

Leaving No One Behind – Equality & Inclusion Policy of VLIR-UOS

Part 1: Gender Policy 2020-2024

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Purpose and background of this policy

As part of the Flemish Interuniversity Council, VLIR-UOS facilitates and supports partnerships for sustainable development between higher education institutions in Flanders and in partner countries in the Global South. In 2020, VLIR-UOS decided to meaningfully integrate Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into its policies, goals, interventions and partnerships. Agenda 2030 and the SDGs are an important reference point for sustainable development policies at international, national and institutional level and VLIR-UOS considers the higher education sector as an essential lever for the systemic transformations that are needed to achieve a common future for all, as set out in the SDGs. Our commitment and strategy is to apply the underlying and universally applicable principles of Agenda 2030 into our policies, goals, interventions and partnerships.

One of these principles which is central to Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is the principle of “Leave No One Behind” (LNOB), putting forward that the Agenda’s goals and targets should be met for all nations and people and for all segments of society, even reaching first those who are furthest left behind. By taking up this principle, VLIR-UOS recognises the need for pro-active strategies to ensure that vulnerable and marginalised groups or populations are included in and benefit from higher education partnerships for sustainable development. The principle has been taken up explicitly in the organizational Theory of Change of VLIR-UOS, with enhanced equality and inclusion in society put forward as one of the three main domains of positive and intended impact to which VLIR-UOS interventions contribute.

An instrument for realizing the ambition of enhanced equality and inclusion in society, is to develop an Equality and Inclusion Policy of VLIR-UOS. The current document is the first part in this broader policy development trajectory and describes the gender policy of VLIR-UOS for the period 2020-2024. In the future, additional policy documents regarding various diversity issues will be developed. Starting the trajectory with a gender policy is logic, considering the fact that women constitute half of the population and are not a minority, and the fact that gendermainstreaming was put on the United Nations agenda by women movements from the South, which was taken up in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and subsequently in the SDGs. The SDGs combined a mainstreaming approach throughout all SDG on the one hand with a specific SDG (5) focusing on gender equality on the other. This document is also being reinforced by the conclusion of a recent impact evaluation of university cooperation for development which puts forward the need for explicit policies for influencing existing gender relations and equality of opportunity¹.

This first policy document reflects how VLIR-UOS will contribute to more gender equality by mainstreaming gender. The policy is also considered as an instrument for conducting a dialogue with partners on gender sensitive issues and for putting gender on the agenda. The gender policy has a double focus : on interventions (programmes, projects and scholarships) on the one hand, and the organisation VLIR-UOS on the other.

This policy is an update of the previous VLIR-UOS gender policy (2016-2021), and thus replaces it. An update was needed in view of the following considerations:

¹ “There is no explicit mechanism in place for either interventions or individual scholarships to contribute to transforming existing gender dynamics and contribute to equality of opportunity in the partner countries. This would however be relevant, as women are still highly underrepresented within academia in some partner countries. The evaluation team therefore recommends that VLIR-UOS and ARES develop explicit policies to contribute to countervail existing gender imbalances” (2018, [report](#), p.127)

- the previous policy was elaborated by the end of 2015, while there was not yet a clear framework for development cooperation for the years to come. A new reality of five-year actor programmes being composed of country programmes and being aligned with joint strategic frameworks (JSFs²) has been created for university cooperation for development since then. VLIR-UOS has been adapting to these realities in the past years, but this was not yet reflected in the gender policy of 2016-2021.
- an impact evaluation of university cooperation for development in 2018, requested by the Belgian government, and several mid-term evaluations organised by VLIR-UOS itself in 2019, highlighted the need for improvement for a better integration of gender.
- an internal analysis of how and to what extent gender has been integrated by VLIR-UOS and in its interventions, was done by the gender focal point in 2019. Based on facts and figures, the results of this analysis show that positive initiatives were developed in the last years, but a more structural approach for integrating gender is necessary and that the support base for the gender policy needs to be reinforced.
- new experiences and insights were gained at VLIR-UOS by being involved in different learning trajectories related to gender, in the context of JSF Ethiopia and JSF Belgium. The fact that gender was put high on the agenda by external decision makers both in the sector of development cooperation and higher education in recent years, especially the commitments³ made at the level of VLIR in 2019, was also conducive for the decision to update the gender policy.
- discussions with DGD and the other scholarship attributing organisations (ARES, ITM, KMMA, KBIN, ENABEL) in 2018 on the modification of the scholarship guidelines, were concluded with the joint commitment to make an evaluation of the scholarship allowances from a gender perspective, before the start of the next five-year programme in 2022.

An important starting principle for updating the policy is the complementarity with already existing initiatives, commitments or engagements made and policy documents elaborated at the level of the Flemish and partner higher education institutions and the development cooperation sector. These existing frameworks have been translated to the very specific context of university cooperation for development within VLIR-UOS. This also resulted in the choice to update the current policy and not to develop a completely new gender policy.

A new feature of the updated policy is the introduction of the “3 fixes model” (L. Schiebinger, 2010). The model identifies three strategic levels for gender mainstreaming within universities and governments. The model is translated to the context of VLIR-UOS and is used throughout the policy.

The intersectional perspective has also been put at the forefront of the policy. Intersectionality emphasizes different axes of people's identity, of which gender is one, in order to look for which factors make people vulnerable in which situation. Defining the crucial vulnerabilities in specific contexts is a first necessary step for minimizing these vulnerabilities. So next to gender, the policy also tried to take other factors into account, like country of origin or age. However, the precarious position of women at universities in many partner countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, makes a specific gender focus legitimate. The encouragement of the reflex to adopt a gender perspective also contributes to an increased attention for other factors of intersectionality. Raising awareness of implicit gender prejudices provides

² Since 2016, all Belgian non-governmental development actors elaborate a Joint Strategic Framework (JSF) per country. These JSFs provide information about the goals to which the actors want to contribute, and also indicate potential for synergy and complementarity.

³ The Charter is described in Dutch as “visietekst met bindende engagementen”

insight into similar mechanisms with respect to other aspects of identity that increase vulnerability of people in certain situations. As indicated earlier, this document is the first step in a longer trajectory, as the aim of VLIR-UOS is to also develop in the upcoming years policies regarding diversity issues, based on a common perspective on intersectionality and inclusion, analyzing which dimensions increase people's vulnerability.

Another important aspect of this policy document is the evidence-based approach which is used. In different chapters of the document, facts and figures are presented as to provide concrete information and to show evolutions over time. This data driven-approach however also has its limitations, as the picture presented of the organisation is for example fully dependent on data collection methods as they are currently practiced at VLIR-UOS. Several interesting variables could not be brought into the analysis. Also, this policy document uses a broad definition of gender, going further than a binary division between men and women, a complexity which is not easy to capture in the empirical data used for this policy. The reader is invited to keep this broader gender definition in mind throughout the whole document.

Lastly, the complexity of VLIR-UOS as an umbrella organisation which does not implement interventions itself, is an important feature for each policy developed by VLIR-UOS. VLIR-UOS sets out the framework for Flemish university cooperation for development. Higher education institutions in Flanders and the partner countries implement the interventions. This policy takes into account both levels, reflecting a realistic level of ambition with a difference between the own organisation (VLIR-UOS) and the higher education institutions involved.

The gender policy document first describes the gender context in which VLIR-UOS is situated: the gender context of higher education and the gender context of development cooperation (p.6-13). An update of both contexts is presented, with a focus on facts & figures. Special attention is given to the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030, in line with the strategy of VLIR-UOS to use this as a central framework in the future. The second chapter sets out the key concepts regarding gender and VLIR-UOS (p.14-19). Definitions have been updated, and a section on approaches and the theoretical model is added. A third new chapter presents the analysis done by the gender focal point in the form of lessons learned for this updated policy (p.20-27). The last chapter presents the newly taken engagements of VLIR-UOS (p.28-30), which express the willingness to pursue objectives and to search for solutions towards more equality and inclusion. It are engagements which will be strived for.

The document is the result of a consultative process which started in the beginning of 2019 (see annex 1 for list of meetings and experts involved). To implement the gender policy, a concrete action plan with a time schedule is set up. The action plan is presented in a separate document, which will be yearly updated in November.

1. Context

The gender policy of VLIR-UOS is situated within the context of higher education in which VLIR-UOS operates on the one hand, and the context of (international and Belgian) development cooperation on the other.

1.1. Higher education context

An entry point for looking at gender in the higher education context, is the (im)balance of female and male students in access to and graduation from higher education and in the workforce of higher education institutions (HEI). Data of the World Bank, OECD and UNESCO were consulted for this purpose. An exploration of underlying reasons to explain the imbalances is also presented, based on a literature study⁴. The last section focuses specifically on Flemish higher education.

Enrolling at higher education institutions

At international level, SDG 4.3.1. holds the engagement of equal access by 2030 for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education. Enrolment in tertiary education shows a global increase in tertiary education in most parts of the world, especially as from 2000. The global tertiary education gross enrolment ratio reached 38% in 2017 and exceeded 50% in upper middle income countries for the first time in 2016.

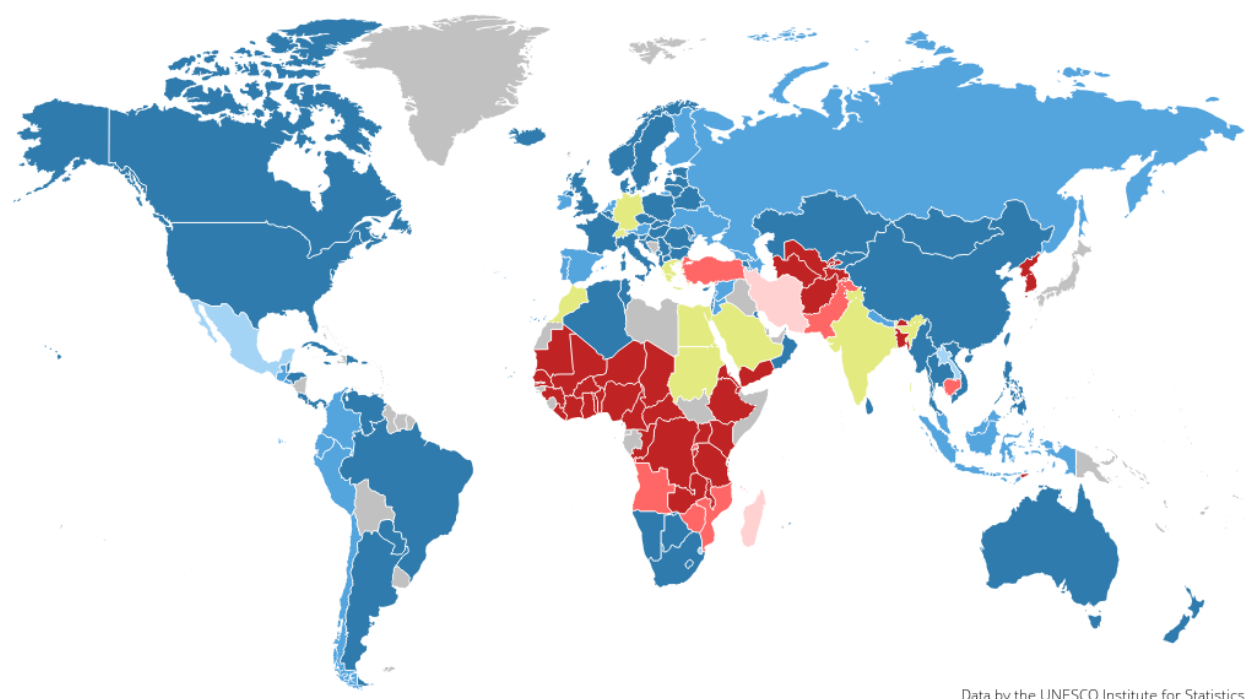
When bringing in the gender dimension, the positive evolution in enrolment rates for tertiary education is higher for female students than for male students in for example Latin-America and Asia. In Belgium the increase of female students (24%) doubles the increase of male students (12%), to which is referred as the reversal of the gender gap in education.

