

ITM Erasmus Policy Statement (EPS) 2021-2027

Your Erasmus Policy Statement should reflect how you intended to implement Erasmus after the award of the ECHE. Should you wish to add additional activities in the future, you will need to amend your Erasmus Policy Statement and inform your Erasmus National Agency.

What would you like to achieve by participating in the Erasmus Programme? How does your participation in the Erasmus Programme fit into your institutional internationalisation and modernisation strategy?

(Please reflect on the objectives of your participation. Please explain how you expect the participation in Erasmus to contribute towards modernising your institution, as well as on the goal of building a European Education Area and explain the policy objectives you intend to pursue).

The Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM, founded in 1906) is a Flemish higher education institution with the mission to conduct and promote scientific research, professional and academic education as well as scientific and community services in the field of tropical diseases and global healthcare, with special attention to low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

The international focus is central to these three academic core tasks. The scientific niche, the human resources involved and the collaborations are international. ITM collaborates with multiple partners in the North and South, including 18 long-term collaborations with institutions in Africa, Asia and South-America. ITM is a longstanding member of European and international networks such as TropNet and tropEd. The latter being a global network for quality postgraduate training and student and staff (virtual) mobility, in international and global health.

Every year, more than 500 postgraduate students from all over the globe, including researchers, medical doctors, nurses and other health professionals enroll in Master programmes, short courses, individual studies or internships at or with ITM. At any time about 100 early stage researchers are working on their PhD at ITM, the majority is from LMICs in a “sandwich” modality, alternating research periods in their home institution with periods in Belgium or elsewhere.

ITM strategic objectives

In its 2020-2024 Institutional Policy Plan, the strategic priorities are:

1. *To build on our reputation and expertise to expanding to new health challenges using novel approaches of cooperation and scientific research. [to pursue Excellence & Relevance]*
2. *To thrive as an open and global campus for students, teachers, alumni, professionals and researchers with a flexible teaching approach.*
3. *To forge and strengthen synergistic partnerships through which we widen the impact of our unique expertise and knowledge and thus further enforce our academic reputation*
4. *To strengthen the overall coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of ITM's policy, support and decision-making processes*

These strategic priorities translate into specific objectives for education (and KPI's) which emphasize

- the strengthening and expansion of our educational offer in tropical medicine and international public health
- the continuous improvement of teaching and learning experiences and
- the further strengthening of the international connectedness and collaboration in education

The achievement of these specific objectives for education will be enabled by a number of operational objectives focused on strengthening and increasing:

- diversity of students and staff
- study flexibility
- technology-enhanced learning possibilities
- national and international cooperation
- teaching capacity and competences for lifelong learning
- access to ITM's educational portfolio (inclusive education)

Effective participation in the Erasmus Programme is expected to significantly contribute to these objectives for the betterment of international health globally through sustainable partnerships with stakeholders in Europe and beyond.

The Erasmus Programme and ITM

The Erasmus Programme offers opportunities to expand and innovate academic cooperation, in the face of new or (re-)emerging health challenges, with European and third country higher education institutions. The different Key Actions of the programme support mutually beneficial internationalisation and modernisation strategies aiming at increased synergy between institutions and their fields of scientific expertise, in the spirit of a global open campus. Capacity Building initiatives will allow to progressively move to truly equal academic partnerships globally as a prerequisite for joint educational programmes.

Strengthening diversity and increasing flexibility

Because of ITM's focus on postgraduate training for early and mid-career students and researchers, flexibility (in content, place and time as well as approaches to teaching and learning) is crucial. During the last years, ITM has made significant progress in making its educational offer more flexible. ITM transformed its courses into independent short courses and allows students to develop more tailor-made programmes. ITM aims to further increase the diversity of **students and staff** as well as the **flexibility** of its programmes for national and international students. A next step in this process of flexibilisation is embedding ITM courses in collaborative educational programmes.

