

Corona / COVID-19

FAQ (2020-12-01)

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Who to contact with a COVID-19 related question

First contact point 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.

The ICOS and GEO will refer to institutional policies and liaise with VLIR-UOS (respective programme manager) when necessary. In this way VLIR-UOS can involve all stakeholders and streamline communication.

The Flemish universities have also created specific webpages with information regarding Corona:

- <https://www.kuleuven.be/coronavirus/english/Coronavirus-ENG>
- <https://www.ugent.be/en/news-events/coronavirus-updates.htm>
- <https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/about-uantwerp/organisation/in-the-spotlight/faqs-coronavirus/>
- <https://www.vub.be/en/coronavirus#updates>
- <https://www.uhasselt.be/coronavirus-en>

Mobility and visa applications

Essential travel: students (Master and PhD)

Essential travel to and from Belgium is allowed, while respecting restrictions. Travels of **third-country students** starting or continuing their studies in Belgium in the academic year 2020/21 are considered essential travels (exception on the overall travel ban). This exception covers students who are defined in Article 3(3) of the EU Students and Researchers Directive 2016/801 as “*a third-country national who has been accepted by a higher education institution and is admitted to the territory of a Member State to pursue as a main activity a full-time course of study leading to a higher education qualification recognised by that Member State, including **diplomas, certificates or doctoral degrees** in a higher education institution, which may cover a preparatory course prior to such education, in accordance with national law, or compulsory training.*”

This does apply to **VLIR-UOS master scholars** and **VLIR-UOS PhD scholars**, also in case the latter travel to Belgium for a pre-doc or compulsory training.

For **travel grant students (Reisbeurzen)** travelling from Belgium to a third country, see ‘Travel grants (Reisbeurzen)’ in this document.

Non-essential travel

To Belgium

Please consult the platform “reopen EU” for actual information on travel to Belgium: <https://reopen.europa.eu/en/map/BEL> and click the relevant icons:

Non-essential travels from certain third countries outside Belgium (Schengen Area and the United Kingdom) to Belgium remain prohibited with few exceptions. For the time being, travels of training scholars, project/programme- members and visitors from extra-Schengen countries to Belgium are **not considered essential** journeys (e.g. promoters who would travel for a PhD-defense, the development of project activities or steering committee meetings). Hence they **will not receive a visa**.



What are the rules to enter this country from outside an EU Member State or Schengen Associated country?

Last update: 30-11-2020

Travel from third countries remains prohibited with few exceptions. Essential travel to Belgium is allowed, while respecting restrictions (see question on quarantine).

For more information please check the website of the Federal Public Service (FPS) Foreign Affairs (<https://diplomatie.belgium.be/en>).

The FPS is advising against all travel. Depending on the answers to the self-assessment questionnaire attached to the Passenger Locator Form, a traveller may be required to comply with a quarantine. After 7 days in quarantine, there is a compulsory [test](#).

Travellers should be aware that new COVID-19 outbreaks abroad can greatly affect their trip and that repatriation cannot be guaranteed if commercial flights are suspended or borders closed.

From Belgium

For information per country, please check the website of the FPS Foreign Affairs (<https://diplomatie.belgium.be/en>).

Please check your institution’s policy on essential travels and follow the guidelines and procedures that are in place. It is highly recommended to consult the travel advice from Foreign Affairs, which is continually updated (https://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/services/travelling_abroad/travel_advice_by_country).

