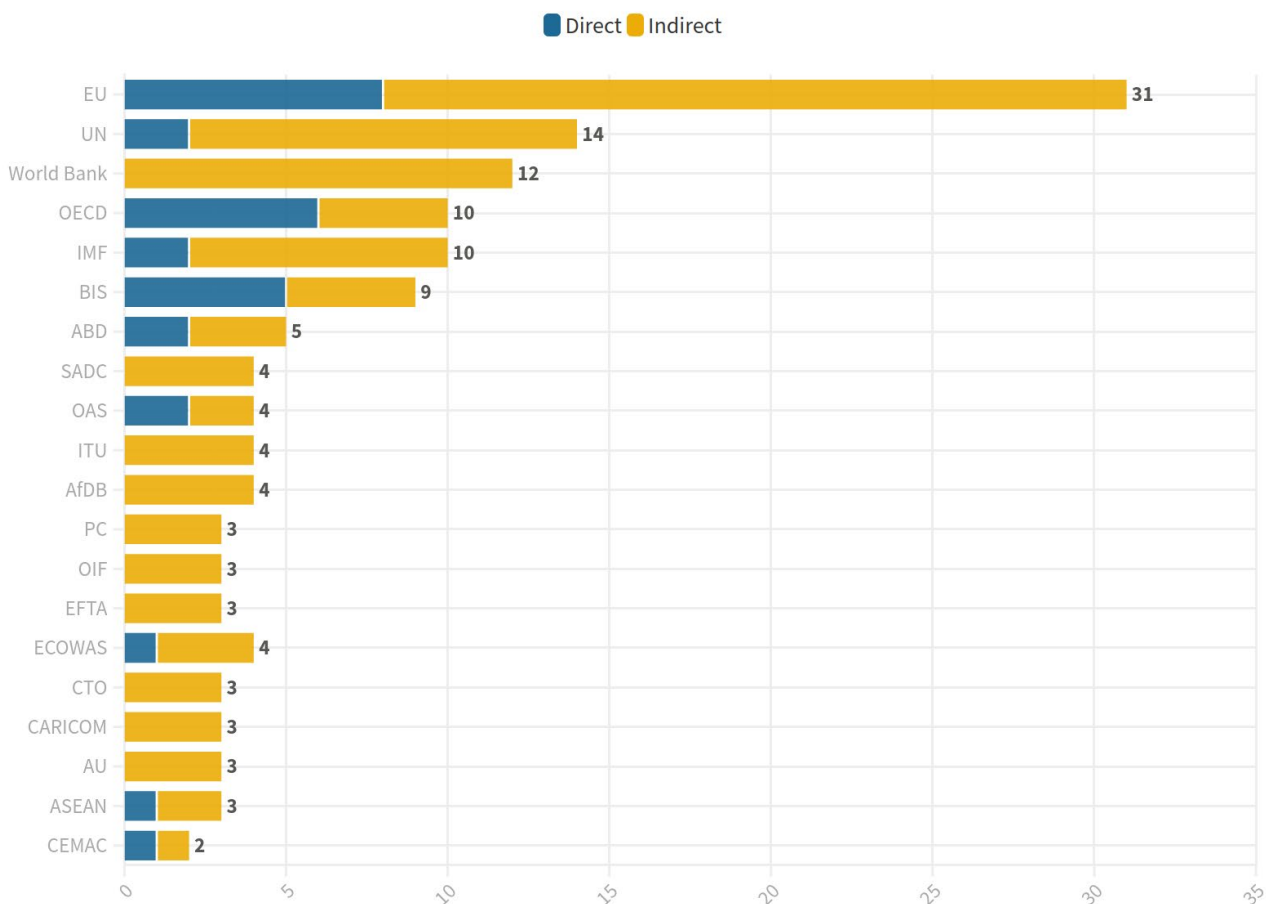


Figure 5: Counts of direct and indirect assistance given to informal institutions by various IOs in 2010

