

VLIR-UOS selection system

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**Applicable to VLIR-UOS calls,
launched as from November 2021**

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Generic elements of the FYP2 VLIR-UOS selection system

The VLIR-UOS selection system has 3 main features:

1. Eligibility and selection criteria
2. Selection or assessment commissions
3. Selection procedure.

1. Eligibility and selection criteria

All proposals will be selected against the same set of 4 selection criteria and for each call eligibility criteria apply.

1.1. Eligibility criteria

Eligibility criteria define whether a proposal meets the minimum criteria to be accepted to enter the selection process. Each call for proposals defines clear eligibility criteria, using the following sections where appropriate. This practice is common within the academic community.

In comparison to FYP1, the number of formal eligibility rules has been limited with the eligibility check to be reduced to a strict minimum whereby appraisal is mainly content based and thus delegated to the selection commissions.

In case of VLIR-UOS calls for proposals, the following eligibility criteria apply:

Eligibility of applicants	Eligibility of Flemish and local (co)promoters and eligibility of Flemish and local (co)partner institutions. (see detail under section 4 specificities per programme) Depending on the specific programme and/or call, differentiation is possible in terms of profile and commitments of partner institutions, level of interinstitutional collaboration expected, etc. Guidelines will be included in the conceptual frameworks per programme and in call documents.
Eligibility of budget and implementation period	Maximum budget is not exceeded Maximum implementation period is not exceeded
Eligibility of countries	List of eligible partner countries Differentiation per programme, (see annex 21), and possibly per call. Specific policy priorities, next to the FYP2 policy priorities, are laid down prior to the launch of a new project call
Eligibility of submission modalities	Timely and complete submission, through the ICOS of the university (association), and respect for formats and other possible formality guidelines (max. number of pages, font, ...).

Eligibility control is for most programmes performed via a 2-stage procedure whereby proposals are submitted to VLIR-UOS by the ICOS of the Flemish university association), after validation by the ICOS (Institutional coordinators for development cooperation, i.e. the VLIR-UOS focal points at the Flemish universities). Before submitting, the ICOS will be invited to check a number of institution related eligibility criteria listed in the call (e.g. does the Flemish promotor have a mandate at the Flemish institution for as long as the duration of the project?). By submitting the proposals, the ICOS confirm the eligibility of the proposal. An administrative eligibility check is done at the level of VLIR-UOS, based on a number of eligibility requirements which define whether a proposal can be accepted to enter the selection process (yes/no). A proposal which does not meet all eligibility requirements will be declared ineligible by the Bureau UOS and be rejected from the selection procedure. The submitters of non-eligible proposals will be informed by VLIR-UOS.

1.2. General selection criteria and descriptors for projects, and scoring and weighing

1.2.1. Implementation of FYP2 ambitions in revised selection criteria and descriptors

Covid-19 changed the world drastically, highlighting the role of science and international cooperation to tackle global and local problems, with data and digitalization creating new opportunities for equal partnerships.

Similar to the previous FYP, the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and associated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) serve as the main reference point. VLIR-UOS is committed to meaningfully mainstreaming the 3 SDG principles of leaving no one behind, interconnectedness and multi-stakeholder partnerships, throughout its ambitions, policies, programme, portfolio, partnerships and scholarships. The universal nature of Agenda 2030 provides entry points for HE&SIs to incorporate global citizenship education, decolonization & equal partnerships, and a broader understanding of sustainable development into their threefold mission: research, education, and service to society. Policy themes have become more important: the VLIR-UOS gender policy was translated into a guiding framework for these calls aiming at mainstreaming gender throughout all new projects. A similar policy framework will be developed for environmental sustainability.

The focus of Agenda 2030 on meaningful impact through multi-stakeholder partnerships resonates with the FYP2 ambition “Connect4Change” to focus on cooperation among and beyond academic actors (CONNECT), societal impact (valorisation), and collective learning.