Visa for Belgium

Visa services at Belgian Embassies and visa application centers (VFS, TLS) are (partly) operational. Overall, students can make an appointment to apply for a long-term study visa. In some countries the embassy does not provide short term visa. This depends on the local Corona-situation and the risks assessment made by the Embassy. **If you would want to apply for a short term visa, please contact the Embassy or visa service directly to check whether this is possible and under what conditions.**

Country	Visa address
Benin	Embassy Benin
Bolivia	Embassy Lima
Burundi	Embassy Bujumbura

Burkina Faso	Embassy Burkina Faso
Cambodia	Embassy Thailand
Cameroon	VFS Cameroon
Cuba	Embassy Cuba
DR Congo	Centre européen de visa
Ecuador	Embassy Lima
Ethiopia	Embassy Addis Abeba
Guatemala	Embassy Panama
Guinea	Embassy Senegal
Haiti	Embassy Cuba
Indonesia	Embassy Indonesia
Kenya	Embassy Nairobi
Madagascar	Embassy Nairobi
Mali	Embassy Mali
Morocco	TLS Morocco
Mozambique	TLS South Africa
Nicaragua	Embassy Panama
Niger	Embassy Niger
Palestine	Embassy Jerusalem
Peru	Embassy Peru
Philippines	VFS Philippines
Rwanda	VFS Rwanda
Senegal	Embassy Senegal
South Africa	TLS South Africa
Tanzania	Embassy Tanzania
Uganda	VFS Uganda
Vietnam	VFS Vietnam
Zimbabwe	TLS South Africa

Flights to and from Belgium

Booking a flight

Flights can be booked (if available/possible) but it is required to book **tickets that can be changed for a minimum surcharge / fee**. Please always **check travel restrictions / bans** (more info [here](#)) before planning any travel.

We do not allow tickets (and subsequent costs) purchased between 12 March 2020 and 1 July 2020 but cancelled due to the Corona crisis, to be imputed on your programme, project of scholarship budget.

Costs for tickets for repatriation flights that were organised after March 12th can be reimbursed.

Flights booked in 2020 for 2021

The cost of a ticket purchased and paid in 2020 for a flight that will take place in 2021, is accountable to activity year 2020, as the ticket delivery is the service of the travel agency that was rendered in 2020. When reporting on these 2020 attributed costs in reporting year 2021, the actual use of this purchase is to be proven.

Repatriation flights

In a number of countries all commercial flights are suspended until further notice. Some authorities however organize repatriation flights for which nationals can register (e.g. Vietnam, Uganda, Peru, Cuba...). All scholars who are still in Belgium are advised to contact their embassy in Belgium/Schengen as soon as possible and register for repatriation flights (if available). The costs of these flights (and possible additional transportation costs e.g. train tickets to travel to the place of departure in another Schengen country) can be refunded based on receipts. If the departure of a repatriation flight is foreseen in another Schengen country, please make sure to check the validity of the visa/resident cards in Schengen area.

Specific Corona-measures and related costs

Covid tests in home country – before traveling to Belgium

Most air companies and some insurance companies in Belgium require the submission of negative Covid-19 test results before boarding a plane coming to Belgium. **The costs of such a Covid-19 test can be refunded** upon arrival in Belgium, on top of the 150 EUR indirect travel costs, up to a **maximum of 150 EUR**, and only if students provide:

- a communication from the airline, local authority or insurance company stating that a test is required;
- a receipt / proof of payment.

Arrival in Belgium

Students travelling to Belgium by airplane or by boat are required to complete (preferably online) the [Public Health Passenger Locator Form](#) before boarding. After filling in the online form, each traveller will receive a QR code via e-mail, as proof that the PLF was completed. In addition, students travelling from a red zone will also receive a text message with a "corona test prescription code". This is a combination of 16 digits and letters giving direct access to a PCR test in a test centre or laboratory (without having to visit a general practitioner). The test centre will check the validity of the corona test prescription code

and complete an eForm. Students will also have to stay in self-quarantine for max.14 days, during which social distancing and other protective measures must be respected.

Covid tests in Belgium

After traveling from a red zone

Travellers coming from a red-zone country will have to undergo a Covid-19 test in one of the test centers. The test is free of charge for persons who are insured by one of the health insurance funds (called “mutualiteit” in Dutch) (i.e. costs are settled directly with the health insurance). Persons who are not insured (yet) will have to pay for the test. The costs for a standard test can be refunded upon submission of receipt/proof of payment. A second test can be done on day 9 (but this is not obliged). If both the first and the second test were negative, there is no need for continuing quarantine. The costs for a second standard test can be reimbursed based on receipts/proof of payment.