To understand how this development can be shaped and nourished in the coming years, it is necessary to explore the determinants of the creation and survival of informal institutions. While existing scholarship mostly looks at the demand side – shifts that increase the incentive for states to create informal institutions – our research offers a novel supply-side explanation in which the EU features prominently. Rather than becoming less essential, formal IOs—particularly, those capable of providing key resources and services to informal bodies—have facilitated their proliferation as instruments of cross border governance. Figure 5 counts the instances of direct and indirect assistance provided by various formal IOs to informal bodies in 2010 (see GLOBE Report 8.3). It shows the EU—responsible for 31 instances of direct and indirect support—standing out as the most

significant provider of assistance, by far. It is followed by the UN, the World Bank, OECD, IMF, and BIS, and a number of other well-known IOs.ⁱⁱ

This assistance occurs via several mechanisms. First, **formal IO assistance can reshape the choice for informality** by making policymakers more confident that informality can work at the outset; or by making it more likely that an informal design will be maintained when problems change later. Second, in practical terms, **larger bodies can lower the costs of producing governance by lending resources and extending key services to informal IOs**. Thereby, they facilitate the proliferation of new institutions that would not otherwise represent viable solutions on their own. This feeds into theories on IO “mutualism”: as organizations develop links with one another, they mutually strengthen and legitimize themselves (Green, Jessica F, and Jennifer Hadden. 2021).

Taken together, our research revealed extensive direct and indirect support provided to informal bodies by a growing number of well-resourced, general-purpose institutions, most notably from the EU, but also some other IOs as the World Bank or different regional development banks. Our findings suggest that the presence of formal IOs in an organization’s environment is very likely to serve as an important supply-side driver of informality. Put differently, formal IOs can collectively act like a coral reef that provides key resources and services and enables an assortment of smaller organizations to flourish.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With the international rules-based order under threat, global challenges such as climate change make it even more urgent to devise and implement well-functioning global governance mechanisms. The EU and its member states have a particularly pronounced interest in maintaining and improving a stable and effective system of governance, though ideally all of humanity stands to profit from strong international organizations and peaceful inter-state cooperation. The challenges described by GLOBE research lead us to formulate a number of policy recommendations, relevant for policymakers at the EU and member states level, but also to like-minded and willing partners beyond.

A) Policy recommendations for the EU and member states

- Devise creative means to support the **creation of IO networks, epistemic communities and informal channels beyond Europe**, and subsequently **work towards their formalization** whenever pertinent. Additionally, EU institutions should continue working towards obtaining maximum recognition by IOs, ideally getting accepted as a proper member and not only as observer or sponsor.
- Staff concerns have highlighted budgetary constraints as a major potential bottleneck for the EU’s capacity to continue leading the way in international cooperation and global governance. Given its fundamental role in facilitating other IOs and in serving as a blueprint for peaceful international cooperation,

member states should commit to **enhancing the EU's own resources**, funding and staff.

- In light of IOs' vulnerabilities to financial blackmailing, the EU and its member states should spearhead a global alliance of like-minded multilateralist partners to **establish an IO/GG emergency reserve** or budget backstop. This reserve could serve as a budgetary backstop, being accessible on demand to those IOs who suffer temporary funding problems. Thus, it would help bridging undue withholdings of members' contributions or to balancing unexpected withdrawals of voluntary contributions.
- The EU should **coordinate reforms of IO decision-making rules and governance structures. For this, it should involve member states and set up a dedicated Joint Research Council teamⁱⁱⁱ** with a mandate to reach out to other IOs - in close cooperation with the respective EEAS unit - and provide them with mutually accepted guidelines and technical assistance upon request.
- Building on the successes of supporting informal IOs that are instrumental to global governance, the EU should continue to **engage with and assist existing informal IOs and to promote transnational networks**, wherever conducive to its own policy objectives and the upholding of a functioning rules-based international order.