These policy ambitions have been translated in the project selection criteria and descriptors for all programmes. That way VLIR-UOS wants to stimulate new projects to **capitalize** on former and/or other relevant projects in the same context or topic, and to commit to **interinstitutional cooperation** among and beyond academic actors. It will be an added value in the competitive selection of projects if **different** Flemish or partner HE&SIs will be involved in a proposal, either universities, universities of applied sciences and arts or both. In case of TEAM projects, an extra budget of 20.000 EUR can be applied for, as an extra incentive. As of now, each call will be accompanied by a list of ideas & request for advice and/or partnership from third parties (other development actors (e.g. NGOs, VVOB, Enabel, ...), private sector, ...) addressed to academic stakeholders, whereby VLIR-UOS will function as platform and broker to stimulate **multi-actor partnerships**. We expect all projects to be based on a genuine and evidence-based context and stakeholder analysis with attention to **gender, vulnerable people and the environmental impact**. In their approach projects should have attention for gender and vulnerable

groups and respect for decent work and human rights. Projects should address the interconnectedness of the sustainable development challenges through e.g. multidisciplinary or systems approaches, and have a clear valorisation strategy focussing not only on scientific impact, but more importantly also on societal impact.

Specific objective of FYP2 is to mobilize young/new academics to engage in “sharing minds, changing lives”. This is why the number of project (proposals) per promoter has been limited for SI and TEAM. In case of ex aequo ranking in the selection of projects, preference will be given to academics without prior experience with VLIR-UOS, and to projects from the minority gender group and/or gender specific projects.

For more details on the generic VLIR-UOS selection system, a full document is available but all relevant information for the IUC Selection rounds is made available under **section 3 of this introductory document**.

2. Selection and assessment commissions for projects

2.1. Organising principle for the selection commissions for projects

The selection commissions are organised as along the lines of the earlier mentioned FYP2 outcomes, however, selection will always take place per VLIR-UOS programme (IUC, SI, TEAM, ICP, ITP ...) and considering the high numbers of proposals usually to be expected for SI and TEAM project calls, with a strong focus on thematic sustainable development challenges in relation with country level contextualisation, selection is organised via Regional Selection Commissions. In other commissions, regional/country expertise will be guaranteed through the mixture in profile and background of the selection commission members.

There will be at least 6 VLIR-UOS commissions:

- Outcome SI/TEAM:
 - Regional selection commission Africa for the selection of SI/TEAM proposals in Africa¹;
 - Regional selection commission Asia for the selection of SI/TEAM proposals in Asia;
 - Regional selection commission Latin America for the selection of SI/TEAM proposals in Latin America;
- Outcome IUC : Selection / Assessment commission IUC
- **Outcome ESN: Selection / Assessment commission ICP Connect / ITP**
- Outcome GM : Assessment commission GM
- Outcome BSS: the selection system still has to be developed.

More details per programme, under section 4 of this document.

2.2. Composition and size of the selection / assessment commissions

According to the Syspons study, the composition of the VLIR-UOS selection commissions with an exclusive focus on external experts is one of the main strengths of its selection system. Therefore Syspons recommends that this focus should be maintained as it assures an independent and equal assessment

¹ List of VLIR-UOS partner countries 2022-2026:

Africa: Benin, Burundi, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda

Asia: Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam

Latin America: Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Peru

of all proposals. *“The mix of profiles with regards to the professional background of selection commission members should also be maintained. Through the readjustment of the peer review system, specific (scientific) knowledge not represented within a determinate commission but needed to successfully assess a proposal can be included to inform the selection process.”* Other new elements brought into the commission, is the fact that the commission as a whole should contain expertise on the SDG principles and also in implementation of the VLIR-UOS gender policy, the gender balance in the commission was revised. Finally, taking into account recommendations from the evaluation on ‘creating the conditions for uptake’ and the need to strengthen the ‘science society interface’ also this expertise should be present in the commission.

The VLIR-UOS commissions are composed of **international experts**, with no affiliation whatsoever to a Flemish HEI, in order to guarantee impartiality and integrity. They consist of four to five effective members. In addition, substitute members are selected in case an effective member cannot participate due to force majeure or conflict of interest. VLIR-UOS attaches great importance to participation of commission members from partner countries within the selection commissions.

Requirements for each individual selection commission member:

- Affiliation: a selection commission member cannot be staff of a Belgian HEI or research institute.
- Each selection commission member should have the following competences:
 - o an international academic background with interest in the broader development challenges or a development co-operation background;
 - o (basic) knowledge of the Agenda 2030, SDGs and the 3 principles (‘Leave no one behind’, ‘Multistakeholder partnerships’ and ‘interconnectedness’). More in-depth knowledge is an advantage;
 - o experience with interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and/or transdisciplinary approaches;
 - o in the case of regional commissions, each member should have specific expertise on the region, preferably with a focus on VLIR-UOS partner countries in that region;
 - o very good command of English, as all proposals to be assessed are elaborated in English, and all selection meetings will be in English.