Please note that the consultation fee for a general practitioner for a Covid test in Belgium cannot be refunded separately. These costs will have to be covered by the scholar him/herself. The costs for the actual standard test can be refunded.

Before traveling to home country

For most local authorities and/or some air companies, a negative Covid-test result will have to be provided before boarding a flight to one of the partner- or scholarship countries. If a Covid-test is required by national regulations / air companies, the costs of such a test can be refunded, based on receipts and with provision of documents proving a test is required.

Covid-test in the home country – after travelling from Belgium

In a number of countries an additional Covid test is required upon arrival/ a few days after arriving from Belgium. If a Covid test **upon arrival** is required by national regulations, the costs of such a test can be refunded based on receipts and with provision of documents proving a test is obligatory.

Quarantine in Belgium

Everyone coming from a red-zone and arriving in Belgium has to quarantine for max. 14 days.

“Quarantine” can be defined (see also https://covid-19.sciensano.be/sites/default/files/Covid19/COVID-19_FAQ_travel_NL.pdf) as follows:

- You have to stay in one designated place that they communicated on before, via the Passenger Locator Form.
- Contact with other people should be avoided, including people who are staying in the same house/location (always keeping a distance of 1.5m is the overall rule).
- Towels, bed linen and utensils/plates/cooking material should not be shared with other housemates.
- If possible a separate toilet and bathroom should be used.
- Availability to the health authorities should be guaranteed at all times.
- Visits from ‘external’ people are not allowed.
- Physically attending social and school related activities is not allowed during this 14-day period. Classes can only be followed online, not on campus.
- You can leave their residence – if they wear a face mask- for essentials like purchasing of food or medical supplies, arranging urgent financial matters etc.
- Use of public transportation is to be avoided as much as possible.

No additional costs are expected related to these quarantine requirements. All universities and university colleges have quarantine guidelines/protocols in place for students and staff. Make sure to check these first.

Quarantine in home country

In some of the partner- and scholarship countries, quarantine measures are in place. Persons arriving will have to go in quarantine in facilities that are appointed by the government, for a specific period of time (from 1 day – 14 days). These accommodation costs can be refunded if:

- **proof of the necessity** of the quarantine as imposed by the government is provided by means of a **local attestation/document** stating the quarantine requirements and indicating which facilities are to be used, for how long and what this would cost. Overall, this document is provided by the ministry of health/specific Covid-19 task forces or embassies.
- the respective government is not intervening in the costs.
- **proof of payment** / receipt of the quarantine facility is provided.
- **cost-effective** options are booked as much as possible.

For ICP and ITP scholarship holders, these costs should be imputed on the Flemish university's scholarships programme budget.

Taxi costs in Belgium

For scholars, transportation costs using taxi services, from the airport to the university city, **cannot be refunded** in addition to the indirect travel costs. If institutions which to make use of a taxi-service, these costs have to be covered by the (indirect travel cost allowance of the) student.

Costs to send personal belongings

For those students who were in their home country during the second semester of the academic year 2019-2020, in the framework of an internship / thesis research as part of a VLIR-UOS supported master program and who were unable to return to Belgium because of the health crisis and related travel bans, costs related to sending their personal belongings to them can be refunded. In any case the most cost-effective solution has to be sought.

Scholarship guidelines

General principles

Financial issues

All financial issues related to scholars / grantees are dealt with by the Flemish HEIs, not by VLIR-UOS directly.

Mobility

Existing planning implying outgoing mobility from Belgium to the home country can be pursued after the outgoing mobility ban ends or in case repatriation flights are organised, and in any case by verifying home country policy (via home country embassy/consulate in Belgium) and the availability of effective travel options.