Key Action 1, where **mobility** of students and staff is highlighted, will be of particular importance to ITM's policy in this respect. The many longstanding and global institutional relationships and the global network of ITM alumni create numerous opportunities for incoming and outgoing mobility of staff. Collaboration agreements with Belgian universities and international HEI, members of the tropEd Network or other, allow to increase student and staff exchange initiatives. Master loans, at present non-existent, might become increasingly attractive for postgraduate (mid-career master) students.

Within this policy logic, ITM is also increasing its investment in technology-enhanced learning, such as blended short courses and distance learning. It is clear that the Corona-pandemic and travel restrictions will make **virtual mobility** even more important. Every course or building block of Master programmes is, as stated above, offered as stand-alone short course. More courses will be offered both on campus and online or blended. Key Action 2 can in this respect be of significant added value by increasing international access, credit recognition and educational collaborations across the globe. This will ultimately contribute to the flexibility of ITM's educational portfolio.

Strengthening national and international cooperation

Cooperation and exchange of good practices and expertise with HEI partners worldwide is being enhanced under ITM's "**Alliance for Education in Tropical Medicine and International Public Health**" (the "**Alliance**") and through the consolidation of the **ITM Alumni Network**. The "Alliance", supported by the Belgian Directorate General for Development Cooperation (DGD), is ITM's framework for internationalisation and strategic integration of existing and new national and international collaborations in the field of education. It is a platform for collaborative initiatives including staff and student mobility, joint educational initiatives (curriculum development and joint courses) and exchange on management and quality assurance in higher education.

Given ITM's focus on LMICs, **Capacity Building projects** are of special importance as they facilitate collaborations across countries and regions, which is particularly relevant when partners work in a specific scientific niche. Participation in **Knowledge Alliances** can boost **innovation** in educational approaches. This will be of particular relevance for the transition towards more distance learning and further internationalisation. Participation in Strategic Partnerships can diversify ITM's international collaboration for better synergies in changing contexts. **Strategic Partnerships** with Belgian universities and international HEI, as for example with members of the tropEd Network, will mainly be mutually beneficial in the field of educational quality assurance and joint course development.



In sum, participation in the Erasmus Programme Key Action 2 will allow ITM to diversify its strategic partnerships and networks with HEIs in EU Programme and Partner Countries beyond DGD partner countries and especially in the EHEA. It will be the preferred route to contribute to the EU goals of building a European Education Area; strengthening teaching capacity, supporting the development of students' key competences for lifelong learning and increasing inclusive education.

Strengthening teaching capacity

To strengthen ITM teaching capacity, training activities for lecturers and educational staff on cross-cutting themes such as e.g. pedagogical skills, use of digital tools for teaching and learning and intercultural competences are organised. Supporting educational staff in implementing competence-based education, and innovative learning methods and assessments and fostering digital readiness is prioritized in the institutional policy plan as well as seminar programmes for knowledge sharing and continuous professional development. Career development of **education support staff** is as well facilitated through a specific career track in the institution's jobs architecture. ITM's Education Office and the Education Units in the scientific departments actively support these strategies.

The Erasmus Programme Key Action 1 will be explored for funding mobility of staff in view of the exchange of teaching and learning expertise with a training of trainers (ToT) logic. Key Action 2 may also be of added value in further developing internal teaching capacity.

Investing in key competences for lifelong learning

Competences for lifelong learning and transferrable skills are structurally embedded in ITM's educational portfolio. These competences are essential requirements for personal and career-development, social inclusion and active citizenship.

Participation in the Erasmus Programme will allow to develop cooperation (KA2) and staff mobility (KA1) to fuel and compare policies in higher education for the development of these competencies, which often require important changes in the educational culture. The exposure to policies and practices at international level (Europe and beyond) is considered most effective for institutional learning.

As a higher education institution offering post initial scientific training, our emphasis is on: academic English, intercultural communication, critical thinking and scientific skills, digital and technology-based competences and active citizenship as scientists. Below a brief overview of main aspects.

- **Language proficiency**

ITM being an international postgraduate campus, English is the main language for instruction. In terms of language support a comprehensive Academic English Training Programme is offered to students from non-English speaking countries. For interested foreign students, basic Dutch language courses are organised on campus. This is especially encouraged for long-stay students to improve their integration in the Flemish social environment.