Focusing on Belgium, research on the reversed gender gap in (secondary) education highlights the importance of gender identity theory in explaining this trend of underperformance of boys. Studying and education is often perceived as a passive, caring and thus feminine activity. Also certain subjects are more considered as masculine (e.g. mathematics, sciences) or feminine (e.g. language, arts). Boys set up strategies to actively balance between getting good grades and maintaining a masculine image, which is not linked to working hard or being enthusiastic about school. More research is needed to see whether this research on the reversed gender gap also applies in the context of VLIR-UOS partner countries.

In Sub-Saharan Africa the (modest) growth in higher education enrolment rates is higher for male students than for female students. Gender disparities in the current gross enrolment rates are reflected in the map of gender (female/male) parity indexes worldwide below. Gender disparity widens at higher levels of education in Sub-Saharan Africa, reflecting the link between low educational coverage and social disparities in school participation. The legacy of colonialism accounts in part for the persistence of gender inequity in tertiary education, as colonial educational systems were established for the purpose of exclusively educating African men. Higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa remains elitist, based on persistent social inequities and disparities by gender, geography, and ethnicity.

⁴ References available on request

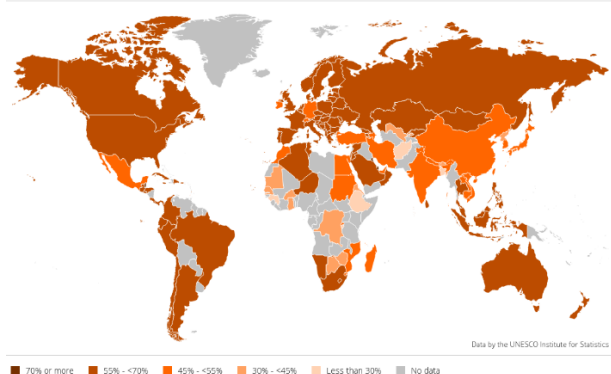
Gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education, gender parity index (GPI) (2018)



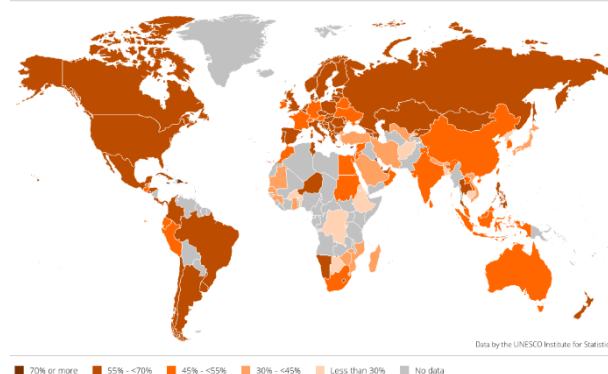
Graduating at higher education institutions

The reversed gender gap is also present in most European and Latin-American countries at graduation level of Bachelor's programmes and Master's programmes. At global level (countries with available data), women account for 53% of Bachelor's degree graduates and 55% of Master's degree graduates. At the level of PhD programmes however the opposite is true, with women accounting for 46%.

Percentage of graduates from tertiary ISCED 6 programmes who are female (%) (2018)



Percentage of graduates from tertiary ISCED 7 programmes who are female (%) (2017)



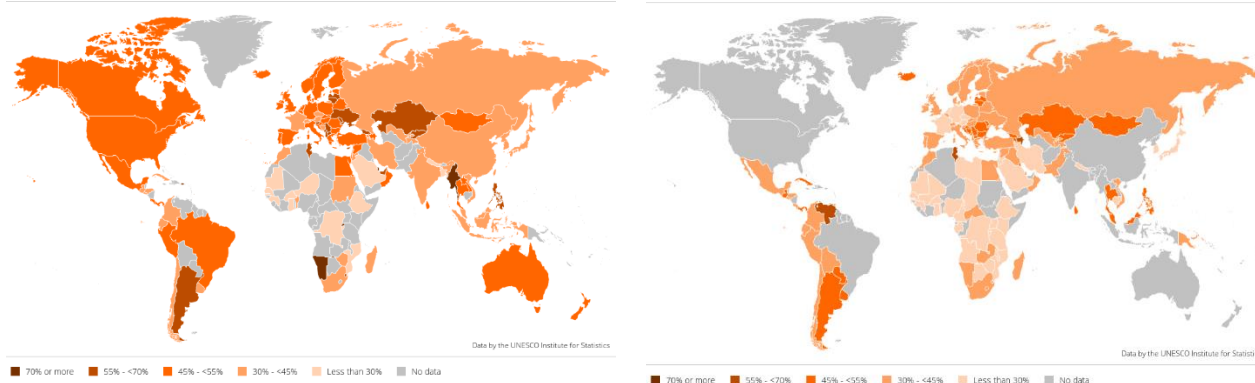


Figure 2 Percentage of graduates from tertiary education and researchers who are female (UNESCO eAtlas of Gender Inequality in Education 2019)

An important difference between men and women is the field of graduation in tertiary education. Across OECD countries, in 2012 only 14% of women who entered university for the first time chose science-related fields of study. The gender differences in the fields of study are reflected in gendered career choices later on and the subsequent gender inequalities in earnings from employment.

Working at higher education institutions

Despite improved access to education, women still face considerable barriers in their academic career. In 2017, 42% of academic staff in tertiary education worldwide were women. Focusing on researchers, only 29% are women. In Flanders in 2018, 28% of staff at professorial level were women. Looking at the level of full professors, the balance lowers to 23%. At the level of Flemish university colleges, women represent 59% of staff. Women are also underrepresented in senior tenured or tenure equivalent positions. Even fewer women occupy leadership positions, only 13% of HEIs in 27 EU countries in 2017 were headed by women.

The influence of childbirth and motherhood on completing a PhD, obtaining research funding and securing tenured positions is significant. In the US, women who have children within five years of receiving their doctorate are less likely to achieve tenure for example than men in the same condition. Compared to men at the top of the academic ladder, women that also reach the top are also less likely to be married or have children, to which is referred as the familial gap. The rigidity of tenure and the lack of family friendly policies at the institutions are obstacles in the career path. Female scientists do nearly twice as much householdwork as their male counterparts. This translates to more than ten hours a week for women. Another factor influencing female promotion paths is implicit bias. Biased behavior and decision-making is a serious problem in the tenure and promotion processes at many universities and colleges. Another hindering aspect in lower female applications for vacant functions at professorial level is the problem of self-selection. Women are strongly inclined to apply only if they are sure that they meet all requirements, while men apply much faster, even when they can tick only a few of the boxes.

Further study is needed to investigate if these causes in European countries and the US are also applicable to the context of the VLIR-UOS partner countries.

Flemish higher education

At the level of the Flemish higher education institutions, the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR) aims at promoting dialogue and cooperation between the Flemish universities. Within the policy domain Diversity and Social Policy, the Flemish universities design common standards and action plans related

to diversity and equal opportunities' policy for their students and staff. A specific working group is set up for Gender.

In 2012, in response to the debate regarding the gender quota in advice and management structures of the universities imposed by specific decrees of the government, the VLIR High Level Task Force prepared a Gender Action Plan for Higher Education. Over the past years, the five universities have made progress in this area in the different hierarchical levels of their academic staff. However, without interventions or a specific policy, it would have taken at least until 2050 before there would be an actual gender balance among the academic staff in Flemish universities. In 2019, the rectors therefore wished to step up their engagements to greater gender equality and, where necessary, shift up a gear. So the action plan of 2013 has been updated in 2019, in cooperation with the Jonge Academie, and the five rectors signed the [charter on Gender and Academia](#).

The VLIR working Group on Gender has recently worked on gaining more insight into the reasons why women in academia are advancing slower in their career compared to their male colleagues. Focus group interviews were organised, especially focusing on the bottleneck PhD postdoc positions. This was based on the observation that the gap between the number of men and women in senior positions is only slowly narrowing, although the number of women and men entering research positions within the university, in PhD positions, is roughly equal. It appears that the majority of the reasons given by men and women with a PhD for their career decisions are the same. Women do cite arguments about the work-family combination more than men in their considerations about career decisions. These [results](#) were discussed with the personnel managers of the universities and presented to the VLIR board at the end of January 2020. The Gender working group continues to monitor the results.

Respecting the principle of complementarity, the VLIR-UOS gender policy does not directly focus on overall measures for students and staff of Flemish higher education institutions (e.g. recruitment and promotion procedures of HEIs). This policy document focuses on how to involve students and staff in university cooperation for development in a gender balanced way.

1.2. International development cooperation context

A brief historical overview is given on how the concept of gender equality evolved in the context of international development cooperation, starting with the UN World Conferences up to the Sustainable Development Goals.

The foundation of gender equality: Beijing

Gender equality has become part of the development policies of the major international development actors throughout the last decades. Four UN conferences, organised between 1975 and 1995, are the foundation of contemporary strategies and action plans to put women forward on the development agenda worldwide:

- 1975: World Conference on Women in Mexico
- 1980: World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women in Copenhagen
- 1985: World Conference to review and appraise the achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace in Nairobi
- 1995: The fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing

The resolution adopted by the end of the conference, the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), was a progressive blueprint for international political commitments regarding the promotion of gender

equality, women's rights and female empowerment. The progress and implementation of this key global policy document on gender equality is yearly monitored at the level of the United Nations by the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The MDGs and gender

In September 2000, a new international framework was developed with the Millennium Development Goals. Leaders of 189 countries gathered at the United Nations headquarters and signed the historic Millennium Declaration, in which they committed to achieving a set of eight measurable goals with the target date of 2015. Goal 3 committed to gender equality and women's empowerment; the intermediate target was elimination of gender disparity at all levels of education; and the indicators to measure progress were reduction of the gender gap in education, increasing women's share in non-agricultural wage employment and increasing the percentage of women in parliaments. The assumption was that progress on education would contribute to progress on these other measures. However, progress on the other measures next to education has been slow. Although education is a crucial dimension of women's empowerment, much more was needed to dismantle the structural causes of gender inequality and the systemic nature of certain forms of inequality.

The SDGs and gender

In 2012, a new process was started to shape the post-2015 development agenda during the Rio+20 conference (the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development). By the end of 2015, a new set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were put forward to shape the global development agenda spanning from 2015-2030. This [Agenda 2030 for sustainable development](#) incorporates the two-track strategy on gender: a stand-alone goal on gender equality, women's empowerment and women's rights (SDG5), and mainstreaming of gender equality concerns in other key goals, as gender equality and female empowerment as an accelerator to reach the other SDGs. Also important is the underlying principle of the Agenda 2030 of leaving no one behind. It recognises the need for pro-active strategies to ensure that vulnerable and marginalised populations are included in and benefit from sustainable development. The specific goal on gender, SDG5, incorporates some of the key issues on gender inequality, like the unfair gender division of unpaid care work, violence against women and girls, and reproductive and sexual health and reproductive rights. Gender is integrated in other goals through specific targets, for example: to eliminate gender disparity in education (SDG 4.5), ensure women's access to adequate sanitation (SDG 6.2), equal pay for work of equal value, (SDG 8.5), and safe and affordable transport for women (SDG 11.2). However, a number of SDGs make no reference to gender and many gender indicators are considered not to cover the aspirations and full intention of the goals. Also, a lack of (disaggregated) data is a challenge. More fundamentally, the SDGs do not question the economic model of growth, a key step in the systemic and structural change needed for more gender equality.

