



Vilnius  
University

## ERASMUS+ POLICY STATEMENT

VILNIAUS UNIVERSITETAS

Erasmus+ ID code: LT VILNIUS01

Vilnius University being the oldest and the biggest university in Lithuania (20,000 students, 3,000 academic and research staff) faces constant challenges in the rapidly changing local, European and Global milieu of maintaining its position among the Top 500 universities in the QS rankings and the leading higher education institution in the country. The new 2020-2026 Strategic Plan of Vilnius University being under development, the basic principles and directions of the Strategic Plan 2018-2020, as the platform for the institutional development trajectory, will be maintained. Strategy of internationalization is one of them and is seen as the horizontal university activity visible in and encompassing all its spheres; reaching every single member of the academic community. The old Strategic Plan (2018-2020) included key performance indicators of international nature in all 9 strategic directions. Each direction had been implemented through several specially designed and university-funded strategic projects, thus leading to: studies internationalization assessment system, funding support for internationalization, development of international study environment, etc...

Vilnius University has been one of the founders of the Arqus network which has received the European Commission funding under European Universities call in 2019. The network has been set on the understanding that all seven partner universities share common values and strategic priorities. The network's priorities and plans will be diligently reflected in the new Vilnius University's strategy and will set a firm basis for policy and practice of participation in Erasmus+. Such core values as societal impact, democracy, respect for diversity and human rights, work towards United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, academic freedom, equity and inclusion will be guiding principles for reaching major Arqus network goals and Vilnius University strategy in general and participation in Erasmus+ in particular. The University will seek structural integration among the network partners by enabling its student and staff through numerous activities available under Erasmus+ programme.

The main strategic action lines of the University and its Erasmus+ participation policy will be closely connected to the Renewed EU agenda for Modernisation of Higher education (2017): tackling future skills mismatches and promoting excellence in skills development; building inclusive and connected higher education systems; ensuring higher education institutions contribute to innovation; supporting effective and efficient higher education systems. While selecting specific paths for University's development and setting priorities for area support, the focal point will remain the **European dimension and values**. International cooperation in general and development of all types of mobility in particular are seen as a basic right and a value for development of the institution, helping it to fulfill its mission to society, region and the world. Therefore, the university is open to cooperation with all institutions of higher education that are comparable in their profile or any cross-sectorial cooperation where either academic or scientific interests of academic/research staff and students are met. The main activities to be prioritized under Erasmus+ will lead to and ensure reaching broad horizontal **strategic University priorities** for internationalisation, such as:

1. Strengthening the University's role in Arqus network for reaching the **European University** goals, setting stable structures and ensuring joint international activities and in all spheres of the university life;

2. Increasing **mobility** in all possible forms (physical, virtual, and blended) and structures (joint programmes, short intensive courses, twinning; mobility windows);
3. Enhancing student centred **frameworks for learning** and employability by: sharing practices with the peers in the Arqus network and outside it; promoting interdisciplinarity and introducing new modes of learning and teaching (blended, virtual, work-based); enhancing **recognition** of non-formal learning and ensuring automatic recognition of study periods abroad and of qualifications of some partners;
4. Promoting **multilingualism** by ensuring diverse foreign language preparation for local students and access to Lithuanian and foreign language learning for the international students;
5. Stimulating student **entrepreneurship** competences across different areas by strengthening student participation in (smart) internships and engagement in such activities with local and international communities as voluntary work, hackathons, etc...
6. Ensuring **global university engagement** through participation in Erasmus+ projects (such as Capacity Building) and mobility schemes (International credit mobility and international opening in KA103);
7. Designing and implementing comprehensive Vilnius university **sustainability** strategy based on the best international practices;
8. **Widening access and inclusion** by sharing best practices, carrying out joint activities among the partners and setting new approaches and models.

The main **working principle** in using all the opportunities offered by the programme rests on the balance between institutional co-ordination, top-down initiative and support on the one hand, and autonomous initiatives of the faculties, departments and individuals on the other. This participatory and inclusive principle, as the main strategy for participation in Erasmus+ programme, has been maintained throughout the years and proved itself suitable for the university culture. Therefore, inter-institutional agreements and/or projects, though signed by the persons empowered to do so, may be (and are) instigated by any member of the University – from students to Rector - if concrete and realistic cooperation goals in line with institutional values and broad strategic goals are set. This approach allows involving community members, enhancing existing practices and opening new venues for international cooperation, improving University strategies and policies.

