

Multilateralism what?

Multi-what?

A short guide
on **multilateralism** and its
role in our daily lives

The background is a solid teal color. On the right side, there are several overlapping geometric shapes: a light green vertical rectangle, a dark blue semi-circle, and a light green semi-circle. The text is positioned within the light green semi-circle.

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Introduction: *Multi-what?*

Multilateralism is a term one often hears in the context of international relations particularly today. It is said to be under attack. However, do we really understand what it means?

Multilateralism is important for creating and maintaining peace, improving the quality of our lives and promoting human rights. Multilateralism is also crucial for tackling complex global challenges like climate change and health crises. When countries tackle problems together, the best outcomes are inevitable.

Multi-what? was inspired and produced by the Perception Change Project of the United Nations Office at Geneva with the goal of contributing to a better understanding of this concept. This booklet is an effort to present a complex and often misunderstood notion to the general, non-specialized public, not only underlining its essential role in the international system, but also highlighting its concrete impact on our daily lives.

Defining multilateralism

Multilateralism, traditionally, refers to a collective action coordinated between at least three actors. It implies that the actors have a shared realization that it is in their interests to work together to resolve problems that are bigger than their individual efforts could tackle. Multilateralism helps nations to confront complex global challenges through a universal approach. In short, it is a tool of statecraft and a mindset, a way to do things. The spirit of multilateralism is: “together, we are stronger”.

- Multilateralism comes from the association of two Latin words: *multus* (many) and *latus* (side). Literally, it means “multisided”. The term was first used in geometry before being used in politics.
- The definitive Merriam-Webster unabridged dictionary of the English language describes “multilateral” as something having many sides, participated in, or involving more than three sides, as in treaty, guarantees, contract, etc. It is associated with a series of international agreements to help rebuild international order after war.
- The same dictionary carries a definition of “multilateralism” which is often forgotten in the political discourse, but is a basis of the modern

international trade and financial system: “freedom of international trade and currency transfers so as to achieve for each country a trading balance with the total trading area but not necessarily with any one particular country”. The dictionary contrasts it with “bilateralism”.

- In a multilateral system, the costs and benefits of international cooperation cannot be judged on a single interaction. Multilateralism creates a mechanism for constant bargaining that generates concessions and gains, with opportunities to balance their gains and losses over the long term.
- It allows all parties to participate in the decision-making process and to make their voices heard. Moreover, multilateral decisions are based on collegial agreements.
- The core of multilateralism is cooperation. The multilateral system provides a space for international actors to coordinate. It also fosters the exchange of information as well as good practices. It is space to settle disputes through dialogue, persuasion and respect for collective norms.
- In short, under multilateral negotiations, no party gets everything, but all parties get something.

The evolution of multilateralism

THE ORIGINS OF MULTILATERALISM

Multilateral cooperation has existed for as far back as we can remember. Some scholars see it as a foundation for the development of organized societies and trace its origins back to ancient times. Many civilizations left evidence of agreements to help regulate interactions (be it political, commercial or financial) between different entities.

In its recognizable form, multilateralism developed in the course of negotiating the Westphalia treaties, which ended the Hundred Year War and the Thirty Year War in 1648. The peace agreements signed in the German cities of Münster and Osnabrück are now generally considered to be at the origin of the modern international state system.

Modern multilateralism progressively took shape during the 19th century, and can be traced through different stages.

CONCERT OF EUROPE

The “Concert of Europe” emerged from the Vienna Congress in 1815 which ended the Napoleonic wars and is considered to be the first political step towards the development of modern multilateralism. Its main objective was to

maintain political order in Europe by maintaining a balance of power. During this period, we also see the emergence of the practice of holding periodic international conferences among the Great Powers to settle disputes to prevent potential new wars breaking out.

A HUMANITARIAN MULTILATERALISM

Multilateral discussions to support and protect humanity, especially victims of war and violence, also emerged. The Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field signed in 1864, better known as the first Geneva Convention, marked an important step for the codification of humanitarian law.

AN INTELLECTUAL MULTILATERALISM

The “pacifist” or “internationalist” movement emerged in the 19th century. It promoted international peace through global cooperation and international law. It prepared public opinion and the minds of political leaders for the creation of the League of Nations, the first global international organization.

THE HAGUE CONFERENCES

The First Hague Peace Conference (1899) and the Second Hague Peace Conference (1907) marked new milestones in the development of multilateralism. The 1899 Conference led to the Permanent Court of Arbitration, the first multilateral attempt to prevent war through arbitration. The 1907 Conference continued these efforts by bringing representatives together from 44 governments which, at the time, was a large part of the existing states.



