

Call Priority Country Programme Academic year 2024-2025

1. General Description

The Priority Country Programme has been established with the aim of promoting exchanges of students between Belgium/Flanders and the following priority countries: Brazil, Chile, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, South Africa, Turkey and the United States of America.

Under the Priority Country Programme both a pair of students can be exchanged in the framework of a duo-project, as well as outgoing mobility from a Flemish higher education only.

Applications will be accepted from all Flemish higher education institutions, and in all disciplines. The grant can be used for study, internship or research for a bachelor/master thesis.

The total budget available for the Priority Country Programme 2024-2025 is € 500.000.

2. General eligibility criteria

In order to be eligible, the exchange project needs to fulfill all criteria below:

- The applicant of a Priority Country Programme grant is enrolled in a fulltime study programme of EQF level 5, 6 or 7.
- In case of study mobility: A higher education institution in Belgium/Flanders (home institution) and an educational institution in Brazil, Chile, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, South Africa, Turkey or the United States of America (host institution) have established an academic cooperation agreement or express the intention to set up a new cooperation agreement by writing a Letter of engagement.
In case of internship: A higher education institution in Belgium/Flanders (home institution) and an institution/organization/company in Brazil, Chile, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, South Africa, Turkey or the United States of America (host institution) have established a traineeship agreement.
- The Flemish higher education institution, as well as the partner from Brazil, Chile, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, South Africa, Turkey or the United States of America cannot ask tuition fees to the students for the exchanges.
- To be eligible for a Priority Country Programme grant, the student cannot be staying in the country of the host institution already at the time of the selection procedure.
- International students meet all academic entrance criteria, including relevant language requirements, for entering the study programme in the Flemish host institution.
- A maximum of 8 applications per country can be submitted per higher education institution.
- Nationality of the student is not a criterion.

3. Modalities

- The eligible period for mobilities under the Priority Country Programme 2024-2025 to take place is from July 2024 until September 2025.
- The obtained credits have to be recognized by the sending higher education institution.
- The selection for the Priority Country Programme is made only once a year. In this respect, those who are planning an exchange in the Spring Semester of 2025 (January-August 2025) shall apply for 2024-2025.
- The duration of a mobility under the Priority Country Programme 2024-2025 is minimum one month and maximum a year. Exception: for Turkey only short mobilities of **one month** for internship and study are eligible.
- A month is defined as a period of 30 days even if the month counts 28, 29 or 31 days, with the exception of the last month of mobility which needs to be minimum 26 days.

E.g.: 15/02 - 11/05:

- 15/02-14/03 = 30 days = 1 month
 - 15/03-14/04 = 30 days = 1 month
 - 15/04-11/05 = 27 days (sufficient for the last month)
- A grant can be maximum 4 months and is calculated according to the modalities below:
 - The grant amount is € 700/month for the Flemish student with a total maximum of € 2.800 and € 850/month for the incoming international student with a total maximum of € 3.400.
 - An extra € 200/month (with a total maximum of € 800) can be awarded to Flemish students that belong to the underrepresented groups in higher education:
 - Students who are entitled to a Flemish study allowance, confirmed by AHOVOKS.
 - Students with a disability, recognized by VAPH.
 - Working students in a work programme. The student must be an employee, or must be looking for a job, and the study programme must be aligned with the work programme proposed by the employment service. Moreover, the student cannot have obtained a Master degree or a second cycle diploma yet.

The data in the database of AHOVOKS will be considered as correct. The date of reference to determine whether a student comes from a low socio-economic background is the deadline of 29 March 2024. If on this date the request of the student is still being processed, the final decision of AHOVOKS will be awaited. As soon as the request is approved, the student will receive the extra € 200/month. Students from underrepresented groups can additionally send a request for financial aid to the department of social services for students of their institution.

- The reimbursement for travel expenses is calculated according to the following rules:

Distance to guest country	Amount in Euro
2000-2999 km (Morocco, Turkey)	360
>=8000 km (Brazil, Chile, Japan, Mexico, U.S.A., South Africa)	1500

- Upon completion of the mobility or exchange, all students, both outgoing and incoming, are expected to fill in a short questionnaire about their mobility and to submit an essay for which a format is provided.
- Students should not combine this scholarship with another scholarship from the Flemish Government or VLIR-UOS.