Different initiatives have been set up to track the progress of gender in Agenda 2030 and to deal with the lack of data. [Equal Measures 2030](#) for example is an independent civil society and private sector-led partnership that connects data and evidence with advocacy and action, helping to fuel progress towards gender equality. They developed the SDG Gender Index ([2019 version](#)), a comprehensive tool to explore the state of gender equality across 129 countries, 14 of the 17 SDGs, and 51 targets linked to issues inherent in the SDGs.

1.3. Belgian development cooperation context

An overview is given of gender in the Belgian development cooperation context, firstly by presenting the governmental framework, followed by bottom-up initiatives from the sector of Belgian (non-governmental) development cooperation.

Governmental framework

Since 2001 DGD has imposed gender balance as to scholarship selections by VLIR-UOS and ARES. Within the Belgian development cooperation, the importance of Equal rights and chances to Women and Men has led to a strategy note of the current Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD) in 2002.

In Belgium, gender mainstreaming is compulsory in all policy domains as of 2007 (law of January 12, 2007). In 2012, the federal government has adopted an action plan for gender mainstreaming in the federal government structures and 40 policy domains. Within this action plan, the gender dimension is integrated in two main policy domains that are pertinent to VLIR-UOS:

1. Education and research matters: access to education and more specific to scholarships that are granted by Belgium in the framework of development cooperation
2. International affairs: the Belgian foreign affairs policy, action plan and activities within the framework of the national action plan on Women, Peace and Security.

An evaluation of “the integration of the gender dimension in the Belgian development cooperation of 2002-2013” was conducted in 2014 and revealed the fact that positive results regarding gender integration were a consequence of temporary and random configurations and individual initiatives rather than originating from a structural and continuous effort of Belgian development organisations to contribute to more gender equity ([synthesis](#)). Based on the results of this evaluation, a new strategy note on [Gender in Belgian development cooperation](#) and [Action plan on integrating the gender dimension](#) was published in 2016.

The strategy is based on a three-point approach:

- the human rights based approach,
- the two track-approach on gender: gender mainstreaming and specific actions are mixed,
- the contextualisation according to national and local priorities.

Four priorities are put forward: education and decision-making; Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR); food safety, access to natural resources and economic empowerment; protection of rights and fight against violence (in all its forms) based on gender, with particular attention to the Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgenders, Intersexuals (LGBTI).

Relevant for VLIR-UOS, are two actions mentioned in the action plan in the section on non-governmental actors:

- Support research on the theme of gender and development in all research actors and all actors of civil society
- Support the institutions responsible for promoting and maintaining parity among scholarship holders and prospective scholarship holders.

According to Belgian law on development cooperation of 2013, and reconfirmed in the law of 2016, the gender dimension – pointing at both the empowerment of women and gender equality - needs to be integrated in a transversal way within all interventions of the Belgian development cooperation. Therefore, the Royal Decree (April 2014) regarding the subsidization of the non-governmental development

cooperation actors, stipulates that the integration of gender as a transversal theme is one of the 10 criteria on which the quality of the organisational management of a non-governmental actor would be measured.

In 2019, a [policy supporting research project](#) started to strengthen DGD at the level of the implementation of its gender policy, financed by VLIR-UOS. The project aims to support and strengthen the integration of gender into the Belgian development cooperation policy, by analysing the use of the OECD gender marker, by describing different gender approaches used in the Belgian development sector and by investigating the possibility of mapping the Belgian contribution to SDG5.

Initiatives from the sector

Next to these government initiated structures, policies and platforms related to gender in Belgian development cooperation, there are a lot of bottom-up initiatives starting from Belgian (non-governmental) development actors.

An important platform working on gender within the Belgian development cooperation, is the Advisory Council on Gender and Development ([ARGO](#)). ARGO advises the Minister of Development Cooperation and the Federal Government with regard to gender and development. This Council contributes to a better integration of gender in the Belgian development policy and the positions taken by our country at international level. ARGO brings together the expertise of the Flemish and French-speaking academic community, the women's councils, NGOs and the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men. The ARGO also consists of two advisory members - the Cabinet of the Minister for Development Cooperation and DGD, and two acting members - BIO and Enabel. The Council was established by Royal Decree of 2 April 2014 for a five-year mandate and will be reconfirmed in 2020. VLIR-UOS nominates 2 members of the Flemish speaking academic community of ARGO.

The platform on Education in Belgian development cooperation, [Educaid](#), also has a working group on Gender in education. The platform serves to strengthen, defend and support the education and training sector in Belgian development cooperation. In 2019, the working group on Gender has developed a publication on gender and socialization (to be published in 2020), in cooperation with the NGO Le Monde Selon Les Femmes. VLIR-UOS is member of the platform and working group on gender.

The actors involved in the Joint Strategic Framework (JSF) Belgium, have developed a [Gender Charter](#) in the framework of a joint learning trajectory in 2018. The charter has been signed by 82 accredited non-governmental actors, VLIR-UOS being one of them. Each actor who subscribes to the charter is committed to create or maintain a positive momentum on gender equality within its own organisation. Each signatory organisation will take the necessary actions to realise its intentions on gender equality. An [inspiration guide](#) was developed in combination with the Gender Charter. This guide aims to inspire organisations that want to integrate gender in activities in Belgium related to communication, policy, education, movement work and scholarships. VLIR-UOS contributed to the chapter on scholarships.

1.4. Conclusion

This chapter elaborated on the context in which VLIR-UOS wants to contribute to more gender equality, in line with the aspirations of the Flemish HEIs and international and Belgian development cooperation.

Although enrolment and graduation of students from higher education has evolved towards higher female participation, the academic world still faces huge challenges in dealing with gender equality, which should be seen in a historical context. As Schiebinger described “universities have developed over the

past two hundred years to fit men's lives, both as faculty members and as students. From the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, university professors were predominantly men—with stay-at-home wives who organised and cared for the household.” (2010, [Housework is an academic issue](#), section “What institutions can do”, par.1). The (male) majority group in academic institutions could set the research agenda and determined the standards of what is considered interesting and needful research, missing out the perspective of half of the population.

Given a context of gender inequality in higher education, the sector of VLIR-UOS, this seriously challenges VLIR-UOS to reach its aim of striving for gender equality and puts forward the need of an ambitious gender policy.

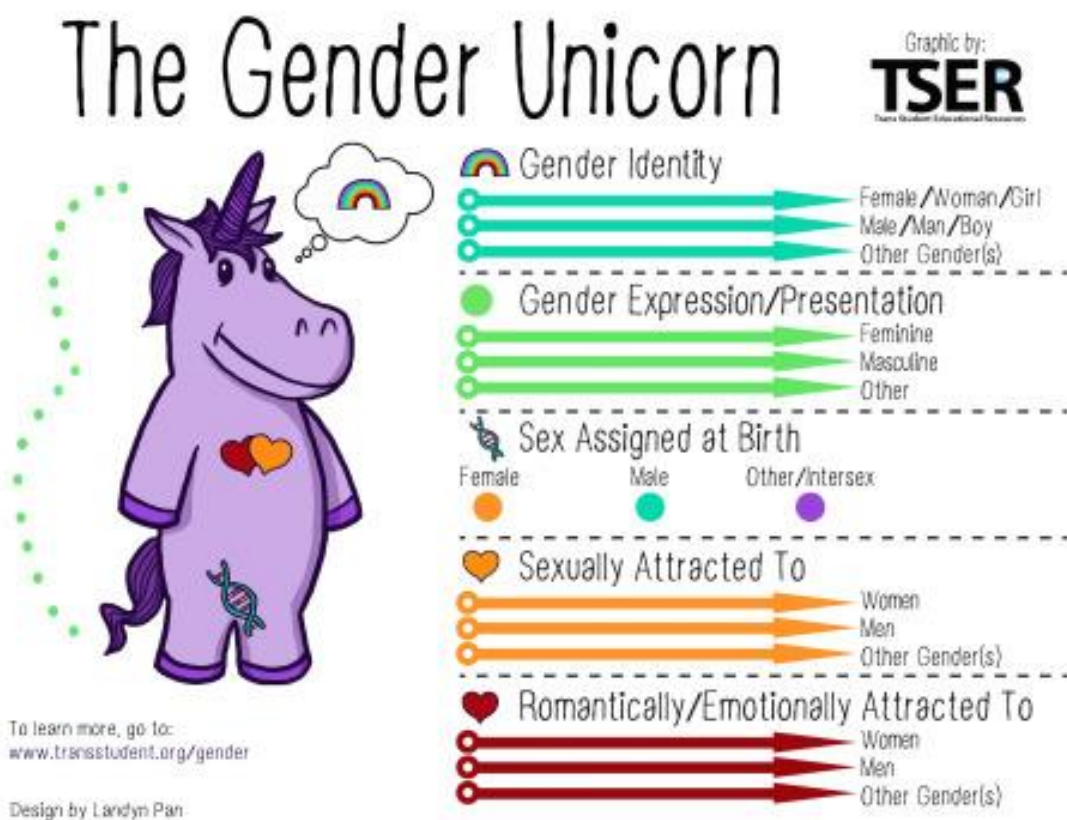
2. Key concepts

This chapter firstly presents definitions of concepts used throughout the gender policy, key approaches that are mentioned for integrating gender and the theoretical 3-fixes-model as developed by Londa Schiebinger.

2.1. Definitions

Gender is a term which is used to distinguish from the term **sex**. While sex is grounded in perceived biological differences among human beings (commonly men-women although a continuum exists), gender refers to the cultural constructions observed, performed, and understood in any given society, often based on those perceived biological differences. Shortly, gender is the cultural construction of beliefs and behaviours considered appropriate for each sex. These cultural and social constructions shape gender relations. This makes clear that gender is not the same as focusing on women, it encompasses the relations between men and women. This gender definition also avoids that the concept is perceived as being a Western concept.

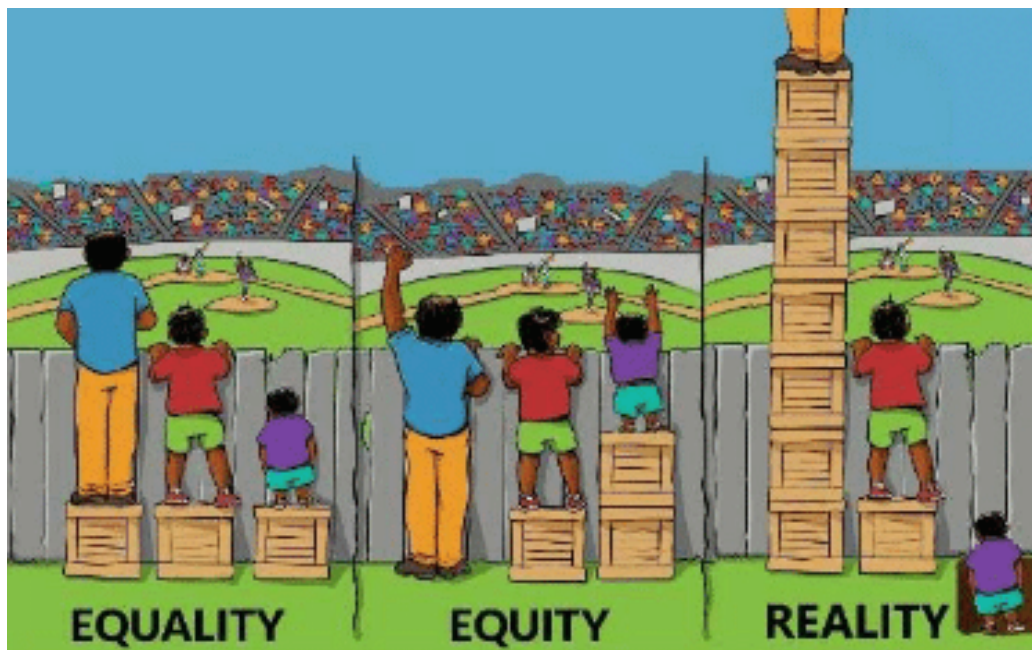
Linked to gender are the concepts of gender **identity** (how you think about yourself), gender **expression** (how you demonstrate yourself) and **sexual and emotional orientation** (who you are attracted to). The gender unicorn (developed by Trans Student Educational Resources) presents these concepts in a simple and straightforward way :



Gender analysis highlights the differences between and among women, men, girls and boys in terms of their relative distribution of resources, opportunities, constraints and power in a given context.