MANIFESTATIONS OF MULTILATERAL EFFORTS IN THE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The first intergovernmental organizations were the Central Commission for the navigation of the Rhine (1815) and the European Commission of the Danube (1856), which were established to guarantee the freedom of navigation. Because these two rivers crossed different national territories and represented an important waterway, river-states had to cooperate with each other for a mutual agreement concerning navigation, transit, tariffs, and facilities.

THE OLDEST INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS STILL STANDING

When telegraphy was invented, different countries had different telegraphy systems. This made it difficult to send messages around the world. Messages would have to stop at borders and be rewired for delivery. To solve this problem, the International Telegraphy Conference (ITC) was established in 1865 to provide a framework of common norms and rules for easy international communications.

Did you know that the International Telegraph Union (1865) and the Universal Postal Union (1874) were among the first organizations founded and are both still part of the United Nations system today? The International Telegraph Union later changed

its name to International Telecommunications Union (ITU) as we know it today.

MULTILATERALISM FOR UNIVERSAL TIME TELLING

Imagine a world where a number of different meridians are used in different countries as a reference for time. In 1884, a meeting was held to make a multilateral decision to adopt the Greenwich Meridian as a basis for the world's standard time-zone system, a "standard of time-reckoning throughout the whole world".

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION TO CONTAIN THE SPREAD OF DISEASES

Diseases know no border. As more people and goods crossed the borders, so did diseases such as cholera, typhus, yellow fever and the plague. Meetings were held about containing the spread of diseases, harmonizing national quarantine regulations, and highlighting the importance of information exchange in case of outbreaks.

THE OLDEST SPECIALIZED AGENCY - INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION (ILO)

ILO was established in 1919 at the Paris Peace Conference on the basis that "universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice". Today, 187 states are members of the ILO. Its main mission is to promote the right to work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue on work-related issues.

Multilateralism goes global: The League of Nations

The League of Nations was established following the First World War at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Indeed, the Covenant of the League of Nations is an integral part of the Versailles Treaty. Its foundation marked a turning point in the process of institutionalizing multilateralism. The League was the first global international organization created to maintain peace and promote cooperation between countries.

THE COVENANT: A NEW INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE

If you are a member of a sports club, there are some rules you must follow and there is some information about how the sports club works. In the same way, the Covenant was a document for the members of the League. It detailed what members can and cannot do, and outlined the way the organization works. There was a code of conduct, a way to behave: there must be unity among members, respect, equal rights, group decision-making, transparency, and peaceful resolution of disagreements.

The creation of the League provided an opportunity for representatives of member states to meet regularly and discuss all major international issues on an equal footing. For the first time, the debates were public and the press were allowed to attend diplomatic meetings. Importantly, a permanent secretariat was created, which serviced the intergovernmental process of multilateral diplomacy.

A FIRST ATTEMPT AT GLOBAL COOPERATION

The League was active in many areas. It aided in settling international disputes, provided financial assistance to states, fought epidemics, and promoted the codification of international law. It coordinated international action to fight slavery and human trafficking. It ensured international cooperation in the fields of transit and communications. It facilitated intellectual cooperation and supported refugees.

Governments, and private associations (nowadays referred to as NGOs) were very active within the League.

The League officially had up to 60 member states, which represented most of the existing states at the time. However, the Geneva-based organization never succeeded in establishing a global multilateral system, largely because of the absence of the United States, which never joined the League. In addition, a large part of the world was under colonial rule.

Despite this, during the 1920s and 1930s many multilateral treaties were prepared and signed under the auspices of the League of Nations, which were also open to non-member states. The web of international treaties laid the foundation on which the modern multilateral system is based today.

THE LEAGUE'S GREAT EXPERIMENT

The League was unable to prevent the Second World War. After the conflict, Winston Churchill said "The League did not fail because of its principles or conceptions. It failed because those

principles were deserted by those states which brought it into being".

The League of Nations officially dissolved in 1946. It has been called the "Great experiment" and it demonstrated both the potential of multilateral cooperation and the consequences of the lack of cooperation.

Following this, the new international system was formed: The United Nations. It was built on a stronger foundation of multilateralism.

SOME MULTILATERAL INITIATIVES SUPPORTED BY THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

1920

STANDARDIZING PASSPORTS

A long time ago, every country had its own passport and its own rules. But it became important for countries to control their borders and restrict access for safety reasons. This is why in 1920 an international conference, held by the League of Nations, adopted an “international-type” of passport. It set common rules about the personal information to be included in a passport, its validity, etc.

