

VLIR-UOS and Corona

Measures and information – version 20 March 2020

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Purpose of this document

Given the restrictions on (international) mobility and social interaction imposed by a multitude of stakeholders concerned (governmental and institutional authorities, airlines, travel agencies,...) on the basis of the Corona virus pandemic, VLIR-UOS wishes to provide basic information on measures related to mobility, events and costs in the framework of VLIR-UOS programmes, projects and scholarships.

In addition to the present document, targeted communication has been sent to various target groups such as programme and project promoters.

General obligations of the public

- We explicitly refer to every citizen's general obligation to primarily consult governmental policies, both in the home country and in the country of destination, regarding social interaction and travel, and to act accordingly.
- Additionally, please consult [World Health Organisation's advice for the public](#).

Situation in Belgium

- EU leaders have agreed on a temporary restriction on travel to the EU by means of a ban on all non-essential travels until at least 19 April 2020 (can be extended).
- The Belgian government has issued a prohibition to travel abroad from Belgium until at least 5 April 2020. All non-essential flights from Belgium are hence prohibited (art. 7, Ministerial Decree 18 March 2020) until 5 April included (can be extended).

- All employers are obliged to let employees work from home where possible. Where telework is not possible, social distancing is obligatory while working.
- Non-essential shops are closed, with the exception of pharmacies, nutritional stores and newspaper shops.

Your questions

For specific inquiries concerning your project, programme or scholarship activities, please consult the responsible academic (the project promoter) and institutional coordinators for development cooperation at the Flemish university (ICOS) or university college (GEO) first. They will refer to institutional policies and liaise with VLIR-UOS when necessary. In this way VLIR-UOS can involve all stakeholders and streamline communication.

Please do not directly send an email to VLIR-UOS without prior consultation of your responsible academic and/or institutional coordinator.

Mobility planning and visa applications

On the basis of current Belgian government policy, no travel to the EU will be allowed until 19 April 2020 and non-essential outgoing flights from Belgium are prohibited until at least 5 April 2020. Hence, postponement of all travels and mobility related events to and from Belgium in the framework of VLIR-UOS until at least the end of April 2020 is recommended at present, but this 'no go' period is uncertain right now and can be extended.

Consequently, visa applications for travels to Belgium for that period will not be processed.

Moreover, we advise to postpone all travels as long as possible and until further notice. We cannot guarantee that visa will be issued for e.g. May 2020. It is probably wise to postpone all travels until summer, although we currently have no formal basis for this advice. Any ticket bookings and visa applications for travels to Belgium are strongly discouraged at the moment, until there is new formal government communication that would allow to make such arrangements. Prior to that, we cannot guarantee that these applications can be processed.

Travel related costs

We are aware that cancellation insurances are not likely to refund the costs of travels cancelled due to the Corona crisis, but nevertheless you are required to verify this.

Cancellation costs can be imputed on your VLIR-UOS project budget after written motivation that there is a direct link between the cancellation and (one of the) Corona crisis linked policies concerned (on the basis of the planned date of the activity) and proof that the insurance does not cover these costs.

Should you make any bookings now, please make sure these are flexible tickets, i.e. of which the dates can be altered without surcharge.

We cannot allow tickets purchased after 12 March 2020 but cancelled due to the Corona crisis, to be imputed on your programme, project or scholarship budget. We cannot predict how long this period of uncertainty will last.

Furthermore,

- Given existing and expanding travel bans, it is not allowed for VLIR-UOS **Master scholarship holders** studying in an ongoing full-time Master programme in Belgium to return home without prior consultation of the programme coordinators. In case they do so anyway, they will have to cover all costs made and make sure to inform the programme coordinators on their plans prior to their departure. Master scholars take full responsibility and formally disclaim the programme coordinators for not respecting Belgian government decision.
- For **ICP and ITP**, the following applies:
 - Costs related to cancellation due to the Corona crisis that are non-refundable by insurance / travel agency etc. can in principle be imputed on the ICP's incremental funding budget (for incremental project activities), ITP budget (for ITP programme activities), or scholarship budget of the Flemish higher education institution (for scholarship holders – see also below), given a motivation is provided in the reporting.
 - If any costs would occur related to the scholarships, for example for those (ITP) programmes which had to postpone organisation and need to re-book tickets, accommodation etc., these costs can in principle be imputed on the scholarship budget of the Flemish higher education institution. Scholars are requested to consult the ICOS/GEO of the Flemish higher education institution. In principle they are not allowed to (re-)book or cancel their tickets themselves since this is organised by the respective programme.
- VLIR-UOS **PhD scholarship holders and Short Term Allowance grantees** staying in Belgium, are also requested to consult their Flemish university promoter and/or the ICOS/GEO, before planning any mobility or altering existing mobility plans by which costs would be incurred.

As a principle,

- Existing planning implying outgoing mobility from Belgium to the home country after the outgoing mobility ban until – at present – 5 April 2020, can be pursued by verifying home country policy (via home country embassy/consulate in Belgium) and, if travelling is allowed, by verifying the availability of effective travel options.
- Proven inability to leave Belgium due to Corona and subsequent policies (governmental and or airlines) can be qualified as force majeure; costs of forced prolonged stay will be refunded, in principle on the basis of the VLIR-UOS guidelines. We repeat that prior consultation by the scholar with the Flemish university promoter and/or the ICOS/GEO and by the latter with VLIR-UOS is in any case required.

REI (travel grant) holders studying in a developing country

- Students who are **still in Belgium** but who cannot travel due to the travel ban and who already made expenses, can be reimbursed by the Flemish university (college) up to a maximum of 1.000 EUR – or lower: see your Flemish university (college) regulation. These expenses need to be accounted for, and a written motivation is to be provided in the reporting (in any case: insurance disclaimer).
- Students who were **already in a developing country** but were forced to abort their stay and return to Belgium, are entitled to a maximum of 1.000 EUR – or lower: see your Flemish university (college) regulation) as a lump sum –, even if their stay abroad was shorter than 28 days. In case of premature return to Belgium, a written motivation is to be provided in the reporting.
- For any **further questions**, REI holders are requested to contact their ICOS/GEO.

VLIR-UOS staff

As the entire VLIR-UOS staff is working from home as from 16 March 2020 until further notice, we are fully operational and can be contacted as usual.