Gender equality entails that all human beings, regardless of their sex or sexual orientation, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally.

Gender equity means that a different treatment is adopted towards men and women, according to their respective needs, in order to restore historical and social imbalances which impede the active and equal participation in the development of their society. While gender equality is more about equal access and opportunities, a balance, and no preferences or discrimination, gender equity is more about fairness and justice, giving the same benefit.



[Source: Equity Equality Graphic](#)

Gender sensitivity refers to the understanding and consideration of socio-cultural and economic factors underlying attitudes, that socialize girls and boys into certain behaviours or opportunities and that may lead to sex-based discrimination.

Gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, policy or programme, in all areas and at all levels before any decisions are made and throughout the whole process. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes so that both women and men benefit and inequality is not perpetuated. It is not only a women's issue. Gender mainstreaming is not a goal in itself but an approach for promoting gender equality.

Intersectionality emphasizes different axes of people's identity, of which gender is one, in order to look for which factors make people vulnerable in which situation. It identifies how interlocking systems of power affect those who are most marginalized in society. It analyzes injustices that are felt by people not by looking at each oppressive factor in isolation, but by taking the relationship between these factors into account, and by doing so, highlighting what/which intersection of identity dimensions makes people vulnerable in which situations, as 'vulnerability' might change depending on specific contexts of situations. For example, a woman belonging to a specific ethnic group in a specific region, being part of a rural community researched by the university, might experience discrimination in a mixed male-female group, e.g. by not allowing women to raise their voice in public meetings; but these women living in rural

areas might also face discrimination or stereotyping by urban women, or discrimination based on age, or discrimination based on (not) having children. In sum : what makes people vulnerable is context embedded and depends on a dynamic cluster of identity dimensions.

Practical gender needs (PGN) are the needs women identify in their socially accepted roles in society. PGNs do not challenge, although they arise out of, gender divisions of labour and women's subordinate position in society. PGNs are a response to immediate perceived necessity, identified within a specific context. They are practical in nature and often stem from inadequacies in living conditions such as water provision, health care and employment.

Strategical gender needs (SGN) are the needs women identify because of their subordinate position in society. They vary according to particular contexts, related to gender divisions of labour, power and control, and may include such issues as legal rights, domestic violence, equal wages, and women's control over their bodies. Meeting SGNs assists women to achieve greater equality and change existing roles, thereby challenging women's subordinate position.

Empowerment is a set of measures designed to increase the degree of autonomy and self-determination in people and in communities in order to enable them to represent their interests in a responsible and self-determined way, acting on their own authority. It is the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights.

Masculinity and femininity refer to traits or characteristics typically associated with being male or female, respectively. Traditionally, masculinity and femininity have been conceptualized as opposite ends of a single dimension, with masculinity at one extreme and femininity at the other. By this definition, high masculinity implies the absence of femininity, and vice versa. Contemporary definitions propose that masculinity and femininity are separate dimensions, allowing for the possibility that individuals may simultaneously possess both masculine and feminine attributes.

2.2. Approaches

Two types of approaches are presented, in line with the two viewpoints of VLIR-UOS: approaches which focus on how to integrate gender at the level of an intervention and approaches which focus on analysing the gender sensitivity of an intervention.

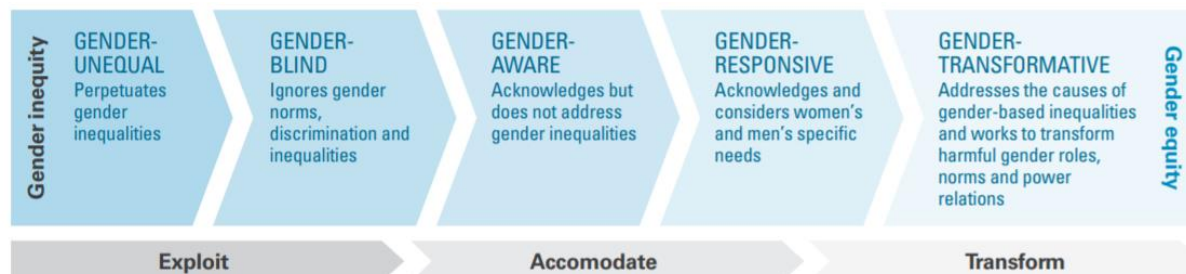
For integrating gender in an intervention

As presented in the Belgian strategy note, the **2-track approach** or twin track approach for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment combines projects aimed primarily at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, with mainstreaming gender into projects where gender equality is not the main objective.

A distinction can be made between **horizontal and vertical gender mainstreaming**. Horizontal mainstreaming refers to mainstreaming of gender within all domains, all sectors, all departments, all programmes... while vertical mainstreaming of gender refers to all steps of the project cycle (identification & formulation, implementation & monitoring, evaluation).

For analysing gender sensitivity of an intervention

UNICEF uses the **gender equity continuum**, going from gender unequal to gender transformative approaches, for analysing the gender sensitivity of an intervention. The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) uses a similar tool, with the ambition of no longer funding gender unequal or genderblind projects and of encouraging gender transformative research through funding.



Source: [UNICEF](#)

Gender policy markers (0, 1, 2) are given within the system of the OECD Development Committee to determine the realized progress with regards to the integration of the gender dimension in the development interventions. It is also used in the Belgian development cooperation. While this was previously assessed by DGD, since 2017 VLIR-UOS manages the gender policy markers of its interventions. The DAC gender equality policy marker is based on a three-point scoring system:

- Principal (marked 2) means that gender equality is the main objective of the project/programme and is fundamental in its design and expected results. The project/programme would not have been undertaken without this objective.
- Significant (marked 1) means that gender equality is an important and deliberate objective, but not the principal reason for undertaking the project/programme, often explained as gender equality being mainstreamed in the project/programme.
- Not targeted (marked 0) means that the project/programme has been screened against the gender marker but has not been found to target gender equality.

2.3. Theoretical model

Over the past decades universities worldwide have started to develop strategies to improve gender equality. Schiebinger distinguishes three approaches for improving gender equality in science and technology ([short video](#) on the three fixes model).

Fix the numbers

This first approach focuses on increasing women's participation in research and technology, by supporting women's education and careers. In this approach, the cause of the problem is situated at the level of the capabilities of women. Women are encouraged to study more technical fields and are trained to be more competitive in the scientific workplace. Schiebinger criticizes this approach to focus only on women, and not to look beyond women's careers. Aspects of labour division in society and the gender blindness of research should also be examined.

Translated to the realities of VLIR-UOS, this level is aimed at describing the current gender balance in the interventions and organisations involved and putting in place measures that contribute to achieving a more positive balance. This is for example already happening at the level of scholarship attribution, where a 60-40% to 40-60% representation of both sexes in the selection is set as a norm. When bringing

in other disaggregating variables together with gender into the numbers (like country of origin, age...), indications for factors that strengthen or lower the gender imbalances can be discovered, taking an intersectional approach.

Fix the organisation

Academic institutions have identifiable cultures that have developed over time in the absence of women. In the second approach, the cause of the problem is situated in the institutional structure which hinders career paths of women; for example at the level of hiring and promotion practices and work/life balance because of gender bias. Conditions should be created that allow both men and women to achieve the highest levels in their academic career.

For Flemish university cooperation for development, this level consists of reflecting on what gender (implicitly) means for VLIR-UOS and its partner organisations, HEIs in Flanders and the South, and how this is translated in the organisational culture and the way of working. An entry point for the reflection on what gender (implicitly) means for VLIR-UOS, is to see whether VLIR-UOS is reflecting principles of gender equal opportunities in the organisation, for example in employment patterns and decision-making bodies.

Fix the knowledge

Science is not value-neutral. Research has shown examples of how gender blindness affects the quality of research and its impact on society, for example in the withdrawal of medication that affects women differently. In this third approach, the cause of the problem is situated at the level of gender bias which limits scientific creativity, excellence, and benefits to society. Gender mainstreaming should be used in research by including gender analysis as a resource to achieve excellence, as excellence in science is a socially constructed concept itself suffering from gender bias. Schiebinger calls the mainstreaming of gender analysis into all phases of research "[Gendered Innovations](#)".

Translating this model to the realities of VLIR-UOS, an organisation that is not an academic actor itself but a developmental organisation with close ties to academia, the third approach can be translated in



two ways: integrating gender analysis throughout the project cycle and within all phases of research, education and outreach activities undertaken in the interventions.

Source: [Networklearning.org](https://www.networklearning.org/)

3-Fix-Model

All three approaches are necessary according to Schiebinger. Working on the first level, which is considered the easiest at first sight, will not lead to sustainable changes if the organisation and content of the institutions is not considered. The model aims for a triple win, besides the overarching goal of creating more gender equality, by adding value to :

- (1) research by ensuring excellence and quality in outcomes and enhancing sustainability,
- (2) society by making research more responsive to social needs
- (3) business by developing new ideas, patents and technology (Schiebinger, 2011).

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter gave an overview of definitions, approaches and a theoretical model necessary to understand the gender policy and engagements of VLIR-UOS. In line with the guiding principle of complementarity in this policy, the existing knowledge on gender equality is presented as a starting point for VLIR-UOS to translate this knowledge into its own reality.

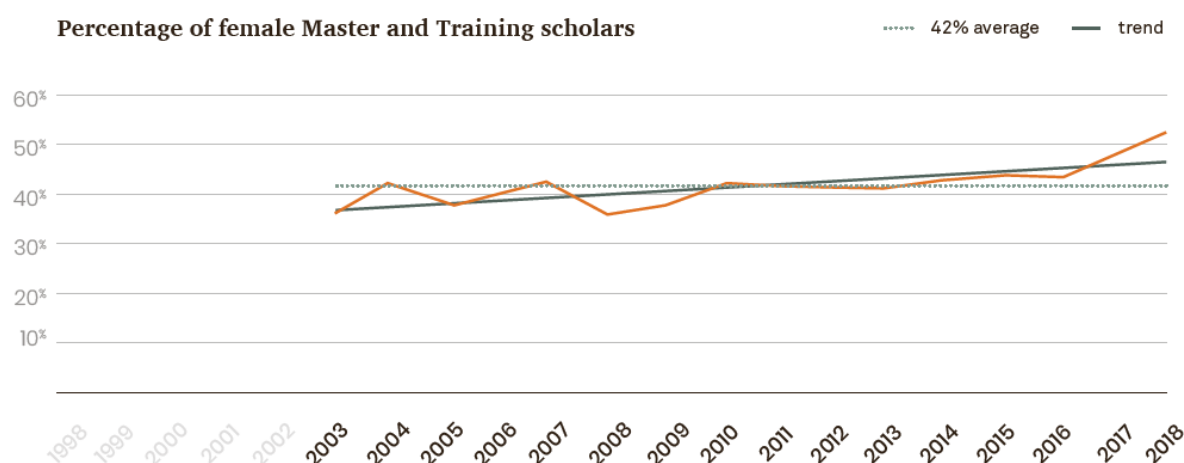
3. Lessons learned on gender & VLIR-UOS

This chapter applies the 3-fixes-model on the context of VLIR-UOS. Data used for these sections are collected through the [VLIR-UOS database](#).