1922

BRINGING SMART MINDS TOGETHER FOR PEACE

There was a committee of men and women who were selected to be members because of their talent and achievements. They could be intellectuals, artists or scientist, e.g. Albert Einstein or Gabriela Mistral. It was the first attempt to bring smart minds together to promote peace, no matter their nationality.

1925

CONTROLLING WEAPONS

The “1925 Geneva Protocol” is an agreement that was signed in Geneva to ban the use of chemical and biological weapons in war. Today, it is complemented by the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and the Chemical Weapons Convention, which extend its applicability to the whole scope of these weapons and cover the entirety of war case scenarios.

1936

RADIO BROADCASTING AND PEACE

When the radio was created in the 20th century, it was difficult to control propaganda and false information that was spreading across borders. In 1936, the “International Convention concerning the Use of Broadcasting in the Cause of Peace” was signed in Geneva to ban radio broadcasting that could create chaos in a country or threaten the safety of other countries. After the Second World War, depositary functions passed to the UN Secretary-General, with the treaty being still in force today.

1936

DRUG CONTROL

Illegal drugs have been traded across borders for years. An agreement was made to prosecute acts related to drug trafficking. The convention also, for the first time, dealt with drug-related crime.

Multilateralism at the heart of international life: The United Nations

The multilateral system that emerged after the Second World War has been constantly evolving. In 1945, 51 governments signed the UN Charter at San Francisco. Today, 193 states are members of the United Nations. For over 75 years, the multifaceted global cooperation has increased in light of the growing number of participating states.

Multilateralism is at the heart of the United Nations. Since its foundation, the UN has contributed to the development of global cooperation by providing a multilateral framework for international action. It has also been the catalyst for negotiation and the adoption of a number of international agreements which are essential elements of the multilateral system we live in today.

THE UN CHARTER, A COMPASS FOR MULTILATERALISM

The UN aims to allow states to cooperate and coordinate their actions in order to maintain peace, advance and defend fundamental human rights, promote social progress and provide better living standards.

The UN Charter is the constitutional treaty of the United Nations. It is composed of 111 articles, which define the obligations of the member states as well as the structure, mission and functioning of the organization. It also contains the core

principles on which the functioning of the international system is based.

The UN Charter is the bedrock of multilateralism. As United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres declared, “the United Nations Charter provides a moral compass to promote peace, advance human dignity, prosperity and uphold human rights and the rule of law.”

AN EVOLVING SYSTEM OF COOPERATION IN AN EVOLVING WORLD

The UN is a place for harmonizing the actions of countries: security, arms control, human rights, trade, economic development, health, codification of international law and much more.

The UN Charter established six principal organs of the United Nations: the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice, and the UN Secretariat. The UN family, however, is much larger, encompassing several funds, programmes, specialized agencies, and other bodies. All of them work together but in their own mandates and areas of expertise to achieve the objectives enshrined in the Charter and to facilitate global cooperation.

A PLURALITY OF STAKEHOLDERS

But is multilateralism just a matter of governments? The United Nations allows a multitude of actors to meet and share their views on global responses. Gradually, new stakeholders got involved in the multilateral processes.

Today, diplomats from the 193 member states, and also delegates from observer states and international organizations, representatives of NGOs, international experts, private actors and academics come to meet regularly to discuss a broad range of international questions.

The United Nations system and the Nobel Prize

In 2001, the Peace Nobel Prize was awarded jointly to the United Nations and the Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan “for their work for a better organized and more peaceful world.”

The Nobel Peace prize was awarded several times to UN funds, programs and specialized agencies as well to other UN organizations.

- 1954:** Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- 1965:** United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)
- 1969:** International Labour Organization (ILO)
- 1981:** Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- 1988:** United Nations Peacekeeping Forces
- 2005:** jointly to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and its Director General Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei
- 2007:** jointly to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and former US vice president and environmentalist Al Gore Jr.
- 2013:** Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)
- 2020:** World Food Programme (WFP)

THE EVOLUTION OF MULTILATERAL COOPERATION

In the last 75 years, global cooperation in the United Nations framework has been through ups and downs, being constantly influenced by various global challenges. The United Nations is a reflection of its Member States and is as efficient, or ineffective, as its Member States make it.

During the Cold War, the UN provided a successful channel of communication and achieved the first peacekeeping operations, as well as the adoption of agreements in the field of arms control and for the protection of human rights.