**Through joint Erasmus+ activities and shared good practices, the University plans to give new impetus, refine and enhance:**

1. Incoming and outgoing student and staff mobility for study, traineeship, teaching, and training;
2. More versatile mobility forms and improved digitalized services;
3. New forms of learning and teaching and new pedagogies;
4. Quality culture and quality assurance practices as the pivotal areas for constant improvement;
5. Staff development system;
6. Sustainability policy and practice;
7. Entrepreneurial skills education and initiatives;
8. Policy of non-discrimination and inclusion;
9. Life-long learning strategies;
10. Multilingual policy;
11. Joint programmes leading to joint/multiple degrees.

Mobility and cross border cooperation being the hallmark of the University and Erasmus+ implementation strategy will be given special attention by strengthening support services through their full **digitalization**. Erasmus Without Papers (EWP) initiative, which is only partially implemented, and European Student Card will become fully functional. The plans for increasing staff and student exchanges include introduction of such innovations as mobility windows and subject area related twinning initiatives for which Erasmus+ support is

crucial. Virtual cooperation/learning means in international format are envisaged to be given greater prominence so that more local students could benefit from international exposure.

Though the University has fully implemented automatic study period **recognition** based on ECTS principles, further advancement of the system by removing challenges arising from IT student database is envisaged. The whole recognition system will be further refined according to the recommendations jointly agreed on by Arqus network universities and made fully compatible among the seven partners.

Though all student and staff mobility under KA1 will be a backbone activity in the new Erasmus+ funding period, all the possibilities under KA2 and KA3 calls will be promoted, supported and, if funded, implemented to the best of the institutional capacity and commitment. During the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ period Vilnius University has participated in 46 projects – Knowledge Alliance, Strategic partnerships, Capacity Building, Erasmus Mundus Master courses, Jean Monnet, Europe for Citizens and some of the initiatives under KA3. Establishment of Arqus network and approval of its project under Erasmus+ call for European Universities is one of the biggest achievements of continuous work during the previous E+ period. Though Arqus alliance will be the most important strategic partnership, the University will continue to encourage and support participation in the new generation of cooperation projects under Erasmus Key Action 2 (KA2) – Partnership for Cooperation and Exchange of Practices; Partnership for Excellence – European Universities and Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees; and Partnership for Innovation. Participation in the projects will foster deeper cooperation between university and business and ensure transference of knowledge and skills between these two areas. It will help to widen University's outreach, increase visibility and gain expertise in various areas of university life. Participation in the projects will be of utmost importance for developing "out of box" thinking, giving room for piloting new ideas at the University, and placing it among important actors and even game-changers of European Education Area. All the know-how and experience gained during participation in various projects and activities will be shared with and best practices transferred into the structures and working culture of Arqus European University.

The University plans to expand considerably cooperation with the third countries by building up on experience gained from previous successful cooperation. Having implemented significant changes in structure, governance, curricula development and teaching/learning approaches as well as having played the leading role in a number of national initiatives and reforms the University has necessary know-how and experience to share it with its peers outside the European Union.

The University is committed to participate in the activities for policy reforms through supporting its dedicated staff involved in these initiatives.

The top-down and bottom-up principles will govern University's involvement in various Erasmus+ projects. International Relations Office (IRO) and Department of Development have dedicated staff that ensure necessary support during all stages of project development, writing, implementation and reporting or may initiate the projects themselves. Each faculty of the University has international faculty coordinators who have academic and administrative decision-making power. They ensure that all project initiatives and inter-institutional Erasmus+ agreements are in line with the strategic goals of the faculty and the University, and provide support on the faculty level. They also ensure that new initiatives feed into the mainstream of the University life and the project results are embedded on a wide scale.

Erasmus+ programme is seen as a powerful strategic tool to help the University to reach its strategic goals, ensure peer-benchmarking activities and enhance quality through joint activities and sharing good practices.

**Target groups:** The target groups for Erasmus+ activities encompass the whole University community: students, academic, research, and administrative staff. All these groups will be supplied with information and necessary support provided enabling them to take part in any activities of the programme, be it individual mobility or university participation in the project.