3.1. Fixing the numbers

Gender balance in individual scholarships

VLIR-UOS awards **individual scholarship grants**⁵ for students from the South to study a short training programme (International Training Programme, ITP) or a Master (International Master Programme (initial or advanced master), ICP) in Flanders. VLIR-UOS has a policy guideline of aiming for a 40-60% gender balance in the attribution of scholarships. Between 2015 and 2018, the share of selected female scholars evolved from 44% to 51%, showing a positive evolution and respecting the policy guideline.



Taking into account other variables, like type of scholarship and region of origin, the numbers reveal intersecting factors with gender imbalances.

The type of scholarship has an influence on the gender balance, as the growth in the share of female scholars in general is mostly related to an evolution at the level of short courses. A more in-depth analysis should be done to discover the underlying rationale for this (e.g. duration of the course, topic of the course, application requirements...).

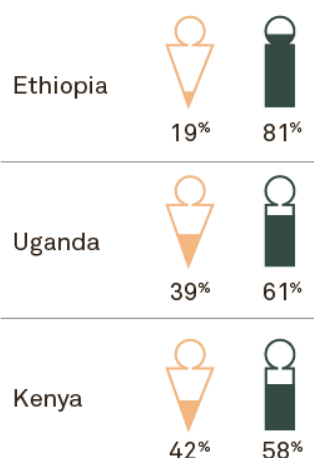
The region of origin from the scholar is also important to take into account, next to gender. There is a female underrepresentation of scholars from the African region (34% in 2015, 40% in 2018) and a male underrepresentation of scholars from Asia (47% in 2015, 28% in 2018) and Latin-America (37% in 2015, 39% in 2018), reflecting the gender gap and reversed gender gap as discussed in the first chapter. The 40-60% balance policy guideline is not respected at regional levels. Within regions, there are also clear differences between countries, as shown in the following infographic based on data of the last 20 years.

⁵ Scholarships awarded within the framework of an intervention are not taken into account

Gender ratio of Master and Training scholars in the top 3 countries per region female male

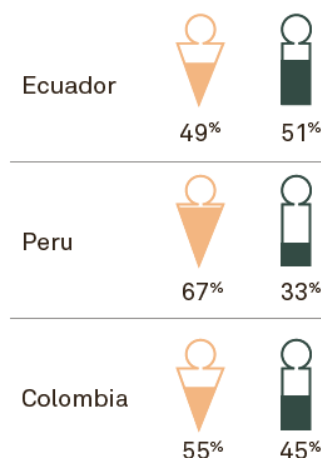
Africa

 33% en  67%



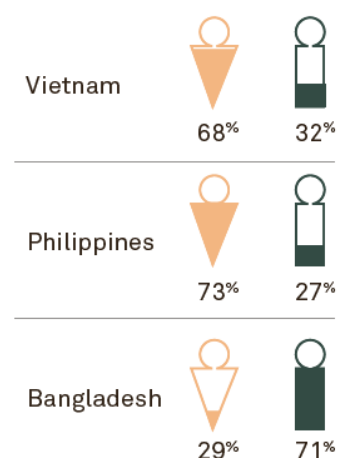
Latin America

 60% en  40%



Asia

 42% en  58%



The influence of the 40-60% policy on the selection of scholars becomes more visible when comparing the gender balance of the applications with the gender balance of the final selection of scholars. Data of gender balance in applications were available for six ICP programmes⁶, showing that scholarship attribution is much more balanced after selection (47% female scholars) than before (31% female applications), also reflecting strong regional differences at both levels. A further analysis including other ICP programmes and ITP programmes is suggested, to trace possible differences between the programmes and analyze best practices.

Comparing graduation results between male and female students of Master scholarships of the last three academic years (n=563, average graduation result 83%), male scholars have slightly higher graduation percentages (85%) compared to female scholars (81%). Graduated female students have however the same or a slightly higher average graduation score (up to 1% higher in 2017-2018). From the 224 students of which the information was available, 21% graduated during first session, with a difference between female students (25%) and male students (17%). This finding needs a more in-depth analysis to reveal the factors influencing the moment of graduation (e.g. the costs of a prolonged stay in Belgium, familial responsibilities, planning of assignments...)

The influence of other variables should be further investigated (e.g. number of children, socio-economic status, rural/urban context), but current data collection methods at present at VLIR-UOS make it impossible to investigate this without thoroughly redressing existing data.

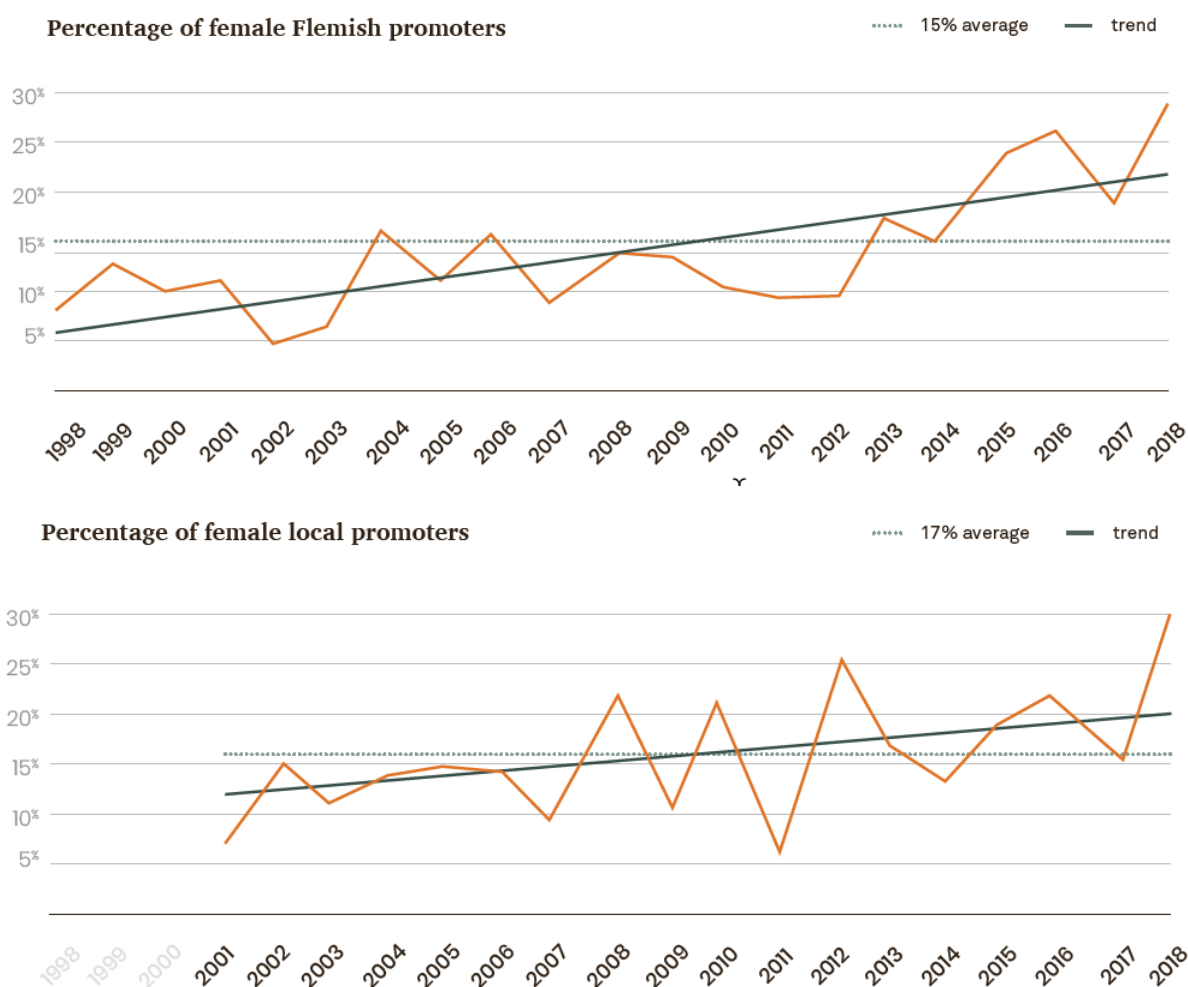
VLIR-UOS also funds travel grants for **Flemish students going to the South** in the framework of an internship or research for a Master's thesis, with a minimum of 500 grants per year at the level of all Flemish HEIs. Between 2015 and 2017, only 25% of these grants were awarded to male students. More than half of the travel grants go to students in the field of health (41%) and education (22%), where the majority of students are female. The reversed gender gap and gendered fields of study, as described in

⁶ VLIR-UOS does not have access to the application data due to the fact that selection is done at the level of the programmes, however, within the framework set by DGD and VLIR-UOS. Considering time limitations, three universities provided these data on request, covering 6 different programmes.

the first chapter, are clearly reflected here but are only one part of the cause (e.g. not all study fields have an internship included in the curriculum).

Gender balance in projects and programmes in the South

The largest part of the VLIR-UOS portfolio are the programmes (longer-term, at least 10 years, institutional cooperation) and projects in the South (2 to 4 years cooperation). The management of these projects and programmes is done by a team of academics from the South and Flanders coordinated by two promoters and in some cases co-promoters⁷. There is a positive evolution towards more gender balance in the past years in Flanders, reaching almost 30% in 2018, but there still is a significant underrepresentation of female promoters. The imbalance in the South fluctuates around 17%, reaching 30% in 2018.



These numbers are comparable with the figures on female representation in the academic workforce (see first chapter, for example 28% in Flanders at professorial level). So the positive evolution of the gender balance in these interventions is related to the positive evolution of the number of women in higher education in general and is not influenced by specific measures of VLIR-UOS.

⁷ This section focuses on the roles of promotor and co-promotor, but it must be pointed out that the involvement of women in the interventions will be higher when taking into account the whole team.

There is a difference between programmes (long-term, at least 10 years, institutional cooperation) and projects (2 to 4 years cooperation).

Female academics are highly underrepresented in **programmes** (15% in the period 2003-2018: Flanders 13%, South 17%). This imbalance is even further outspoken at the level of programme coordinators (7%). An improvement over time could also not be found: in the 6 most recently started programmes only 15% of academics involved were female (start-up in 2016).

The selection of **projects** in 2018 is more balanced: 33% of (co-)promoters are women. Also for projects, both in the South and in Flanders female academics are more likely to take up the supporting role, which is not necessarily a role with less workload. For female (co-)promoters from the South, there are substantial regional differences between African, Asian and Latin-American countries. In 2018, proposals from Africa included only 24% female (co-)promoters, in contrast with 38% from Asia, followed by Latin-America (36%).