The decolonization process had a significant impact on global multilateral cooperation. The increase of UN members – from 51 in 1945 to 99 in 1960 – changed the multilateral dynamic. The decision-making process in the General Assembly became more complex and influence was diffused.

With the end of the Cold War, a new set of opportunities and challenges presented themselves, raising new prospects for international cooperation. The “New World Order”, however, did not take root.

The world has become progressively more politically fragmented and at the same time interconnected. The process of globalization – in particular the technological advances in communication and transport – shrank the world. It created new opportunities, but also increased inequalities between developed and developing countries as well as within countries.

Multilateral cooperation has had to evolve over the years with changing circumstances, but its significance in addressing global challenges has only increased dramatically with the passage of time.

Sustainable Development Goals

COLLECTIVE OBJECTIVES FOR GLOBAL RESULTS

“As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind.” These are the ambitious terms of the resolution *“Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”* unanimously adopted by the General Assembly in September 2015.

The resolution laid down the basis to achieve 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) addressing global challenges by 2030, including challenges related to poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice.

The SDGs are based on a multilateral approach. They take into consideration the necessity to include different stakeholders for the development of integrated, inclusive and innovative approach.

The adoption of the SDGs is the result of over two years of intensive public consultation and engagement with civil society and other stakeholders around the world. Moreover, the implementation, follow-up and review measures of the SDGs rely on the cooperation among international organizations, national governments and public institutions, non-governmental organizations, academia and volunteer groups.

Multilateral cooperation in practice

ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS

The UN played a central role in the adoption of some 80 human rights treaties and declarations. Much of this body of law was inspired by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948. These treaties and declarations protect civil, political, economic, as well as social and cultural rights. This includes, for example, the freedom from any form of discrimination and the freedom of expression.

ARMS CONTROL, DISARMAMENT AND NON-PROLIFERATION

Global disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation are central in preventing conflict and in building and sustaining peace. Since its foundation, the UN has been helping countries in the process of reducing and eventually eliminating weapons, including nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, as well as halting the proliferation of landmines, small arms and light weapons. In this context, the UN Secretary-General's agenda for disarmament aims to reinvigorate dialogue and negotiations around international disarmament.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), negotiated by the United Nations between 1965 and 1968, represents to date the only binding commitment towards disarmament by nuclear-weapon States. With 191 States having joined the treaty, the NPT is the most ratified arms limitation and disarmament agreement in history.

MULTILATERAL TRADE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Multilateral trade, as we recalled, is based on allowing each country to achieve a trading balance with the total trading area, and not necessarily with any other particular country. The modern multilateral trading system not only ensures economic opportunity, but is also essential for maintaining peace. As Benjamin Franklin noted, “Trading partners seldom wage war”.

As one of its core mandates, and through its funds, programmes and specialized agencies, the UN is committed to both ultimately widening the global trading area, and promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for everyone.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Multilateral humanitarian operations assist the victims of natural disasters and man-made emergencies. Multilateral cooperation in the humanitarian field is multifaceted and can take different forms, from providing material and technical assistance, elaborating on policies, to mobilizing funds, food, health assistance and logistics.

Multilateral cooperation is necessary to assist and protect vulnerable people that are forced to flee their homes because of wars, persecutions or other reasons. The UN system assists about 70 million displaced persons.

PEACEKEEPING

As the world’s primary vehicle to pursue the project of peace, the UN helps countries in the settlement of conflicts and their search for an enduring peace and political stability. While peacekeeping operations firmly rely upon a consent-based, impartial and non-use of force approach, they have evolved over time to adapt to the complexity of modern conflicts. The variety of UN-led peace operations such as peacemaking, peacebuilding and conflict prevention activities express and aim to address this complexity, towards the essential and delicate mandate of maintaining international peace and security.

PREVENTING NATURAL RISKS

Multilateral efforts to face humanitarian crises are not only reactive but are also proactive.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (Sendai Framework) is a multilateral instrument which aims at coordinating international action in order to reduce existing risks, prevent the creation of new risks, and increase resilience by setting common standards, comprehensive framework with achievable targets, and a legally-based instrument for disaster risk reduction.

Multilateralism in your daily life

A FEW EXAMPLES OF HOW MULTILATERALISM SHAPES AND ENHANCES OUR LIVES

PLACE OF ORIGIN: PLANET EARTH

Where is your smartphone from? The right answer: your smartphone is made up from a web of 200 suppliers spread across 43 countries. This network of supply chains makes it possible for smartphone makers to use cutting edge parts while quickly adapting to new trends and prices.

