

# Gender and environmental sustainability guidelines for VLIR-UOS' educational programmes

## Introduction

Contributing to gender equality and a minimal environmental impact is a priority for VLIR-UOS. This document specifies how applicants for VLIR-UOS funded educational programmes can contribute to these goals. Within the application form, several questions focus on the gender and environmental concerns. Hence these guidelines also serve as a source of inspiration to answer these questions.

## Gender equality

Gender equality refers to the goal of reaching equal rights for all human beings, regardless of their sex or sexual preferences. If development misses out on one of the both sexes, it misses out on half of the world's population. Besides the need of working on gender equality in terms of inclusive development results, the need is high to counteract the glass ceiling within higher education institutions management worldwide.

Within educational programmes supported by VLIR-UOS within the country programme Belgium (2017-2021)<sup>1</sup>, VLIR-UOS forwards three pathways to work on gender equality concerns:

1. by a specific focus on gender equality in the design of the curricula and teaching or conference materials;
2. in the recruitment and support of participants (especially the VLIR-UOS scholars but may be larger).
3. by ensuring that lecturers/experts acquire the necessary skills and knowledge needed to promote gender equality through and within the programme

## Gender equality in the design of the curricula and materials

Integrating gender equality in the design of the curricula can be done on various levels: by integrating gender problems and examples within the training to organizing a specific training on gender related issues. Even when gender related problems are not pertinent to the theme of the training, the conceptualization and production of materials can be done in a gender neutral way: using examples which are not gender stereotyping, using footage which forward non-traditional gender roles (e.g. female physicians on illustrations), producing gender neutral texts (calls for participation, invitations,

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<sup>1</sup> These are educational programmes supported by VLIR-UOS - with a bench fee for the programme and scholarships for participants from the 31 countries of Belgian development cooperation - and taking place in Belgium.

programme leaflets, ...). Several higher education institutions have developed tools to screen on gender neutrality within the production of texts and footage, which can provide inspiration.

### **Recruitment and support of participants**

In each training supported by VLIR-UOS, measures should be taken to recruit a relatively balanced ratio of male and female participants (40-60 to 60-40 ratio) and to facilitate the completion of the educational programme for both sexes.

VLIR-UOS has been forwarding the gender balance as one of the six selection criteria for its scholars since long. A VLIR-UOS educational programme can go beyond this though and use the gender criterion as a selection criteria also for non-VLIR-UOS funded participants but for its audience more general, as well as provide particular activities to address students from the underrepresented sex, such as career mentoring schemes adapted to male or female students or specific campaigns within the support of informal and formal alumni networks.

For higher education students, certainly at advanced levels, it is equally important to guarantee that both sexes are supported in combining their research or educational programme with their family life in order to prevent drop-out, especially from women. The same is valid for female promoters of programmes or projects running in the VLIR-UOS partner countries. Specific financial measures, such as the family allowance for male and female master study scholars and suspension of 15 weeks (19 weeks in case of multiple birth) with payment of 75% of the allowance during pregnancy leave for female PhD scholars, are measures to support the combination private-work or study life which are already in place. Female master study scholars can suspend their scholarship for one year in case of pregnancy.

Every measure that is taken within the organisation of the educational programme in order to contribute to the gender equality goal must be included in the description within the application form.

### **Lecturer's gender skills and knowledge**

In line with the indicators proposed within the Sustainable Development Goals framework for SDG 4 on quality education (global education indicators), VLIR-UOS forwards the need to ensure that lecturers/experts acquire the necessary skills and knowledge needed to promote gender equality through and within the programme. Expertise among the staff of the educational programmes which helps to promote gender equality should hence be highlighted within the CVs and referred to in the application form.

### **Environmental sustainability**

Environmental sustainability points at the protection and preservation of the environment. As an umbrella organisation for higher education institutions in Flanders and a development cooperation actor, VLIR-UOS wants to set an example and support the environmental sustainability measures of the higher education institutions.

Applicants to VLIR-UOS calls therefore need to assess whether their project or programme is likely to have a positive or negative environmental impact, or what aspects of their programme have potential negative impacts and which measures can be taken to mitigate these negative impacts. After all, VLIR-UOS wants to prevent, minimize, mitigate or compensate for adverse environmental impacts as well as contribute to enhancing positive environmental impacts.

Within educational programmes supported by VLIR-UOS within the country programme Belgium (2017-2021), environmental sustainability can be targeted by

- focusing on environmental protection, climate change, deforestation or desertification problems within the educational programme or within specific parts of the programme;
- minimizing the waste production, energy consumption, ..., shortly, the carbon dioxide production, in the organization of the programme;
- reimbursing train tickets rather than plane tickets for participants and experts for distances until 500 km;
- providing vegetarian and/or locally produced, biological catering;
- sorting waste and recycling materials;
- ...

This list is not limitative but rather serves as source of inspiration.