Each commission has to contain a mix of profiles, professional and cultural, regional backgrounds and expertise, and should include:

- international academic and development cooperation expertise;
- in depth knowledge about the 3 SDG principles, including gender and diversity for the ‘leave no one behind’ principle and stakeholder management and multi actor partnerships;
- methodological/technical expertise (OECD-DAC criteria, Theory of Change, intervention modalities,...);
- expertise on ‘creating the conditions for uptake’ and ‘science society interface’;
- expertise in higher education policy, scientific research policy and practice. At least 50% of the commission members should have expertise in higher education policy, scientific research policy and practice;
- experience with interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and/or transdisciplinary approaches;
- knowledge of the Flemish higher education system;
- a gender balance, minimally 25-75% and preferably 50-50%.

- a balance as to experts from partner countries and Western countries

The **mandate** of commission members will be limited in time in order to guarantee sufficient dynamism, but long enough to also allow stability and continuity. Each new member will be trained and coached by VLIR-UOS.

DGD representatives will continue to be invited to participate in the selection / assessment meetings and have an advising/observer role. They can provide country specific expertise that can feed into the discussions concerning the assessment of the sustainable development relevance of the academic project proposals, and/or the link to Enabel projects.

Each meeting of every commission (not the GM Assessment Commission) is **chaired** and moderated by a member of the Bureau UOS. The chair does not have access to the individual project proposals, only to the annotated agenda. His / her role is to chair the meeting, keep the time, and make sure the rules and procedures of VLIR-UOS in place for the specific call and selection are correctly applied by the commission. Moreover, the chair has to ensure that the major divergences in scores (identified by VLIR-UOS and provided to the chair prior to the meeting) are addressed during the discussion phase. The chair does not give any personal evaluation and is neutral. The chair can report to the other members of the Bureau UOS on the overall conduct of the meeting during the Bureau UOS meeting when the selection results will be validated.

Each commission has a secretary (a VLIR-UOS programme manager) to take note and to update the scoring table. Other VLIR-UOS staff members will participate in the entire meeting to oversee the selection and to assist the chair. The VLIR-UOS staff members participate in the meeting and have an informative role, e.g. to explain the track record (if needed) or to give oral feedback on the performed budget check.

2.3. Deontological code of conduct

The commission members are invited to sign a code of conduct, in which the criteria of eligibility and general rules of conduct will be stated.

The members of the selection commissions are not appointed to a Belgian university, university of applied sciences and arts, research institute or any other higher education institution. Combining membership of a selection commission and executing external evaluation assignments for VLIR-UOS, and having another responsibility for VLIR-UOS-projects/programmes, is not possible either.²

The commission members function in their individual capacity. They do not represent institutions. Every member gives an objective assessment on the basis of the selection criteria, and only on the basis of the information that was provided by VLIR-UOS. No contact can be taken with the applicants, or with related parties.

Commission members will be asked to abstain from evaluating proposals in the following cases:

- A commission member with a professional appointment to a foreign institute where the applicant(s) has been enrolled as a student or professional after January 1st of the year n-3 (n=year of application);

² This only applies for the commission member in question, not for the entire staff of the institution / organization the commission member is part of.

- A commission member is co-author with the applicant(s) of a publication that was submitted or published after January 1st of the year n-3 (n=year of application);