The International Standards Organisation (ISO) sets quality standards that allow companies to quickly find part makers. As parts cross borders multiple times multilateral trade agreements reduce bureaucratic barriers, costs, and waiting times. The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) regulations allow cargo to move further, faster and safer.

YOU'VE GOT MAIL!

For most of us, content and correct spelling are what we think about when sending a message. We rarely worry about *how* an email, voicemail, or letter gets delivered. Almost 200 billion emails crisscross the globe every day, with very few of

them lost along the way. When an email is sent it looks for the exact address of the receiver in DNS servers that act as the internet's address book system. The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) works with companies, governments, and civil society to create protocols so that all devices from your computer to soil humidity sensors can connect to a truly global internet through these DNS servers. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) helps to allow quick and automatic telephone connections across oceans through unified standards as fundamental as the length of a country code or subscriber number.

The Universal Postal Union (UPU) has built an international postal framework that covers seemingly trivial things like the shape of post stamps to data systems that allow global parcel tracking. Communicating across the globe quickly and reliably with family, friends, and businesses is made possible through global standards with multilateral cooperation at their core.

Did you know?

ICANN, working together with government agencies, companies, and civil society, decides what top level domains including **.com .org .ch .ai .smile .plumbing** can be used?

A VACCINE'S LONG ROAD

Smallpox is the only disease to have been fully eradicated. This was achieved through the cooperative efforts of a global vaccination campaign. For many people getting a vaccine shot is something ordinary. But for people in vulnerable communities with weak healthcare systems or communities that have been threatened by an epidemic, it represents life-changing protection. Yet vaccines are expensive, difficult, and risky for producers to develop, so initiatives like the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) bring together governments, foundations, researchers, and producers to fill in the gaps.

The World Health Organization (WHO) creates guidelines that support countries in the safe, effective, and swift development and approval of vaccines. Bringing these vaccines to vulnerable and remote communities is made possible through over 100 country programmes pioneered by the WHO and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). International agencies and multilateral initiatives like the Global Vaccine Alliance (GAVI) are vital to bringing vaccines from labs to communities and have raised the coverage of essential vaccines for children from 20% in 1980 to 85% today.

WASH YOUR HANDS, IF YOU CAN

It only takes 30 seconds, clean running water, soap, and a clean cloth to protect yourself against many infectious diseases. But 2 out of 5 people, including 900 million school children, do not have access to these basic hand washing facilities in their homes and schools.

The World Health Organization (WHO) leverages its expertise and data to work together with countries

to create national water and sanitation plans to fill this gap in access. But even as UNICEF and other agencies implement these by building wells and latrines in vulnerable communities, only 15% of governments fully fund their national water plans. For each dollar of funding for safe water and sanitation the benefit to communities is estimated to be 5.5 times higher because of positive effects like reductions in child malnutrition and greater school attendance for girls.

Between 1990 and 2015 the number of people without safe drinking water halved through multilateral programmes and initiatives like the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses. Global cooperation has brought clean water and sanitation to millions and strengthened this first line of preventative defence against disease that many of us take for granted.

Did you know?

The 19th of November is World Toilet Day. **Sanitation is a human right** and for many people a life-saver, but today more than half of the world population lives without safely managed sanitation.

The Sustainable Development Goal 6 aims to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030.

DRIVE SAFE

Out of all the things that can change when crossing a border on a road trip, the shape and size of the road signs is rarely one of them. Recognisable and consistent road signs prevent confusion for families on holidays and truck drivers crossing continents.

Thanks to the Vienna Convention on Road Signs and Signals signed in 1968, a stop sign is universally recognisable. The cars and trucks crossing borders depend on multilateral agreements to allow them to be exported and imported across the world. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) supports an international forum where technical regulations are developed for vehicle safety covering everything from fog lamp design, the placement of foot pedals, to rules for autonomous vehicles. These agreements bring greater safety for road users and reduce the barriers for vehicle imports and exports.