- **Intercultural competences and communication skills**

As ITM is an open and global campus welcoming yearly more than 500 students from around the globe, intercultural competences and communication skills workshops are embedded in the curriculum of Master degrees and postgraduate certificate programmes. The institutional gender, diversity and integrity policies foresee training activities for staff. Participation in the Erasmus Programme (mainly through collaboration, KA2 but also KA1, staff mobility) enables to further develop these trainings at an institution-wide level.

- **Digital skills**

Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) coordinators and IT staff support digital skills development for teaching and learning for lecturers and students. ITM specifically focuses on digital skills in the fields of healthcare, public health and biomedical sciences. Further development of these skills and related institutional policies would be topics for further collaboration under the Erasmus programme.

- **Research skills**

The ITM Research Office organises yearly the PhD-training / Transferrable Skills School, open to PhD students, junior researchers, postdocs, supervisors and the wider ITM community (including ITM's



partners). This training focuses on strengthening transferrable skills and key competences in the fields of 'ethics', 'presentation & communication', 'publication & writing' & 'good research practices. Further investing in the development of these skills and this training in a collaborative way will be explored under the Erasmus Programme.

- **Career support for alumni**

Via an online ITM platform - connecting students, alumni and staff – career support, transferrable skills development and lifelong learning of alumni are supported. This is enabled by the organisation of webinars, sharing sector-related information and job opportunities. Mentorship opportunities (alumni as mentors for students) are being developed as well. The alumni network offers travel grants for junior researchers to have their voice heard at international conferences and thus support their active citizenship.

Increasing inclusive education

ITM is committed to guarantee access to its education for its target groups. The inclusion of students from disadvantaged economic backgrounds is being enabled by a scholarship programme, coordinated by ITM, funded by the Belgian Development Cooperation (DGD). A reviewed tuition fee policy with differential fees for EEA and non-EEA students facilitates, since 2020, access of EEA-students as they rarely have access to scholarships (as opposed to students from LMICs). Student loans might become an additional mechanism for enhanced financial accessibility. Also, the ITM Diversity and Gender Policy will encourage inclusive education.

Please reflect on the Erasmus actions you would like to take part in and explain how they will be implemented in practice at your institution. Please explain how your institution's participation in these actions will contribute to achieving the objectives of your institutional strategy.

The interconnectedness of persons and institutions and the opportunities for student/staff mobility play a major role in the different strategic objectives of ITM. Continued participation in the Erasmus Programme offers important opportunities to further internationalise, modernise and expand ITM's educational portfolio, synergistically with the EHEA and third country partners. And although all Key Actions of the Erasmus Programme relate well to the different institutional strategies, as highlighted above, some actions are considered more central than others.

With regards to **Key Action 1**, ITM intends to attract students more globally (and in the first place from Europe), increase the flexibility of its teaching programmes and further internationalise its teaching staff. Incoming and outgoing credit and staff mobility is thus expected to grow albeit slowly. As mentioned, this will mainly depend on the European strategy in the current context. Master students from LMIC's (the majority at this moment) so far usually prefer to stay the full academic year at ITM.

Key Action 1 can support ITM's educational objectives in multiple ways.

First, with respect to **student mobility**. In all Master and PhD degree programmes, students can include a study period and/or an internship/traineeship abroad at a partner higher education institution (HEI). To ensure high quality mobility activities with maximum impact on the students, the mobility activity has to be compatible with the student's degree related learning and personal development needs. In the new Master of Science in Tropical Medicine (MTM), starting in September 2020, the possibility to engage in an optional period for field work or internship is included, or as well to work on a thesis project at an ITM partner institution. Key Action 1 can be of added value in developing this mobility, but it can also facilitate mobility involving partner organisations with different backgrounds and active in different fields or socio-economic sectors (e.g. traineeships of university students, NGOs, public bodies or in industry / private companies).