B) Policy implications for global governance and the functioning of international organizations

- To avoid frustration and delegitimization of IO's, their mandates need to be updated and specified to better reflect current and future global governance challenges. Discussions on the reforms of decision-making structures of IOs should include reflection on how this can be achieved.
- In "normal times", reform would require significant political investment, continuous focus, and ideally a concerted push by a coalition of like-minded countries and institutions.
- Reform can also be triggered by a geopolitical shock or 'perfect storm', and the EU should be prepared to react quickly to such unforeseen events, using them to push its reform agenda.
- Policymakers should continue to explore creative alternative governance means to devise pragmatic and proportionate tools for responding to global challenges. Multistakeholder initiatives, informal institutions, and other novel governance mechanisms may provide useful blueprints for experimentation.
- While formal IOs play a key role in informal institutions, more research is required to improve our understanding about how their interactions relate to effectiveness, and which supporting actions would be most useful in this regard.
- Non-state actors role in IOs has to be explored and expanded in multiple ways, making new avenues for participation, but also to be involved in decisions-making processes together with state representatives.

The Project “Global Governance and the European Union: Future Trends and Scenarios (GLOBE)”, addresses the strategic priorities identified in the EU Global Strategy such as trade, development, security and climate change as well as migration and global finance to identify the major roadblocks to effective and coherent GG by multiple stakeholders in a multipolar world. The project, coordinated by Institut Barcelona d’Estudis Internacionals (IBEI), will provide policy-makers, academics, and the general public with an analytical grip on the state of play in GG, by innovative research contributions beyond the state of art, and also by developing new policy perspectives. It also hopes to equip national and European policy-makers with tools to identify constraints and opportunities in a set of GG scenarios for 2030 and 2050. To analyze the dynamics of GG in the different issue areas, GLOBE makes extensive use of quantitative methods, but it also elaborates a number of case studies to examine key institutions and global policy configurations. Combining diverse research methods, GLOBE aims to contribute to a new generation of studies in GG, capable of identifying and diagnosing the most relevant problems at the sector level with more precision and detail than previous research in this area.

GLOBE mainly employs a range of data-gathering and research techniques: big data mining, combining and expanding existing [GG databases](#), elaborating and distributing questionnaires, document analysis, personnel interviews, and developing foresight techniques. The [Global Governance Organizations Radar \(GGOR\)](#) extracts from the world’s broadcast, print, and online news a ‘heatmap’ related to the main GG issues in these fields such as the institutions and type of actors that are mentioned most often with a topic, reference to the EU in global media or even the ratio of negative/conflict events v. positive/cooperative events between dyads of actors. Some of the GLOBE partners have elaborated large datasets on different characteristics of institutions and organizations related to GG. Noteworthy examples are the [WZB dataset on IOs](#) and other entities involved in GG, the IBEI dataset on the [institutional features of regulatory agencies](#) at the national level, and the ESADE dataset on the characteristics of heads and boards of IOs.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	Global Governance and the European Union: Future Trends and Scenarios” (GLOBE)
COORDINATOR	Jacint Jordana, Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals - IBEI, Barcelona, Spain, jjordana@ibei.org
CONSORTIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-ESADE Business & Law School - ESADE, Barcelona, Spain-Facultad Latinoamericana Ciencias Sociales - FLACSO - Buenos Aires. Argentina-Hebrew University of Jerusalem, HUJI, Department of Political Science and the Federmann School of Public Policy and Governance, Jerusalem, Israel-Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals - IBEI, Barcelona, Spain-ISGlobal Barcelona Institute for Global Health, Barcelona, Spain-Katholieke Universiteit Leuven - KUL - Leuven Centre for Global --- Governance Studies - Leuven, Belgium-Peking University - PKU - School of International Studies, Peking, China-University College London - UCL - Department of Political Science, London, UK-Universitas Bina Nusantara - BINUS - International Relations Department, Jakarta, Indonesia-Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung - WZB - Berlin, Germany
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WEBSITE	https://globe-project.eu/
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ⁱ The “Other” group includes, amongst others, multinational development banks like the AIIB and IDB, security organizations like the OSCE, and regional organizations like the African Union and OAS.

ⁱⁱ In this figure, the “UN” refers to the UN Secretariat. If we include UN sub-bodies like, UNEP, UNDP, and UNECE in this figure, the total is slightly higher—19 instances of support.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Joint Research Council (JRC) is the European Commission's science and knowledge service. It employs scientists to carry out research in order to provide independent scientific advice and support to EU policy.