THE WEEKEND

Much of our life is structured around the rhythm of the work week and the anticipation of the weekend. In most of the world weekends are Saturday to Sunday but weekends can vary between 1-3 days and start on Thursdays or on Sundays. There is even a weekend that is Friday and Sunday separately! While the 7-day week can be traced back 4,000 years to Babylon, the weekend as we know it is less than 100 years old. It was pushed by industrial workers and unions who unofficially took Mondays off because the religious Sunday holiday wasn't enough time to recuperate. As employers in the west expanded weekends to Saturdays they realised the additional rest made workers more productive and reliable.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) sets the standards that have helped establish a minimum of a one-day weekend and a maximum of 48 hours of work per week. This has encouraged governments and employers to give workers more time to rest. Much like the back and forth between employers, workers, and governments that created the weekend, the ILO has – through its inclusion of these groups – helped ensure that weekends are a right for everyone.

Did you know?

Many people consider the 1890s football craze as one of the main reasons why the weekend starts on a Saturday in most countries. The football craze fixed **Saturday as a day for recreation.**

PAYMENT ACCEPTED

Every time you use your credit card, whether in a store, online, at an ATM, or to pay for a dinner, a multilateral process is at work. ISO 8583 is the international standard issued by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and adopted worldwide to process card-based transactions between different networks, allowing your money to travel from your bank to your hands or to a merchant's bank account. The ISO is made up of national standardisation bodies that develop and then implement these international standards for financial transactions.

Sophisticated standardised financial communication systems like SWIFT which handles 33 million transactions per day, allow

these transfers to take place. The trust that the banks and customers have in the system is built up through standards set by the ISO which give banks operating in different languages and settings the ability to interact.

For banks and regulators to understand and trust each other across borders, multilateral cooperation must fill in for national regulators. The Bank of International Settlements (BIS) keeps in common the principles that many regulators use to oversee the international financial infrastructure and use to reduce the risk of financial crises. As the financial infrastructure allowing international payments expands access to remote places through mobile payments systems, multilateral cooperation continues to strengthen its stability and reach.

SAVING FOR GOOD

While governments and international organizations are funding “green” and development programmes through initiatives like the Green Climate Fund, their investments are not enough to match the annual 1.5 trillion USD needed to reach climate targets.

To bring in the resources of private sector investors, like pension funds, to reach development and environmental targets, multilateral initiatives have pioneered green and social investments. Institutions like the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency reduce the risk for investors to support projects in fragile developing countries that have trouble funding solar energy plants and sustainable fertiliser factories. Globally the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) have created principles that are leading the creation

of standards which guide investors towards socially and environmentally conscious investing.

The work of these programmes and multilateral development banks has set the basis for the creation, fast growth, and increasing availability of green and social impact bonds. Multilateral cooperation fills in information and risk gaps to help people and companies use their investments in ways that contribute towards sustainable development.

FASTEN YOUR SEATBELT

When booking flights most of us focus on flight time, number of transfers, inflight entertainment, and above all, the price. We rarely factor safety into our choice because technology and multilateral cooperation have reduced the risks and differences between countries. Commercial air travel is one of the safest forms of transport with chance of an accident being 2.8 per million departures, with accidents rarely injuring passengers.

Since 1944 the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) has been essential to the 10-fold reduction in the chance of dying on a flight compared to 40 years ago through establishing fundamental procedures like a common language and spelling for pilot communication. These Standards and Recommended Procedures (SARPs) cover almost every aspect of safety from landing systems, pilot fatigue, emergency locators, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, to forecasts on ‘space weather’ that can disrupt radios and GPS systems. All of this simplifies the choice of your next booking because the safety of flying has doubled every decade as technology and the implementation of SARPs by countries and airlines has improved.

Did you know?

It would take an average of **11,000 years of continuous flight** before a commercial plane collided with another thanks to safety systems and standards like the Automated Airborne Collision Avoidance System (ACAS)?

DOES YOUR MOZZARELLA SPEAK ITALIAN?

When shopping at the supermarket, being sure that a specific regional product comes from its original geographical area can be difficult given how much choice there is in the crowded global marketplace. Thanks to the Lisbon Agreement for the Protection of Appellations of Origin and their International Registration, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) protects the appellations of origin of more than 1100 unique products that have a strong link with their place of origin. These offer consumers an additional guarantee of quality, authenticity, and traceability for products including wine, fruit, tea, coffee, pottery, glass, and textiles.

For example, for a mozzarella to receive the *di Bufala Campana* label or appellation, it has to be produced in the Campania region of Italy and meet the traditional production requirements, under the supervision of the *Consorzio di Tutela Mozzarella di Bufala Campana DOP*. In the same way, a Darjeeling tea can enter the market with this name only if cultivated in the tea gardens of the Indian region of Darjeeling and produced according to its geographical indications standards.

With the Geneva Act of the Lisbon Agreement entering into force in February 2020, both appellation of origins and geographical indications are now part of an effective international system of registration and protection.