VLIR-UOS scholarship holders who left Belgium before the end of the period for which they had already received a scholarship payment, are obliged to repay the part to which they are not entitled.

VLIR-UOS 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.

Scholarship extensions due to force majeure

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 and pro rata until the day of departure. We repeat that **prior consultation** is required by the scholar with the **Flemish university promoter and/or the ICOS/GEO** and by the latter with the respective **VLIR-UOS programme manager**.

Please note that scholars might have to extend **their resident card** or visa if they have to stay here longer than foreseen. In that case, they should contact the city administration and provide them with a number of documents.

PhD sandwich ratio

If, due to the Corona crisis (force majeure), a PhD-scholar had to stay in Belgium for a longer period of time than initially foreseen, the sandwich ratio of the scholarship can exceptionally be exceeded given motivation is provided and given there is **approval of the promotors, project-leaders and programme coordinators (if relevant) and the respective VLIR-UOS programme manager**.

Local allowance ICP students

If ICP-students are unable to travel to Belgium (due to travel restrictions/bans) they are allowed to follow the master programme online during a limited period of time, until the deadline set by the programme (depending on the programme). All students are entitled to their full allowance of 12/24 months and will receive the allowance latest upon arrival on campus. The logistical allowance can also be paid for. **It is up to the programme/university to decide how the payment will be organized**. If relevant, additional banking costs can be submitted as part of the scholarship financial report 2020.

Project and programme activities

Cancellation costs

Costs related to cancellations due to the corona crisis that are non-refundable by insurance / travel agency etc. can in principle be imputed on the project/programme budget. Cancellation costs can only 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 dated of the activity) and proof that the insurance does not cover these costs.

Project extensions

For the time being project extensions are only possible up to the end of 2021 (end of the current formal framework with DGD (Belgian Development Cooperation)). Project extensions can be requested using the relevant formats that are available on the document section of our website.

- All TEAM 2017 projects are allowed to be extended by up to 12 months (activity year 5) till 31/12/2021 (maximum).
- JOINT 2018, SI 2018 and SI 2019 projects are allowed be extended by up to 12 months instead of the 6 months provided for in the contract.
- The 'transversal projects DR Congo' initiated before 2017 (continuation included in JOINT 2017 and closing at the end of 2020) will also be offered the possibility to apply for an extension of maximum 12 months instead of the contractually foreseen 6 months.
- The ongoing phase of the IUC programmes UCB (DR Congo) UNIKIS (DR Congo), UB (Burundi) will be complemented with an extension of the 2020 activity year 10 (2020) so that the unspent budget of 2020 becomes additionally available in 2021 for finalization of project activities. This will be implemented via an addendum to the ongoing partner programme agreement and executed in parallel with the implementation of the Phase Out programme agreement targeting a successful closing of the programme.
- The ongoing IUC Phase Out agreements of UNALM and UL can be revised as such that the unspent budget of year 11 (2020) becomes available in the closing activity year 12 (2021).

Until further notice, extensions beyond the deadline of 31/12/2021, being the final and overall deadline for all projects, is not possible. The Bureau UOS has mandated VLIR-UOS to submit a request to DGD to discuss possibilities of flexibilising the limits of the present FYP. This will be done in concertation with other actors of the non-governmental cooperation that are also funded by DGD.

International training programmes: postponement

ITP programmes that were selected for organization in 2020 but had to be cancelled due to the Corona-crisis can be postponed to 2021. For those programmes that were selected for organization in both 2020 and 2021, this means that in 2021 there can be two editions for 12 scholars each or one edition with 24 scholars.

Flexibilisation of rules on spending ratio

The Bureau UOS has decided that the original spending rates for 2020 have been adapted as such that there is no minimal spending ratio, and as is already the case for TEAM-SI-JOINT projects within this FYP, all unspent budget of activity year 2020 is transferable to activity year 2021. However, we do advise to reschedule project activities as much as possible given the exceptional circumstances. This measure is adopted for activity year 2020 only; budgets unspent in 2020 can only be spent in the remaining year 2021.