Participation in the programme is planned to have significant **impact** on the following areas of the University activities:

**Mobility:** The University had 1,300 Erasmus+ agreements with 555 institutions from participating countries in 2018/2019 and 201 bilateral University agreements, 150 of them being with the non-EU countries (with average annual exchange of about 150-200 students). About 1,000 Vilnius University students annually benefit from the study periods and traineeships abroad under Erasmus+ programme. The number of incoming Erasmus students

has been steadily growing from 363 in 2014/2015 to 540 in 2018/2019. To foster strategic partnerships and increase mobility destination choices the University participates in two multilateral open Erasmus+ agreements (The Coimbra Group Student Exchange Network (CG SEN) and Open ARQUS student and staff mobility scheme (OAM) developed by Vilnius University in 2019). Through flexible curricula and joint activities, the University plans to reach 50% of physical student mobility (standard, blended, twinning) by 2027 and 100% of students benefiting from exposure to international activities by any other means (virtual mobility and exchanges, guest lecturers, involvement with international students).

**Digitalization and enhancement of mobility services:** The elements of Erasmus Without Papers (EWP) are used by the University whenever the partnerships allow it. Introduction of EWP tools will be finalized according to the deadlines planned by the European Commission. The platform integrating EWP by 2021 should replace the in-home made tool used for mobility. The European Student Card will be introduced as soon as final requirements, national conditions and responsibilities for the card will be clarified at the national level. The orientation weeks (at the beginning of each semester) for the international students will be further organized and the online module of the week will be developed by 2021.

**Recognition practices:** Full academic recognition of study/traineeship periods abroad for all mobile students is ensured by the University regulations and is a standard practice at the University however some miscellaneous deviations still might occur due to specific circumstances. In the new Erasmus+ period monitoring of the recognition will be strengthened by organizing focus groups and additional questionnaires for students who end up with academic debts after mobility period. Seamless student mobility and automatic recognition within Arqus network has to be reached by 2023.

**Curricula enhancement:** new mobility forms are expected to significantly influence curricula development. New study programmes with mobility windows, subject area twinning mobility, virtual exchange and blended mobility options should be functional by 2027. Development of joint programmes with European partners will be supported by mobility opportunities. By 2027 academic staff mobility for teaching is expected at least to double from 163 mobilities reached in 2018/2019, leading to knowledge sharing and development of new pedagogies. Staff mobility for curricula development and various joint activities will be strongly affected and enhanced by Arqus European University initiatives.

#### **Quality enhancement and staff development:**

The university offers more than 50 study programmes (the number is growing each year) and around 600 courses in English language for the international and local students. The primary aim is to ensure support for the staff teaching in non-native language. Staff development trainings on English as Medium of Instruction by guest lecturers are planned twice a year. The tradition of yearly international staff week bringing together international academic and administrative staff to Vilnius University will be maintained. Quality issues and staff development will be supported on the basis of peer-to-peer mobility and their involvement in the projects.

**Sustainability practices:** Sustainability policy and strategy will be finalized and practically implemented. It will also include joint and commonly agreed approaches to sustainable mobility among Arqus partners.

The following **indicators** will be used to monitor the implementation and impact of the programme:

#### **Quantitative:**

1. Number/percentage of incoming and outgoing students for study and traineeships;
2. Percentage of students travelling by sustainable means;
3. Percentage of special needs students participating in mobility;
4. Number/percentage of students participating in virtual exchange;
5. Number/percentage of incoming and outgoing staff for teaching;
6. Number/percentage of incoming and outgoing staff to enterprises;
7. Number/percentage of teachers teaching online courses to international students;
8. Number/percentage of incoming and outgoing administrative staff;

9. Percentage of teachers having participated in staff development;
10. Percentage of modules offered in English;
11. Number of new modules and/or modules with innovative pedagogy as a result of mobility;
12. Number of joint programmes and/or modules;
13. Number of short intensive (blended) courses;
14. Number of integration activities for incoming students and staff;
15. Number of submitted and approved project application under Erasmus+ KA2;
16. Number of staff involved in policy reform projects.