Three influencing factors should be taken into account. First of all, the influence of rising female representation in academics is higher for projects than programmes, as there is a yearly call for proposals. For programmes this happens only every 4 to 5 year, so the numbers are more influenced by general lower numbers of female academics of a decade ago. Secondly, programme coordinators are often more experienced older professors while project promoters involve a wide range of professors. Thirdly, specifically for the Flemish numbers, staff of university colleges is increasingly involved over the last years, mainly in projects. As shown in the first chapter, female representation in their staff is much higher (59%), which is translated in the selected VLIR-UOS projects (2018: 63%). More analysis is needed to further understand why women are less involved as coordinators or promoters, for example on the influence of frequent travels, the characteristics of these functions (less focusing on content), field of study/research, ...

Gender balance in projects and programmes in Flanders

VLIR-UOS also support several projects and programmes in Flanders to strengthen the capacity for development cooperation at HEIs (Global Minds programme).

An important aspect of these interventions is the mobility of academics from the South to Flanders, in the framework of research, teaching and sensitization at the Flemish institutions. In 2018, female academics represented 33% of the mobility from the South to Flanders⁸.

The Global Minds programme also wants to broaden the Flemish personnel involved in university cooperation for development, by targeting departments and faculties with less expertise in development cooperation and offering first experiences to young academics. One institution reported 36% female academics among the 76 newly involved staff.

Educational programmes (ICP and ITP) with a development relevant focus at Flemish universities are another part of the interventions in Flanders, next to the scholarships funded for these programmes. ICP and ITP educational programmes also involve a promoter from a Flemish institution. From the 28 promoters involved in the programmes of 2017 and 2018, 9 were coordinated by female academics (32%).

The higher representation of women in interventions in Flanders, is in part related to the more recent selection and start-up of these programmes. While the South portfolio reflects balances related to selections of programmes and projects of 10 years ago, representing general lower numbers of female

⁸ Based on mobility using the shortened visa procedures

academics in Flanders of that decade, this is not the case for the interventions considered here. They only go back to selections in 2016, so reflecting a general improvement in the female share of academics in Flanders.

3.2. Fixing the organisation

Gender representativeness of the VLIR-UOS secretariat and decision-making bodies

For policy decisions and setting out the framework of university cooperation for development, VLIR-UOS has a board with members representing the Flemish HEIs (Bureau UOS). There are currently no female representatives among the six members of the Bureau UOS. In the past 20 years, the maximum of female members in the Bureau UOS was one.

As competitive calls for proposals are central in the work of VLIR-UOS, selection commissions play an important role in building up the portfolio of interventions. Profiles of selection commission members are a mix between experts from the academic world and experts from the development cooperation sector. In 2018, after recomposing the selection commissions for the South projects, 6 out of 16 members were female (38%). Special efforts were made to reach this number (intake of 28%), through headhunting of female candidates in certain regions. In 2019, the Belgium commission was recomposed with a 50-50% balance. The intake of female candidates was 6 out of 20 (30%). As for the selection commission for South (Institutional University Cooperation, IUC) programmes in 2019, a balanced commission was also composed of 2 men and 2 women.

VLIR-UOS employs 21 members of staff at the office in Brussels, of which 10 are women (48%). There is an equal division in both the programme and the support service. Only women (3) work part-time. The director is female, assisted by three male heads of department. Besides the personnel of the office in Brussels, VLIR-UOS also funds institutional coordinators for university cooperation for development (ICOS) at the Flemish universities and Global Engagement Officers (GEO) at the Flemish university colleges. There is a high overrepresentation of female ICOS and GEO, only 12% of the ICOS and 27% of the GEO are male.

Gender policy of VLIR-UOS

In 2015, VLIR-UOS elaborated a gender policy presenting its commitments towards reaching and promoting gender equity. It was an ambitious policy that was developed in the framework of an external screening for VLIR-UOS to be accredited as a non-governmental cooperation actor. The gender policy turned out to be too general and overambitious, as well as its action plan, with the consequence of having had only a limited application. The gender focal point left VLIR-UOS in 2017, leaving a gap in the available gender expertise within the organisation.

Before 2015 there was no real formal VLIR-UOS framework as to gender, except for the aim for gender balance at the level of individual scholarships (travel grants and ICP/ITP scholarships) (cfr. *infra*).

In short, there was little embeddedness of gender focus both within the organization and at the level of programmes and projects.

The overall context which triggered the update and reformulation of the VLIR-UOS gender policy was already presented at the beginning of this document. External incentives such as international and Belgian / Flemish policy evolutions, but also the concrete conclusions and recommendations from the im-

pact evaluation (2018) and own evaluations, have increased the institutional awareness of and engagement for gender policy throughout VLIR-UOS. Finally, the importance that is recently attached to the underlying SDG principle of “leaving no one behind” also calls for a more explicit and supported gender policy at VLIR-UOS level.

3.3. Fixing the content

Gender dimension in the content of the projects and programmes

Of the 2913 submitted interventions in the VLIR-UOS database (containing projects as of 2003), 30 interventions (1%) explicitly mention the word “gender” in the title. 23 of those interventions have a Flemish female promoter. 18 out of the 30 interventions with a gender-title have been selected and implemented (60%). The gender interventions are short projects with lower budgets (0,3% of the total budget while representing 1,2% of the total number of selected projects), for example a three weeks training or a two years cooperation project.

The analysis above only considers interventions explicitly mentioning gender in the title, leaving out interventions that consider gender without naming it or interventions that are not registered with titles in the database, so this is considered an underestimation. Scanning on the word “women” already adds 21 interventions (of which 8 were selected), with 10 Flemish female promoters. A further analysis of these interventions is needed to see if they can be considered as gender accommodating interventions or gender transformative interventions.

The analysis also made clear that in 2011, 2015 and 2016 not a single project focusing on gender started in that year. This shows that the two track approach is not structurally embedded in the portfolio of VLIR-UOS.

Another source of information on the link between the content of the interventions and gender, is the gender policy marker. This marker is used in Belgian development cooperation since 2010 to measure the progress of gender mainstreaming into its interventions. VLIR-UOS registered this information in its database for 390 interventions⁹. 18 (4.6%) interventions targeted gender equality as principal objective, 41% of the interventions considered gender equality as an important objective. The interventions focusing on gender equality represent 2,7% of the total budget of all interventions, again showing that these are the smaller and shorter type of interventions. This was also pointed out in the evaluation “Gender in the Belgian development cooperation” (2014): 9,5% of the interventions in the period 2002-2012 had a score 2 on the gender marker, representing 5,3% of the expenditures.

An important factor in this aspect is the selection process of VLIR-UOS. Positive initiatives have been undertaken to improve how gender is taken into account during the selection process, next to assuring gender balanced commissions. In 2018, a training for selection commission members was organised, with a timeslot dedicated to gender. In 2019, an analysis of how selection commission members assessed the aspect of gender was shared during the training of the selection commission members.

⁹ South and Belgium projects & programmes which started as of 2017 and the ongoing South programmes, interventions starting in 2020 not yet taken into account.

Gender dimension in the methodology of the projects and programmes

The previous section gave information on the horizontal integration of the gender dimension throughout the VLIR-UOS portfolio and the two track approach of specific gender interventions and gender mainstreaming interventions. This section looks at the vertical mainstreaming of gender in all different phases of the project cycle.

An in depth case-study¹⁰ of a long-term institutional cooperation programme was done, making a distinction between the two phases of the programme. In the first phase (2013-2018) VLIR-UOS only triggered to do a gender analysis in the formulation phase, did not assess the presence or quality of this analysis and did not follow up on this in other steps of the programme cycle. The intervention was gender blind in the first phase, but evolved to being gender aware in the second phase (as of 2019). This awareness was however not linked with the intervention: the programme indicated aspects of gender relations that could have a possible effect on the intervention (e.g. different labour allocation), but this effect was not translated into the design of the intervention nor did the programme reflect on its own possible effect on this gender relation.

The introduction of a more thorough results orientation principle since 2015 in the interventions of VLIR-UOS was an entry point for improving gender mainstreaming, with the rationale of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of interventions. Project formulation and reporting formats were updated, and specific questions on gender were added. But there were missed opportunities as gender still is considered as an issue to tackle “if relevant”, contradicting the gender mainstreaming approach.

Since 2017, more attention has been given by VLIR-UOS to improve mainstreaming of gender in projects. During recent information sessions for calls, the topic of gender was given much more attention. A flash card on gender (see annex 2), providing some essential questions for reflection when elaborating a project, was developed as a background document for calls.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter has described the current situation of gender integration in the framework of VLIR-UOS interventions and VLIR-UOS as an organisation, by means of factual data. This provides a neutral starting point for the discussion on the necessity of VLIR-UOS taking up concrete measures and engagements for integrating gender. The next necessary step is an analysis of the factual data to look for underlying causes and to explain the numbers. This analysis does not look at the individual level, but at the structures that limit both men and women.

As for fixing the numbers, the scholarship balance shows a positive evolution at first sight. The positive evolution is, however, more complex, when taking into account regional differences. Scholarship attribution for African female students remains highly unequal. Looking at the involvement of female academic staff in interventions there is a positive evolution, reaching 30% in 2018. These numbers reflect the existing inequalities at staff level in the higher education sector worldwide.

As for fixing the organisation, the VLIR-UOS secretariat is well balanced and efforts have been made to achieve more balanced decision making bodies at the level of the selection commissions. There is room for improvement at the level of the Bureau UOS. The previous gender policy (2016-2021) remained too much ‘a document’ and did not get enough institutional and organisational support within VLIR-UOS and

¹⁰ Full analysis available on request

the VLIR-UOS community, while support for policy measures from the top of the organisation, is one of the preconditions for making a mainstreaming policy work.

As for fixing the content, VLIR-UOS has undertaken several initiatives to improve gender integration in the content of projects (e.g. in formats), but it does not structurally use a two track approach. Interventions focusing primarily on gender equality are a minority, with mainly short and small interventions. As for gender mainstreaming in all projects, VLIR-UOS does not encourage gender analysis in project formulations and considers gender not always relevant, contradicting the mainstreaming approach as put forward by Belgian development cooperation.

The current situation of how gender has been integrated by VLIR-UOS, can be summarized using a recommendation from the recent impact evaluation of Belgian university cooperation for development, which was ordered by the Belgian government (2018, [report](#), p.127):

“VLIR-UOS and ARES should **establish specific mechanisms to exert influence on existing gender relations and equality of opportunity to further strengthen the contribution of Belgian university development cooperation to the advancement of women**. The evaluation has shown that women benefit from the interventions of Belgian university development cooperation as well as from individual scholarship schemes. However, **there is no explicit mechanism in place for either interventions or individual scholarships to contribute to transforming existing gender dynamics and contribute to equality of opportunity in the partner countries**. This would however be relevant, as women are still highly underrepresented within academia in some partner countries. The evaluation team therefore recommends that VLIR-UOS and ARES develop explicit policies to contribute to counteract existing gender imbalances.”

In its management response, VLIR-UOS agreed with the need to establish specific mechanisms and elaborated on different initiatives already taken to improve the integration of gender. The update of the gender policy document and action plan was also put forward as a concrete next step.

4. The engagements of VLIR-UOS

For the period 2020-2024, the VLIR-UOS staff and direction, the Bureau UOS, the rectors of the Flemish universities and presidents of the university colleges put forward the following engagements which will be strived for, at the level of fixing the numbers, fixing the knowledge and fixing the organisation:



4.1. Fix the numbers

Available data & yearly monitoring

We need to make sure that data is available for tracking the numbers, at all levels: scholarships, programmes and projects, and at the level of the organisation.