Overview

Type of intervention and start-up year per period (in chronological order) – A. measures and B. measures	Extension subject to justified request		Spending ratio 2020	
	Contractual possibility	Flexibilisation Bureau UOS 2020-04-24	Contractual obligation	Flexibilisation Bureau UOS 2020-04-24
B. Before current FYP				
TEAM 2016	Extension with Year 5 activity year (2020) up to max. 12 months after prior agreement of DGD	Extension with Year 5 activity year (2020) until end date 31/12/2020, after prior agreement of DGD.	n.a.	n.a.
A. Current FYP: partner country programmes				
TEAM 2017	1 year	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
JOINT 2017 ending end of 2020 ('projet transversal RD Congo')	6 months	1 year (simplified request)	n.a.	n.a.
SI and JOINT 2018 and SI 2019			n.a.	n.a.
IUC and NETWORK	n.a.	n.a.	100%	no minimum
IUC activity year 10 (2020) (UCB and UNIKIS-DRC; UB-Burundi)	n.a.	1 year (budget Y 10 added to Phase Out Y11)	100%	no minimum
IUC Phase Out contracts (2020-2021, case of UNALM-Peru and UL-South Africa)	n.a.	n.a.	100%	no minimum
A. Current FYP: Belgium programme				
Scholarships programme (ICP, ITP and phasing out ICP PhD)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Get Together Night	n.a.	n.a.	100%	100%
ICP	n.a.	n.a.	90%	no minimum
ITP	n.a.	postponement (to 2021)	n.a.	n.a.
GM	n.a.	n.a.	90%	no minimum
PSR	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
A. Current FYP: costs outside the country programmes				
ORG	n.a.	n.a.	90%	90%
B. Next FYP				
All questions impacting 2022 budgets and beyond will be submitted to DGD in May 2020.				

Travel grants (Reisbeurzen)

Travelling to a country of the VLIR-UOS scholarship country list

Authorization to travel to a VLIR-UOS scholarship country must be obtained on 4 levels:

- (1) The **governmental** ban on non-essential trips outside Belgium (Schengen Area and the United Kingdom) remains in force until further notice. This means that students are in principle allowed to travel to any of the scholarship countries for an internship or thesis research work, as student travels can be considered essential (<https://www.info-coronavirus.be/nl/faq/>).
- (2) However, the **Flemish university (college)** might prohibit this or impose restrictions or conditions. We therefore advise all students to contact the ICOS/GEO responsible for the travel grants at their institution in order to receive more information on travel regulations, (postponement of) travel grant calls, selection, alternatives etc.
- (3) Moreover, one needs to take into account the **destination country's policy** in this respect, even if the Flemish university (college) policy allows a student to travel. Whether a student will be able to obtain a visa entirely depends on the embassy of the destination country, which must be contacted. And besides that formal element, no student will want to face quarantine measures upon arrival in the destination country and upon return in Belgium. There is no general information to be provided on this matter however, so one needs to consult the official governmental information for the country in question. This can be done via https://diplomatie.belgium.be/nl/Diensten/Op_reis_in_het_buitenland/reisadviezen and/or via the destination country's embassy in Belgium.
- (4) Finally, one must not forget to take into account **the policy of the receiving institution** in the destination country. This institution might not be willing to accommodate an internship in times of Corona, for various reasons.

Expenses made, but unable to travel to the country of destination

Students who were still in Belgium and could not travel due to travel bans / flight cancellations but 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 should also provide their university (college) with documents/communication proving that they have taken all steps required to request a refund of the flight ticket. In case vouchers are provided, the university (college) cannot refund the original ticket.

Return to Belgium earlier than planned

Students who were **already in one of the scholarship countries** 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 contribution to the overall cost of travel and subsistence –, 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**.