VEGETABLES AND MULTILATERAL COOPERATION

Do you know that our vegetables are related to multilateral cooperation? Most of the vegetables and fruits found in supermarkets go through quality checks that determine if they are good enough to buy directly, used for juices, or for recycling.

The United Nations through one of its regional commissions, the Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), works with producers to create internationally used standards for agricultural exports like fresh fruit, vegetables, dry and dried produce, seeds, potatoes, meat, cut flowers, and eggs.

Why are these standards important? They encourage high-quality production, raise profitability for producers, simplify trade through clear quality standards for contracts, and protect consumers. The standards build a common trading language and open new export opportunities for producers. The work of institutions like the UNECE allows your local grocery to safely and reliably source fresh products from around the world ranging from smoked salmon to kiwis.

MULTILATERAL COOPERATION AND OUR DEODORANT

Many of us start the day using hairspray, shaving cream, or deodorant. Did you know that all of these are connected to one of the most successful multilateral initiatives?

In the 1970s scientists started studying the effects of an accumulation of certain gases in the atmosphere's stratospheric ozone layer. Chlorofluorocarbon gases (CFCs) used in aerosol cans and refrigerators were identified as the main cause of the 'ozone hole'. The dangers of increased UV radiation to human and animal health posed by ozone depletion led to the international community coordinating a response through the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone in 1985.

This convention aims to promote cooperation through the exchange of information on the effects of human activities on the ozone layer and measures to prevent further harm to the ozone layer. The Vienna Convention was complemented by the Montreal Protocol in 1987 which controls the production and consumption of specific chemicals, particularly CFCs. To help states achieve their obligations to eliminate the use of these chemicals a multilateral fund was established to provide financial assistance to developing countries. With the successful phase out of CFCs in 2010 our hairspray, shaving cream, or deodorant aerosols cans are safe for the ozone layer.

Did you know?

The **Vienna Convention** and the **Montreal Protocol** are the first treaties in the history of the United Nations to have achieved universal ratification and have significantly contributed to reversing the problem of ozone depletion.

PROTECTING INVENTIONS

Can you guess what Google, Segway, translucent concrete, or Magnetic Resonance Imaging have in common? All these inventions have passed through the multilateral Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) system, which is administered by the WIPO, the UN agency for intellectual property services, policy, information, and cooperation.

A patent is a private right granted by a government authority which ensures that an inventor can control the commercial use of their invention. It has legal status only in the country or region in which it is granted. This means that inventors or companies that want to protect their technology in foreign markets need to seek patent protection for their new technologies in those countries.