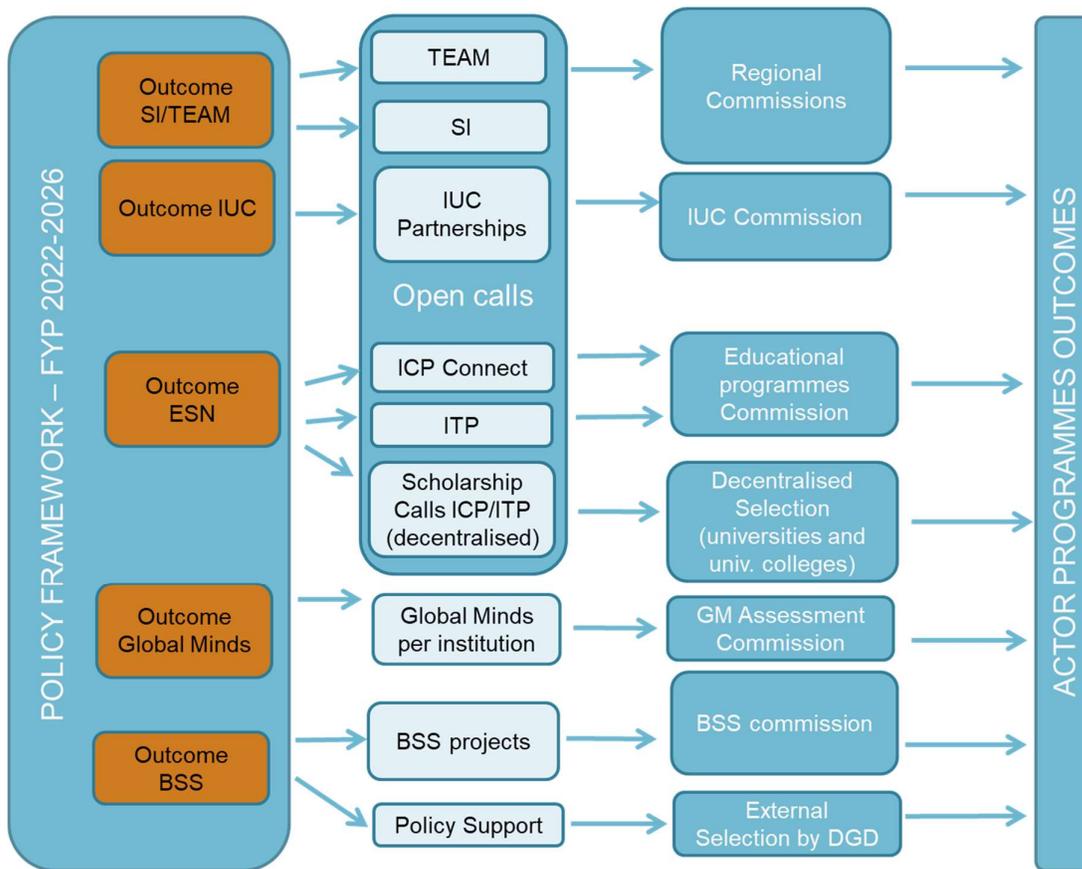
'Co-authorship' is to be understood as follows:

- Co-authorship of a monograph of which the applicant is co-author as well;
- Co-authorship of an article or another type of contribution to a collection (book, journal issue, report, congress proceedings, abstract ...) of which the applicant is co-author as well;
- Editors are not regarded as co-authors insofar as they have not also acted as what is understood under 'co-author' as described above. Co-editors of the applicant are not accepted as an external referee.
- A commission member is partner of the applicant(s) in a research project that has been applied for or has been running after January 1st of the year n-3 (n=year of application).

If one of the above situations occurs the commission member will be replaced by a reserve member.

2.4. Flow chart FYP2 selection / assessment commissions

The flow chart below provides an overview of the type of programme calls (middle) that will be launched during FYP 2022-2026 outcome and by which selection/assessment commission projects will be selected (right) to feed back into the actor programme outcomes.



Note : decentralized selections of embedded scholarships and at the level of GM, are not visualized since this chart focuses on the central selection system.

ITP Selection procedure

3.1. Short overview Selection procedure

Procedural steps	Details
Call	Open Call procedure
Stages in procedure	One stage procedure
Application modalities	Application via the Flemish university (association), receiving proposals with promoters at Flemish and partner institution level; Flemish university association ICOS submits proposals from universities and universities of applied sciences and arts within their university association to VLIR-UOS
Eligibility Check & notification	<p>Eligibility of applicants; Eligibility of budget and implementation period; Eligibility of countries; Eligibility of submission modalities. First check by the ICOS and final check by VLIR-UOS secretariat, and decision by the Bureau UOS</p> <p>In terms of eligibility of applicants the following applies:</p> <p><u>Affiliation of the promoters:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flemish promoter: employed as a professor/lecturer/specialist at a Flemish university or university of applied sciences and arts; - Partner promoter: employed at a recognized higher education institution or national public (not for profit) research institute located in a VLIR-UOS project partner country” (if applicable). <p><u>Additional criteria:</u></p> <p>For this call only 1 project proposal per applicant (Flemish/local) can be submitted.</p>

	At the level of the partner institutions, no further criteria apply. Former and present IUC partner institutions are fully eligible, without any restriction.
Selection criteria	General selection criteria (4) apply. Below the specific ITP descriptors per criterion are outlined.
Peer review	Not applicable
Selection body	Selected by ICP/ITP Selection commission

3.2. Selection criteria and descriptors ITP programmes

Per VLIR-UOS programme the descriptors for each selection criterion were adjusted in line with its conceptual framework and specific characteristics of the ITP programme.. The descriptors provide an objective interpretation of the criteria, for the ITP selection commission³.