4. Application

Step 1: The Flemish institution preselects the applicants for the Priority Country Programme 2024-2025. This can be a student from a Flemish Host institution for outgoing mobility only or a pair of students in case of the duo-mobility. In case of a duo of students, a Flemish student is matched with an applicant from Brazil, Chile, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, South Africa, Turkey or the United States of America. The selection of both students has to be accepted by the institution where the student will be hosted.

Step 2: The Flemish institution starts the application procedure for the Priority Country Programme scholarship by creating the application file(s) in the Mobility-Online tool.

Step 3: The applicant(s) receive(s) an email generated by the Mobility-Online tool notifying him/her of being preselected for a Priority Country Programme scholarship.

Step 4: The applicant registers in the Mobility-Online tool and completes his/her application file in the Mobility-Online tool before the deadline.

Documents to be uploaded:

- Motivation letter of the student (maximum two A4 pages) with a personal and an academic/professional motivation.
- Official Transcript of records of the current and, if applicable, of the previous academic years during the current bachelor or master programme.
- A signed Letter of recommendation from a professor or lecturer of the home institution.
- In case of study mobility or research mobility for bachelor/master thesis:
 - Cooperation agreement between partner institutions, signed by both parties: home institution and host institution.
If there is no Cooperation agreement yet at the moment of the application, a Letter of intent signed by both parties to set up a new Cooperation agreement will also be accepted. The Letter of intent will have to be replaced by the signed Cooperation agreement before the student starts the mobility.
 - Learning agreement signed by at least the student and the home institution.
If the Learning agreement is not signed by the host institution at the moment of the application, a signed version will have to be uploaded later. If the signed Learning agreement is not received in time, the student will not receive his/her first payment.

In case of internship mobility:

- A draft version of the Training agreement containing at least the minimum information on the internship (duration, department, general tasks and competences to be acquired during the internship) signed by all parties: student, home institution and internship institution/organization/company. This document can be used as an upload for the Cooperation agreement and for the Learning/Training agreement of the student in the Mobility-Online tool.

All documents are to be written in English, with exception of the official Transcript of records. If the Transcript of Records is written in another language than Dutch, French or English, a certified translation should be enclosed.

Step 5: The Flemish institution validates and submits the completed application file(s) in the Mobility-Online tool before the deadline of midnight **29 March 2024 GMT+1**. Applications validated submitted after midnight 29 March 2024 GMT+1 will not be accepted.

5. Selection procedure

In collaboration with the Flemish Ministry of Education, a selection committee will make the selection after the application deadline, based on the following criteria:

- the quality of the applicant's motivation (in connection with the planned learning agreement) (30 points)
- the applicant's previous study results (transcripts of records) (30 points)
- the reasons for recommending the applicant (recommendation letter) (20 points)
- the quality of the learning agreement (20 points)

DUO-applications do not necessarily get higher scores in the selection.

The selection committee consists of experts in the field of higher education and internationalisation. Each application will be read by two independent jury members. During the selection committee meeting every application will be discussed by the two jury members. In case of more than 8% of difference between the scores for the same application, the application file will be reopened and reevaluated. Benchmarks will be built into the selection process, in order to guarantee equal chances for each application. At the end of the selection committee meeting a final ranking will be made based on the consolidated scores of each application.

Very important: at least 25% of all scholarships will be awarded to students with a low socio-economic background (only applicable for the Flemish students):

- Students who are entitled to a Flemish study grant, confirmed by AHOVOKS.
- Students with a disability, recognized by VAPH.
- Working students in a work programme. The student must be an employee, or must be looking for a job, and the study programme must be aligned with the work programme proposed by the employment service. Moreover, the student cannot have obtained a Master degree or a second cycle diploma yet.

The data in the database of AHOVOKS will be considered as correct.

If the applications of these categories of Flemish students do not cover at least 25% of all scholarships, the total number of awarded scholarships will be adjusted.

6. Timing

- Launch of the call: December 2023
- Start application procedure in Mobility-Online: from 31 January 2024 onwards
- Deadline for application: 29 March 2024
- Selection: April 2024
- Announcement of selection results: May 2024

Should you have questions about the scholarship programme, please contact the VLUHR-secretariat: international@vluhr.be.