Yearly monitoring has to be done at the level of VLIR-UOS, on the basis of information that the (Flemish and partner) institutions involved will need to provide to VLIR-UOS. Further evidence and study is needed for additional evidence based policy decisions. We are currently lacking quantitative data on important variables to explain certain differences, like for example the family situation of scholars. Information is needed not only from scholars who are selected, but also from scholars who applied but who did not meet the selection criteria. But also qualitative data are lacking, for example on the reasons why female academics prefer to take up supporting roles in IUC programmes instead of leading positions.

Also at the level of reporting per project, there is still room for improvement as to how to report on gender and the use of disaggregated indicators.

40-60% guideline for all scholarships in educational programmes and interventions

The existing guideline from the scholarship programmes should be set as an example for scholarship attribution within projects and programmes too, putting forward a minimum share of 40% for persons from the underrepresented sex. The role of VLIR-UOS for these types of scholarships is to raise awareness towards the Flemish and South partners responsible for selections and to collect the necessary data for monitoring the implementation of the guideline at portfolio level. Special attention should be given to raise awareness on regional differences between Africa, Asia and Latin-America, with a focus on promoting the participation of African female scholars.

Advanced master, 45 as age limit

One way to facilitate more balance in scholarship attribution, is by raising the age limit of 40 years to 45 years for the Advanced Master Programmes scholarships, for men and women. We know from research specifically for female African scholars, that young women in the lower academic ranks, are less physically international and career wise mobile than men in the same age group and rank. This gender difference in international mobility, however, decreases as age increases.



4.2. Fix the knowledge

Structural 2-track approach

VLIR-UOS structurally integrates a 2-track approach. These 2 tracks consist of integrating gender into projects where gender equality is not the main objective and combining this with projects aimed primarily at promoting gender equality or women's empowerment. Gender mainstreaming is about taking gender into account throughout all domains of research, all different types of interventions, all phases in the

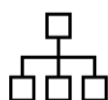
project cycle, all policy and strategy documents etc. and not just where it seems obvious, like only in social sciences. The perspective of gender is always relevant, no matter the sector or discipline, since our focus of work is capacity building for sustainable development. Gender is inherent to both concepts. Capacity building involves people, sustainable development leaves no one behind. The next two paragraphs detail for each track the engagements put forward.

Strive for 10% gender equality interventions

For the projects with gender equality as main objective, we will strive for a 10% share of these projects in the VLIR-UOS portfolio. The 10% share is considered as an incentive in all our calls for proposals. The selection commissions are a crucial factor and training should be continued. In case we do not reach this goal by the end of a Five-Year Programme, a policy initiated call for gender specific projects can give the necessary boost for this type of projects.

Support for mainstreaming gender

For all projects, VLIR-UOS will continue to invest in providing training and support to academics to strengthen capacities to effectively mainstream gender into VLIR-UOS projects, going further than asking academics to simply fill in the box on gender in the formats. An example of this was the flash card on gender developed in 2017 (see annex 2), but other tools need to be developed for example on how to do a gender analysis when elaborating a project. A first important step will be the structural mainstreaming of gender in the new IUC programmes.



4.3. Fix the organisation

Equality and Inclusion policy

This updated gender policy, being the first part of an Equality and Inclusion policy, based on the Agenda 2030 principle of Leaving No One Behind, will be published on the VLIR-UOS website after approval of the Bureau UOS.. In January 2020, the [VLIR-UOS New Year's Event](#) on Gender was the starting point for communicating our new gender policy within the VLIR-UOS community. The policy should become standard knowledge for Bureau UOS members, VLIR-UOS employees, ICOS and GEO in order for them to support individual academics who want to get involved in university cooperation for development.

Engagement of all levels

We consider equality and inclusion as an engagement of all levels, ranging from the VLIR-UOS office up to the rectors of the universities and presidents of the university colleges and of course at the level of the Bureau UOS, which will be reassembled in August 2020. This will be an excellent occasion to strive for a better gender balance within this decision-making body.

The engagement also concerns the whole organisation and not only the Gender focal point, as there are clear links with the communication advisor (e.g. for using female scholars as role models in communication, in the development of the communication policy), the information and data manager, the process analyst, the human resource director ...

But the engagement should also be taken by the Flemish and Southern project promoters.

Expert Group

In order for the Bureau UOS to be supported in its decision-making processes, an Expert Group on Gender, Diversity and Development is put in place as a permanent working group, with 4 year mandates for the members. The Bureau UOS formulated the mandate of the Expert Group on 26 April 2019 as follows: the Expert Group formulates proposals for measures and recommendations which will be submitted to the Bureau UOS. The elaboration, follow-up and evaluation of the Equality and Inclusion Policy and its action plan is carried out by the Expert Group, which acts as a permanent advisory body for the organisation, together with the Gender focal point of VLIR-UOS. During an annual meeting in November, the Expert group will monitor the implementation of the policy document and related action plan. One of the strengths of the working group is that various members link up with gender and diversity policy-making within the Flemish academic community and VLIR, as well as with gender and development policy-making within the sector of the Belgian (and international) development cooperation.

4.4. Way forward

The above mentioned engagements were based on a detailed list of proposed engagements formulated by the Expert Group (annex 3, in Dutch) which elaborates further on specific intervention types, on different partners, on several phases in the project cycle, on links with communication and data management...

Furthermore, the preparatory process of elaborating a new Five-Year Programme (2022-2026) provides a window of opportunity for making these engagements concrete. The Bureau UOS has decided to use Agenda 2030 and the SDGs as a framework for renewing the mission and vision of VLIR-UOS, for updating the theory of change, for elaborating a country framework and for reworking the intervention portfolio. The underlying principles of « Leaving no one behind » and « Inclusiveness » (next to multi-stakeholder partnership and interconnectedness) have explicitly been put forward to be integrated into this whole process. The concept of intersectionality clearly links with these principles and guarantees that other aspects next to gender will receive the necessary and increased attention. As indicated earlier, this document is the first step in a longer trajectory, as the aim of VLIR-UOS is to also develop in the upcoming years diversity policies, based on a common perspective on intersectionality and inclusion, analyzing which dimensions increase people's vulnerability.

Next to this, VLIR-UOS will further exchange with ARES and ITM as to equality and inclusion policies, practices and tools. This opportunity for peer learning will be an added value to reflect on how to improve the integration of gender and diversity in university and research cooperation for development.

Annexes

Annex 1 – List of Meetings and Experts involved

April 1 2019: IUC consultation workshop with session on transversal themes (led by prof. Veerle Draulans and Inge Vandevyvere)

April 26 2019: plan of approach discussion on the Bureau UOS meeting and approval for setting up an Expert Group on Gender, Diversity and Development with the mandate to formulate proposals for measures and recommendations which will be submitted to the Bureau UOS. The elaboration, follow-up and evaluation of the policy and its action plan is carried out by the Expert Group, which acts as a permanent advisory body for the organization, with 4 year mandates for members.

May 24 2019: composition of the Expert Group validated on the Bureau UOS meeting

- Veerle Draulans (KU Leuven)
- Kristiaan Temst (KU Leuven)
- Bert Brone (UHasselt)
- Marjan Decoster (UHasselt)
- Bie Nielandt (UHasselt substitute)
- Kristien Michielsens (UGent)
- Stef Slembrouck (UGent)
- Annelies Verdoolaege (UGent substitute)
- Kathleen Van Heule (HoGent)
- Mieke Clement (UCLL)
- Charlotte Christiaens (VLHORA substitute)
- Nathalie Holvoet (UAntwerpen)
- Dirk Vissers (UAntwerpen)
- Petra Meier (UAntwerpen substitute)
- Gily Coene (VUB)

June 21 2019 and July 6 2019: first meeting of the Expert Group (2 sessions) to formulate propositions

November 5 2019: second meeting of the Expert Group to formulate propositions

December 18 2019: propositions of the Expert Group discussed on the Bureau UOS meeting and Veerle Draulans appointed as chair

January 23 2020: New Year's Event on the topic of gender

March 2020: start of strategic online discussions for elaborating a new Five Year Programme

April 7-15 2020: mail consultation with Expert Group on draft policy

April 24 2020: policy discussed on the Bureau UOS meeting

May 19 2020: policy discussed with chair Expert Group and chair VLIR-UOS

June 5 2020: policy discussed with chair Expert Group and chair VLIR-UOS

June 16 2020: policy discussed with Expert Group

July 3 2020: policy discussed on the Bureau UOS meeting

Annex 2 – Flash Card on Gender

Flash Card: Gender	
Content	VLIR-UOS is committed to achieving more gender equity and equality in the VLIR-UOS partner countries, including Belgium, both in the higher education sector and in society in general, through UOS funded interventions. Gender is understood as a socio-cultural construct of female and male identities, roles and expressions. There are two pathways of integrating gender, through stand-alone projects with a specific focus on gender or through the mainstreaming of gender in all projects. Gender mainstreaming is done horizontally (in all interventions regardless of the sector they focus on) and vertically (throughout the different steps of the project cycle).
Motivation	Sustainable and inclusive development cannot be achieved if women and girls, who constitute half of the population, do not have equal rights and opportunities. From a human rights perspective, gender equality is a goal in itself , although ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls is also crucial to accelerating sustainable development . It has been proven time and again, that empowering women and girls has a multiplier effect, and stimulates economic growth and development. Furthermore, insufficient use of human capital within the higher education sector has a harmful impact on the development of higher education institutions, as it decreases efficiency and excellence by missing out on women's involvement at all academic levels.
Contact person:	Inge Vandevyvere (VLIR-UOS)
Examples & questions for reflection on gender	<p>3 necessary approaches for improving gender equality:</p> <p>Fixing the numbers: focuses on increasing women's (or men's) participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the project ensure gender balanced representation in the team? (cfr. VLIR-UOS policy: 60-40% to 40-60% representation of both sexes) • Does the project incorporate mechanisms to ensure gender balanced participation and representativeness in decision-making processes? • Does the project ensure gender balanced participation and representativeness at project activities? (e.g. by providing day care during training) • Does the project identify cultural/religious/legal restrictions that would not allow women or men to participate in project activities (e.g. identify the reasons making it difficult for young female academics to work outside office hours) <p>Fixing the content: focuses on integrating gender analysis (what is the effect of gender on the intervention, how should the intervention be designed to deal with this effect, and what is the effect of the intervention on gender)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the project consider the way in which the situations/needs/challenges of men and women differ? (e.g. investigating the role of women in the environmental management practices of indigenous communities) • Does the project integrate sex and gender analysis into research? (e.g. including perception differences between men and women about ecosystem services as confounding factor in a research)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the project take different gender roles and divisions of labour between men and women into account? (e.g. taking into account gender differences in a research on unemployment) • Does the project focus on changing gender roles and divisions of labour between men and women? (e.g. working on awareness raising with girls for HIV/AIDS prevention) • Does the project include sex-disaggregated indicators for follow-up? <p>Fixing the organisation: focuses on the institutional structure and how gender is (implicitly) understood</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the project team include a member with gender expertise? • Does the project engage with women's groups, associations, NGOs as project counterparts and/or as gender advisors? (e.g. consulting a microfinancing institution for women on fertiliser use) • Does the project create structural and organisational changes in the integration of gender at the higher education institution (e.g. developing a strategy and action plans on gender, appointing a focal point...)
Available tools/links:	Strategic Policy Note Gender and Action plan for integrating the gender dimension (DGD) Gender mainstreaming in higher education toolkit (INASP) Gender mainstreaming the project cycle (UNIDO) Gender policy (VLIR-UOS) Implicit bias (Jonge Academie) Gendered innovations (European Union, L. Schiebinger) Integrating Gender in Research Policy (Oxfam) Gendercharter (Jonge Academie & VLIR) Genderinspiratiegids (Belgian actors of non-governmental cooperation)