Criteria	Definition	Descriptors
Relevance and coherence of the project	<i>The extent to which the proposal responds to beneficiaries', global, country, and partner/institution needs, policies (relevance) and fits with the programme Theory of Change (ToC) and within the institution/context (coherence)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 The proposal aligns with the Agenda 2030, relevant (inter)national and local policies, as well as with the ITP programme ToC 1.2 The proposal is based on a genuine and evidence-based context and stakeholder analysis with attention to gender, vulnerable people (LNOB) and the environment 1.3 The proposal is compatible/links up with or capitalizes on other related initiatives in the same context or topic (a.o. earlier/ongoing (VLIR-UOS) projects, other relevant initiatives within the context of HE4SD, ...) and addresses/seeks for synergies, complementarities, interlinkages and consistency with these initiatives, including interinstitutional cooperation (INT & MSP) 1.4 If applicable, the proposal demonstrates ownership of the involved local partners, and is in line with the local partners' priorities. 1.5. The proposal meets relevant training needs of well-defined target groups, taking into account the LNOB principle. The proposal demonstrates the ability to attract a diverse group of professionals.

³ Based on the ERC (European Research Council) and OECD-DAC (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development - Development Assistance Committee) definitions.

Quality of the project design	<i>The extent to which a proposal presents a convincing project strategy</i>	<p>2.1 The proposal presents a realistic and applicable Theory of Change (ToC) narrative: i.e. a convincing project logic, with a clear and realistic flow between a long-term sustainable development objective (impact level), the outcomes expected from the project, and the envisaged intermediate changes (=results) by formulating activities and identifying deliverables linked to one or more of the six standard VLIR-UOS project domains</p> <p>2.2 The proposal is original, creative, innovative (scientific, academic or pedagogical excellence) in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) its focus on sustainable development and global challenges (ii) its potential for network development (iii) facilitating the effective use of acquired knowledge and skills by the professionals upon return in their professional context by effectively acting as agents of change <p>2.3 The proposal elaborates an appropriate and feasible (scientific, academic or pedagogical) methodology or approach which recognizes/addresses the interconnectedness of the sustainable development challenges (e.g. multidisciplinary or systems approaches) (INT)</p>
Implementation set-up of the project	<i>The extent to which the proposal presents a strong plan and partnership for the execution of the project</i>	<p>3.1 The project ToC is translated into a clear planning (which will facilitate effective project execution, follow-up and monitoring through a convincing set of indicators) with a logical and coherent spread of student batches, and adequate measures to deal in an adaptive way with the most important uncertainties (assumptions/risks), with attention to gender, vulnerable groups and environment.</p> <p>3.2 The proposal is cost-effective, the budget is reasonable and justified</p> <p>3.3 It is an added value if the proposal involves a mix of stakeholders (persons and their organisations) (MSP) with the required profile, experience and expertise to successfully deliver all aspects of the project (quality of the partnership)</p> <p>3.4 It is an added value if in the proposal different (Flemish or partner) HE&SIs are involved, either universities, universities of applied sciences and arts or both</p>
Potential impact and sustainability	<i>The extent to which the project is likely to produce positive long-term effects (impact) and benefits which will be continued after the project duration (sustainability)</i>	<p>4.1 The proposal has potential to contribute to applications/policies/services responding to the needs of direct and indirect beneficiaries, with attention for gender, vulnerable people (LNOB) and the environmental impact</p> <p>4.2 The proposal presents a convincing stakeholder management plan to facilitate stakeholder engagement, with attention to gender and vulnerable people (LNOB)</p> <p>4.3 The proposal identifies clear target groups within an explicit strategy of knowledge uptake and impact on policies or practices.</p>

Also qualitative criteria and their underlying principles are integrated in the VLIR-UOS selection system: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, expected impact, sustainability, partnership strategy, synergies and learning .