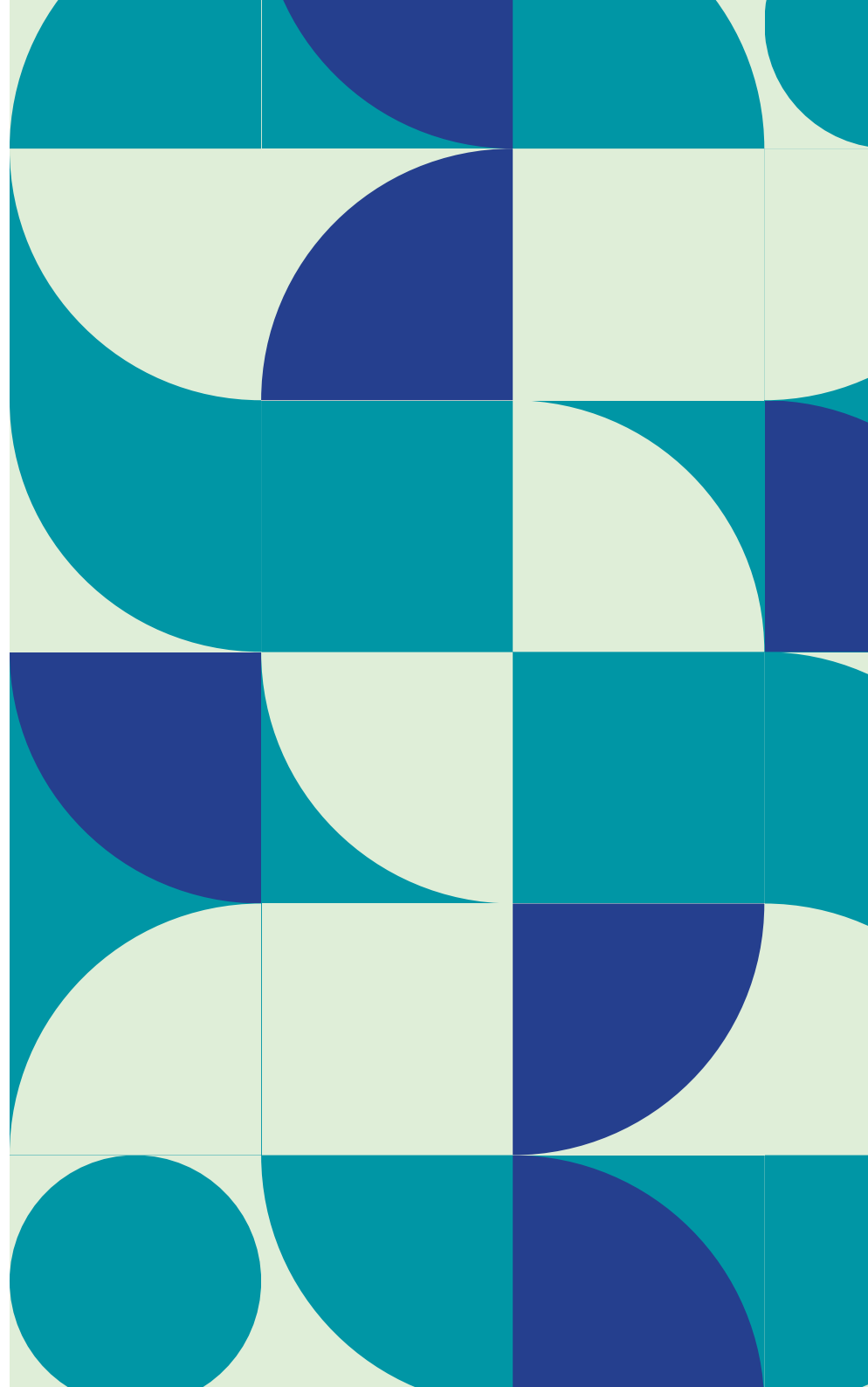
The PCT has since 1978 facilitated this procedure and has revolutionized the way patent protection is sought in countries around the world. The PCT makes it possible to seek patent protection for an invention simultaneously in the more than 150 contracting states by filing a single "international" patent application instead of filing several separate national or regional patent applications. In an interconnected world, the PCT can be used by international companies, small and medium sized enterprises, research institutions, universities, and individual inventors to protect their intellectual property.

ACADEMIC MOBILITY AND RECOGNITION OF DIPLOMAS

Have you ever dreamed of studying in East Asia even if you are an ocean away in Central America? To allow students travel across the globe, students' academic credentials must be mutually recognized and accepted across countries.

Through a number of conventions, the United Nations Educational, Social, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has been working for over 30 years with other international institutions to coordinate efforts to recognize educational credentials and provide an efficient framework for the recognition of degrees worldwide, allowing and protecting the exchange of foreign students and young professionals.

After 8 years of work in November 2019, around 150 Member States adopted the Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications. The convention supports international education norms through recognising qualifications for individuals without proper documentation (refugees and displaced persons), enhancing the promotion of international cooperation in higher education, and facilitating knowledge and skills transfer across country borders.



The Future of Multilateralism

Multilateralism and the global issues that it acts as a tool to solve have continued to change and evolve towards becoming more visible and relevant to people across the world. The League of Nations brought much of what had been backroom diplomacy into the open with accessible discussions, and multilateralism has become only more open since then with the UN opening a window into its processes through streaming discussions and decision making. Part of this has been the UN's 75th anniversary initiative to understand the issues and priorities of its ultimate stakeholders, the people of the world. This came through a combination of over a million online survey results, and in-depth discussions. Across the world, people identified climate change as the most overwhelming long-term issue to be dealt with, closely followed by healthcare, human rights, and conflict resolution. The challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of an international problem-solving approach, with 87% seeing international cooperation as essential.

While the history of multilateralism is irrevocably bound together with cooperation between states, it is likely that multilateralism will continue to move towards cooperation

with new players. The country-based tools that were the foundation of multilateralism have in the past decades been complemented and supported by the work of civil society groups, private companies, and local governments in finding solutions for problems that are no longer country based. In development through the Sustainable Development Goals and in conflict reduction through inclusive peace processes, the UN has integrated this multi-actor approach to collective responses and is likely to continue to act as a hub for global cooperation networks. An effective multilateral platform remains indeed essential to address local and global challenges that only appear to grow in scale and complexity.

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