Annex 3 – Full list of proposed engagements for the Bureau UOS of 23/04/2020¹¹

Fixes	
Numbers (participation of women)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - een jaarlijkse monitoring wordt uitgevoerd van het genderbeleid en de genderbalans doorheen het hele VLIR-UOS-portfolio. Deze monitoring gebeurt zowel op niveau van VLIR-UOS (e.g. genderbalans bij promotoren, coördinatoren, projectleiders, selectiecommissies, VLIR-UOS-personeel) als op het niveau van de Vlaamse instellingen die VLIR-UOS de nodige data bezorgen (e.g. de genderbalans bij intake en selectie van Zuid- en Vlaamse bursalen, de genderbalans bij kandidaatstelling en voordracht voor Vlaamse IUS-coördinatoren, de genderbalans bij kandidaatstelling en voordracht voor Expertengroepen). De monitoring gebeurt in relatie tot de onderliggende referentiepopulatie en focust op de doorgemaakte evolutie doorheen de tijd. - In lijn met het huidig VLIR-UOS-beleid voor het beogen van een relatieve balans van 40-60% voor individuele bursalen na selectie, wordt deze richtlijn ook meegenomen wat betreft de selectie van bursalen binnen project- en programmawerking. VLIR-UOS neemt hierin een sensibiliserende rol naar de Vlaamse en Zuidpartners op die instaan voor selecties. Voor de selectie van individuele bursalen per onderwijs- en trainingsprogramma (ICP/ITP) wordt de richtlijn verder gepreciseerd naar het beogen van de relatieve balans ook binnen de 3 grote regio's (Afrika, Azië, Latijns-Amerika). - in functie van een evidence-based beleidsvoering, is verdere studie en onderzoek nodig, verder bouwend op de analyse uit 2019 van het VLIR-UOS gender focal point. Hiervoor kan een beroep gedaan worden op de Expertengroep via de bestaande linken met de Master Gender en Diversiteit. Dit kan bijvoorbeeld in het kader van een Masterproef of een stageplaats, zoals dat reeds op het niveau van de VLIR is gebeurd, of via het inschakelen van een jobstudent, zoals dat reeds in het kader van het leertraject gender in Ethiopië bij VLIR-UOS is gebeurd. Ook de nieuwe functie van Process Analyst binnen VLIR-UOS biedt hiertoe mogelijkheden. Verdere evidence is nodig wat betreft: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Het in kaart brengen van de beweegredenen waarom vrouwen in Vlaanderen en het Zuiden de rol van promotor/coördinator minder opnemen (bvb via interviews);

¹¹ In line with the mandate of the Expert Group given by the Bureau UOS: the Expert Group formulates proposals for measures and recommendations which will be submitted to the Bureau UOS

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Het verder in kaart brengen van verschillen in genderbalans wat betreft (Vlaamse en Zuid) promotoren en coördinatoren, met aandacht voor de variabele “onderzoeksdiscipline” (bvb verschillen tussen sociale wetenschappen, natuurwetenschappen, geneeskunde...); ○ Het opsporen van good practices binnen de huidige ICP- en ITP-programma’s in het omgaan met genderverhoudingen bij promotie van de programma’s, selectie en afstuderen van Zuidbursalen en in het inhoudelijk integreren van gender in de programma’s. Uitwisseling over deze good practices wordt ook gefaciliteerd door VLIR-UOS. ○ Het verder in kaart brengen van verschillen in genderbalans wat betreft ICP- en ITP-bursalen, met aandacht voor de persoonlijke en professionele situatie voor aanvang, vlak na en 2,5 jaar na de studie of training. ○ Het analyseren van de invloed van de gezinssituatie en familiale verplichtingen op de instroom, beleving en uitstroom van zowel mannelijke als vrouwelijke Zuidbursalen; ○ Het verzamelen van evidence op vlak van intersectionaliteit en diversiteit om dit in kaart te brengen binnen het portfolio van VLIR-UOS en het wegwerken van lacunes in de datasystemen van VLIR-UOS om deze analyses mogelijk te maken; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - verder werkend op het VLIR-UOS-beleid voor het beogen van een relatieve balans van 40-60% voor individuele bursalen na selectie, wordt de maximumleeftijd voor kandidaten verhoogd naar 45 jaar voor de toekenning van Advanced Masterbeurzen, zowel voor mannen als vrouwen. Vrouwen instromen later in de academische wereld omwille van de combinatie academisch werk, zorg voor de familie en community taken (zoals bvb in Ethiopië opgelegd wordt door de universiteiten). VLIR-UOS volgt op of deze tijdelijke maatregel het behalen van een betere balans effectief bevordert. - vrouwelijke bursalen uit het Zuiden worden als rolmodellen mee opgenomen in de communicatie over beurzen. - de instellingen worden vanuit VLIR-UOS gestimuleerd om de positie van UOS binnen de academische carrière voor Vlaamse (junior) promotoren te valoriseren. Voor PhD-bursalen uit het Zuiden, worden Zuidpartners aangemoedigd om duidelijkheid te bieden voor wat betreft de aanstelling binnen de instelling na het doctoraat. Ook worden de verwachtingen wat betreft mobiliteit naar de projectpartners duidelijk gemaakt om voor junior vrouwelijke en mannelijke Vlaamse academici die potentieel geïnteresseerd zijn in UOS de taak-belasting te verhelderen, aangezien voldoende kennis van de lokale context en de Zuidpartner belangrijke factoren zijn voor succesvolle samenwerking.
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Content	<p>- Er wordt ingezet op de dubbele benadering van gender mainstreaming en gender specifieke interventies doorheen de VLIR-UOS-portfolio, met aandacht voor de specificiteit van de verschillende interventies (beurzen, programma's, projecten)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Via een streefdoel voor genderspecifieke interventies in alle calls, waarbij 10% projecten binnen elke call als streefdoel wordt vooropgezet (op basis van de sectorevaluatie). Genderspecifieke interventies zetten inhoudelijk in op gender en hebben een score 2 op de Gender-marker, zoals gedefinieerd door OESO-DAC en zoals gebruikt in de VLIR-UOS-database ("gender equality is the principal reason of the project/programme"). Indien het doel niet wordt gehaald binnen een vijfjaren-programma, wordt een aanvullende beleidsgeïnitieerde call voor genderspecifieke interventies gelanceerd in jaar 4. ○ Via het communiceren van aanbevelingen voor geselecteerde projecten om de gendercomponent te versterken in het kader van gendermainstreaming en de opvolging van het toepassen van de aanbevelingen, waarvoor VLIR-UOS ondersteuning biedt (zie tools verder) ○ Via verhoogde aandacht voor de balans binnen een team betrokken in een interventie en de strategische posities die ze innemen binnen de interventie. Specifiek voor de selectie van reserveprojecten, wordt voorkeur gegeven aan projecten met gebalanceerde teams op de verschillende posities. Specifiek voor IUS-trajecten, wordt voor nieuw op te starten programma's een minimum 1/3 balans beoogd over alle projectleiders en coördinatoren heen, met groter gewicht voor de coördinatoren. Vlaamse instellingen en VLIR-UOS zetten hierbij specifiek in op het werven van vrouwelijke kandidaten voor Vlaamse projectleiders en coördinatoren. ○ Via het expliciet aftoetsen van de gendersensitiviteit van de vernieuwde beurzenrichtlijn (2018), waarvan een evaluatie gepland is in de nabije toekomst, samen met DGD, ARES, ITG, ENABEL, KMMA en KBIN (e.g. afschaffen family allowance) ○ Via het aanmoedigen van Vlaamse en Zuidpartners om gender bespreekbaar te maken en hoe het een invulling krijgt binnen de interventie, door een verhoogde aandacht voor gender vanuit VLIR-UOS (e.g. in formats, guidelines, events, trainingen, projectbezoeken...) ○ Via het ondersteunen van de IUS-partnerinstellingen om een genderbeleid uit te werken, een bestaand genderbeleid effectief te implementeren, een monitoringsysteem op te zetten, een gender task force op te richten... in lijn met de eigen instellingsnoden en -prioriteiten
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - gender wordt gemainstreamd doorheen de projectcyclus van VLIR-UOS interventies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Via het toelichten van gender mainstreaming in informatiesessies (generiek + op campus) voor calls o Via het geven van de nodige background voor academici bij projectformulering om gender te integreren, waarbij verschillende complementaire tools nodig zijn (bvb een checklist, gender training, specifieke sessie tijdens IUS-formuleringstrajecten, good practices uit concrete projecten) o Via het disaggregeren van door VLIR-UOS ontwikkelde standaardindicatoren en het aanmoedigen van disaggregatie in logframes van interventies o Via een effectieve opvolging van gendermainstreaming bij implementatie van de projecten, op basis van rapportering o Via de Terms of Reference voor alle evaluaties, waarbij aandacht wordt besteed aan de 3 niveaus van het 3-fixes-model. - selectiecommissieleden evalueren de integratie van gender in projectvoorstellen en is dit een element dat in rekening gebracht wordt in selecties. Reeds genomen initiatieven op dat vlak zoals gendertraining van selectiecommissieleden en systematische feedback over assessments op vlak van gender worden verdergezet.
Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Er wordt jaarlijks een actieplan uitgewerkt, samen met verifieerbare opvolgings- en evaluatiemaatregelen, en een budget voor dit plan. Het faciliteren van een genderbeleid vraagt om een financiële incentive. Daarnaast zorgt de aanstelling van een gender focal point binnen VLIR-UOS voor de nodige ondersteuning om als organisatie het actieplan uit te voeren. De uitwerking, opvolging en evaluatie van het actieplan gebeurt door de Expertengroep, die als permanent adviesorgaan (met 4jarige mandaten) functioneert voor de organisatie, samen met het focal point. De Expertengroep heeft het mandaat om voorstellen tot maatregelen en aanbevelingen aan het Bureau UOS te formuleren voor het beleidsplan. Het Bureau UOS valideert het actieplan. - een reflectie is nodig over de manier waarop VLIR-UOS-interventies een (grotere) impact kunnen hebben op het beïnvloeden van een genderbeleid bij (potentiele) partnerinstellingen, op het veranderen van sociale normen en op het bredere politieke niveau, via een Theory of Change oefening met focus op gender. - ICOS/GEO mee betrokken bij de opbouw van genderexpertise specifiek voor UOS. - VLIR-UOS ijvert voor een evenwichtige samenstelling in de bestuurs- en beslissingsorganen (Bureau UOS, selectiecommissies) met maximum 2/3^{de} van eenzelfde gender. Dit maximum is een tussentijds doel, het eigenlijke doel is een maximale vertegenwoordiging van 60% van hetzelfde gender.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - een genderbenadering vraagt expliciet aandacht voor het concept 'masculinity' en voor de rol van mannen binnen het genderbeleid. Gender staat niet gelijk aan een exclusieve focus op vrouwen. Verschillende voorgestelde maatregelen zijn daarom niet specifiek voor vrouwen, maar komen zowel mannen als vrouwen ten goede. - het genderbeleid van VLIR-UOS is een commitment van alle niveaus: medewerkers, directie, Bureau UOS en de rectoren/algemeen beheerders.
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