**Qualitative:**

1. Student (incoming) satisfaction with studies (questionnaires);
2. Student (incoming, outgoing) satisfaction with services (surveys and focus groups);
3. Sustainable mobility remuneration system/practice;
4. Various language courses available for local and incoming students;
5. Academic staff satisfaction with services (questionnaires, feedback during meetings);
6. Updated programmes and modules quality assured by the University Committee;
7. IT tools and information in two languages – Lithuanian and English;
8. Progress in Arqus network work plan implementation;
9. Dynamics of partner instructions from participating and partner countries.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

*Please explain the measures taken in your institution to respect the principles of non-discrimination, transparency and inclusion of students and staff. Describe how your institution ensures full and equitable access to participants from all backgrounds, paying particular attention to the inclusion of those with fewer opportunities.*

“Vilnius University Diversity And Equal Opportunities Strategy 2020-2025” has been approved by the University Senate in 2020. The strategy sets University study and work environment benchmarks that promote individual, social and cultural diversity and ensure equal opportunities for the University’s community. The strategy shall be applicable to anyone who is studying, working, visiting or otherwise engaged with the University. Particular attention is paid to ensuring equal opportunities in the areas of disability, gender equality, different cultures and social status through pursuing following objectives:

1. Strive for dignified, need-oriented and high-quality study and work conditions at the University for people with disability (measures: workplaces and study individualized plans, taking into account the needs arising from disability, removing physical barriers of the University’s environment);
2. Strive for gender equality in all areas of science and studies through implementing gender equality plans in respect to students and staff and gender balance in the University governing bodies (measures: guidelines for gender-inclusive language, gender equality plan of the University);
3. Promote cultural diversity and seek full inclusion of foreign students and staff into the University community (measures: information systems (intranet) in English for students and employees, mentoring assistance for foreign students/staff, consultation services based on the “single entry” principle);
4. Search for the ways to widen access to socially excluded people (due to financial or other circumstances) to study at the University (measures: support system for students with socially-complex backgrounds, additional Erasmus grant for outgoing students from disadvantaged groups);
5. Develop measures that help members of the University community to better balance study and/or work commitments with personal ones (maternity, paternity, caretaking of relatives, etc.) (measures: children playroom service for employees’ children; mother/father and baby care rooms, educational summer camps for students/employees’ children);
6. Develop anti-discrimination measures to reduce direct and indirect discrimination indicated in the legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania, and to foster institutional culture that values diversity and respects each member (measures: guidelines for lecturers on how to work with diverse classroom).

IRO and Community Development Office (CDO) closely cooperate to ensure that participation in Erasmus+ activities would be communicated clearly and comprehensively to all the disadvantaged groups. Every autumn semester a separate one-day event to people with disabilities is organized on the topic. Students and staff get to know requirements on special conditions at partner universities, get consultations on the best destinations for mobility, and are informed on the requirements for top-up grants. Incoming students/staff with disabilities are encouraged to register with CDO where they get extra care and support throughout their stay at Vilnius University. CDO gives exhaustive information about their activities during the Orientation weeks were all students, irrespective of their types of exclusion and/or perceived discrimination, are invited to contact the Office with their difficulties.

*Please explain what measures your institution will put in place to implement the European Student Card Initiative, and promote the use of the programme’s Erasmus+ mobile App to students. Please refer to the timeline indicated on the European Student Card Initiative website.*

The University is committed to fully implement digital services for Erasmus+ mobility participants. Alongside other tools that are being implemented, Erasmus+ mobile App is being promoted to all outgoing students by providing information during info-sessions before the mobility, by emails, and individual consultations. The information is provided to international faculty coordinators. The link on information on Erasmus+ mobile App is included into leaflets and brochures to all mobile students. All outgoing students, if partnership allows, are encouraged to compose their online Learning Agreement for studies in Erasmus+ Dashboard. All the international faculty coordinators have their own OLA accounts for signing OLA.

The Lithuanian Student Card (LSC) is the responsibility of the Student Union who manages personal data of the students and ensures extra benefits the LSC provides. The University approach is that LSC and ESC initiatives should go hand in hand. Therefore, the President of Vilnius University Student Representation is personally involved into the working group to start implementation of European Student Card Initiative at the national and the University levels. The general University plans foresee that ESC will be functional by 2023 at the latest. The ESC will be promoted and implemented by all Arqus partners, with the optimal structural integration possibilities for ensuring future seamless mobility among the partners.

*Please explain how your institutions will implement and promote environmentally friendly practices in the context of the Erasmus+ programme.*

The Lithuanian Universities Rector's Conference has signed the Agreement on Climate change in January 2020. This is the top-level commitment to educate the University community on the climate change impact to the society as well as develop research on solutions to reduce the nature damage. The Sustainable Development Goals is at the heart of the strategy. The Action plan and its implementation steps for upcoming years is being developed.

At the moment, Vilnius university encourages separate miscellaneous activities related to sustainability and environmental friendly practices (e.g. Vilnius University Student Representation organizes the scientific conferences on sustainability). The sustainability action line will be among one of the priorities of the future Strategic Plan (2020-2026) of the university.

To ensure sustainable participation in Erasmus+, the following means will be introduced:

1. Starting with academic year 2021-2022, to reduce the negative impact of air-travel, all outgoing Erasmus students travelling to/from receiving country by train will receive the top-up amount of 150 Euros after submitting travel documents;
2. The use of EWP tools will be actively promoted and introduced by 2023: OLA and Erasmus+ App for students, Erasmus Inter-institutional agreements in the IIA Manager, the new software to manage outgoing/ incoming mobility flows.

University souvenirs to mobile participants will include goods from recyclable materials and environmental friendly /sustainability requirement for all public procurement will be included.

*Please explain how you will promote civic engagement and active citizenship amongst your outgoing and incoming students before, after and during mobility.*

The University promotes and organises activities that allow mobile students/staff to be civically engaged into local community. All mobile students take part in Vilnius University ESN section activities. University provides financial support to ESN events and projects. In the past years international mobile students took part in Erasmus Student Network (ESN) projects: 1) "Erasmus in Schools" which included them into social and volunteering activities in Lithuania; 2) "Exchange Ability" – aimed at students with disabilities, promoting mobility opportunities and removing obstacles for it; 3) "Multilingual Lithuania" - free language lessons conducted by native speakers (foreign students) eager to teach languages through their culture, traditions and lifestyle.

During the mobility all incoming students are strongly encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities with local students and staff by joining University student clubs, theatres, choirs, ensembles, sport clubs or becoming a volunteer. CDO organizes many kinds of volunteering activities and mobile students are invited to contribute to cultural, civic, social and voluntary activities as well as the organisation of leisure and other events at Vilnius University and beyond.

Orientation Week for incoming students is organized by IRO and ESN twice per year before semester. Every incoming student can apply and gets an ESN buddy. Mobile participants take part in the traditional celebration with local community (the celebration ceremonies of the start/finish of the academic year, University birthday, etc.)

After the mobility, the outgoing participants who have been on mobility are invited to share their experience by promoting mobility activities to peers with fewer opportunities: Disability Affairs Coordinator and IRO organize small informal group meetings.

*Please demonstrate your commitment to implement full automatic recognition in your Higher Education Institution. Please describe the concrete steps you will take to ensure the full automatic recognition of all credits gained for learning outcomes achieved during a mobility period abroad/ a blended mobility, according to the Council Recommendation on Automatic Mutual Recognition.*

ECTS credits system it used since September 1, 2011. 60 credits measure the workload of a full-time student during one academic year and one credit stands for around 25 to 30 working hours.

Credits can be obtained only after successful completion of the work required and appropriate assessment of the learning outcomes achieved.

Vilnius University uses ECTS recommended grading tables and provides statistical distribution of local grades within the faculties and is included in the information on the ToRs.

The course catalogue and academic offer for incoming students is being renewed before each upcoming semester and is hosted on the link: <https://www.vu.lt/en/studies/exchange-students/courses-taught-in-foreign-languages>.

The principles of automatic recognition are embedded in the internal rules for sending students abroad. The updated regulations "Rules for sending Vilnius University students for a study period at foreign science and study institutions" have been approved by Pro-Rector for Studies in 2018. According to it the University automatically recognizes the learning outcomes of the student achieved during the study period at the receiving institution, if the student fulfils the requirements stipulated in the Learning Agreement, and receives a certificate/transcript or records (ToR) issued by the receiving institution. The international faculty coordinator is responsible for recognition of the learning outcomes obtained at the host institution once the mobile student submits the ToR or Traineeship Certificate.

Recognition of the learning outcomes obtained at the host institution is carried out by the international faculty coordinator in accordance with the Procedure for Recognition of Learning Outcomes at Vilnius University. If the student fulfilled all the formal requirements (concluded a Learning Agreement, made approved changes of the LA, successfully implemented the planned study programme), all the obtained qualitative assessments of study achievements (grades) and quantitative assessments (credits) shall be recognized and included in the diploma supplement without converting the assessments of study achievement (grades) to the University's assessment system.

The appeal procedure on the institutional level is available for the students unsatisfied with the recognition results. The Appeal Committee formed by the Rector's Order shall revise the student's appeal and shall make the decision on results of the recognition.

Student mobility for traineeship: If the student fulfilled all the formal requirements concluded in the Learning Agreement for Traineeship and the mandatory traineeship is included into study programme all the ECTS credits will be automatically recognized and included in the diploma supplement.

Automatic recognition within Arqus network is one of the priorities. Common guidelines for automatic recognition will be developed and applicable to all partners.

*Please describe your institution's measures to support, promote and recognise staff mobility:*

Staff mobility is regarded as means for strengthening cooperation with partner universities, develop competences of the staff and enhance quality of the studies. The University provides favourable conditions for mobile staff members by either replacing them during the mobility period or allowing flexible teaching schedule. As the staff selection for mobility periods is decentralized and carried out at the faculties/departments it allows to combine the mobility activities with strategic purposes of each individual unit and to select staff members whose teaching/training programmes clearly indicates activities relevant to the intended cooperation projects and/or



development of new teaching material. This approach helps to promote mobility activities and ensures the recognition of teaching and training activities and their sustainability after mobility.

Information on Erasmus opportunities for staff (application, deadlines, selection procedures, etc.) is published on the University's website, intranet, and newsletters, distributed in the departments. Information is provided in Lithuanian and English. University staff is consulted individually by e-mail and telephone. Information sessions on staff mobility opportunities are organized in the faculties/departments. Mobility time is seen as a part of employee's workload. The adopted human resource policy aims at improving intercultural competences of the staff by giving more weight to mobility activities and recognizing staff mobility as integral part of professional development. Additional cultural/language preparation is available to staff by encouraging attendance of seminars on intercultural communication and (or) language courses. The workshop series in language and cross-cultural competences: joint workshops in Arqus Academy for staff to increase their language and cross-cultural competences and to ensure inclusive and gender-appropriate language are planned.

*Please provide the web link where you will host the Erasmus Policy statement in the future. Please reflect on how you plan to regularly promote the activities supported by the Programme.*

The Erasmus Policy Statement is hosted on the link: <https://www.vu.lt/tarptautiniai-ryšiai>. Erasmus programme is well known university wide. IRO and international faculty coordinators are responsible for implementing the programme and provide students and staff with many activities that promote Erasmus programme. For outgoing students: Information sessions are held at least twice each semester by IRO and faculty staff before the mobility; Individual advising by IRO and academic mentoring by international faculty coordinators before, during and after mobility; Information about mobility options is provided on the webpages. Orientation Week for incoming students is organized by IRO and ESN before each semester.

Various communication channels are being used to promote the programme activities for students/staff: University website, intranet, social media (Facebook, Instagram, Youtube channel), online meetings, consulting individually by emails and phone.

*Please describe how you will ensure that the principles of this Charter will be well communicated and applied by staff at all levels of the institution.*

While preparing the application for ECHE 2021-27, the statements of EPS have been discussed and agreed-on with international faculty coordinators. The principles of ECHE are fully embedded at the University and recognized within the community. More attention will be given to promoting new ECHE principles - civic engagement, active citizenship and environmentally friendly practices - as the European values, even though these action lines will be addressed in the new Strategic plan of the University. IRO and international faculty coordinators are responsible for implementation of the Erasmus+ programme and other staff members could consult and follow recommendations. The principles of Charter are incorporated into standard documents of University: Rules for sending Vilnius University students for a study period at foreign science and study institutions, rules for sending students to traineeships abroad, etc.

The ECHE text will be displayed on University webpage.