Important to note is that ITM already provides active support to incoming and outgoing students and this throughout the entire mobility process. Student Services take care of visa, travel, insurance, housing, scholarships, social welfare, mental and social wellbeing, safety and health. In this context, ITM manages its own modern, affordable student accommodation for mobile and international students (103 student-rooms available). Outgoing students receive continued support for all administrative matters. Key Action 1 can support ITM in further facilitate mobility of students in the field of international public health and tropical medicine.



Second, with respect to **staff mobility**. The Erasmus Programme creates opportunities for incoming and outgoing staff mobility for training and teaching, to a broader range of HEIs in EU Programme and Partner countries. This mobility action can support academic staff (including ITM international alumni and staff from partner institutions) as current funding for this type of mobility is limited. The added exposure will create stronger EU ties and will enhance ITM's participation in EU networks such as tropEd (www.tropEd.org). By virtue of the EU Partner country mobility possibilities, Erasmus+ will allow ITM to expand its scope beyond the list of low- and middle-income partner countries under the current Belgian development cooperation framework. Staff mobility agreements are validated in advance between the sending and receiving institutions and the mobile participants.

With regards to **Key Action 2**, our institutional strategy involves the development of **Partnerships for Cooperation and exchanges of practices** and **Partnerships for Innovation**.

Strategic Partnerships

These partnerships will support ITM and partner institutions in the development, transfer and/or implementation of innovative practices as well as the implementation of joint initiatives promoting academic cooperation, course development, peer learning and exchange of experience. There are several opportunities under consideration.

First, a strategic partnership is being envisaged with members of the international tropEd network. The increasing need to teach relevant digital skills for International and Global Health and blending of course programmes are common concerns in the tropEd network. Despite the fact that the established consortium did not obtain a grant in Key Action 2 to further develop the aforementioned skills, the existing project will in the next ECHE-period be considered for resubmission. Also, the timely and joint development and management of topical courses such as courses on “outbreak investigation and research” and “migration and health” is a priority in the network for which collaboration can be further explored.

The tropEd network and the academic networks of each member institution, such as the ITM “Alliance for Education”, constitute fertile ground for sustainable relationships and joint educational initiatives. Participation in the Erasmus Programme will thus enable ITM to plan strategic collaboration including countries and partners beyond the LMIC-list as managed by the Belgian Development Cooperation framework.

Capacity Building projects

ITM has extensive expertise and long-standing experience in academic capacity strengthening in LMICs. The focus is on low- and middle-income countries - in accordance with the Belgian international cooperation and development policy - mainly in Africa and selected countries in South America and Asia. ITM aims to foster excellent long-term (20 years or more) institutional partnerships. We focus on academic staff development through North-South-South interactions, development of research skills, knowledge management and digital innovation in tropical and international/global health programmes.

ITM has submitted successfully one Capacity Building project as lead organisation in the past ECHE period. The HITIHE-project (Health Information and Technology for Improved Health Education in South-East Asia), funded in 2019 by the Erasmus Programme, aims to improve access to high-quality open educational resources through supporting health libraries, health-oriented educational technology experts and online platforms for the distribution of educational material. The project is implemented by a consortium of nine higher education and research institutions in Europe and Asia (Cambodia and Indonesia). In line with the further development of the HITIHE-project, ITM aims to further invest in new partnerships for capacity building and innovation both in EU Programme and Partner countries.

ITM started to explore possible educational collaborations with French speaking West-African universities which are struggling with the increasingly English environment in which health sciences and health programmes evolve worldwide. The present political and security context are additional reasons to explore innovative ways to collaborate.

ITM is also involved in the development of a current Erasmus+ KA2 proposal (Capacity Building) entitled “Consortium for an International Specialization in Epidemiology with emphasis on chronic diseases / IEEpiCD.” The proposal, led by the University of Antioquia (Colombia), involves EU partners in Spain (U Salamanca), France (U Sorbonne) and Belgium (ITM), and Latin-American partners in Ecuador (U de las Américas), and U Tecnológica Equinoccial), Argentina (U Mar del Plata) and Colombia (U CES).



Another specific Capacity Building project is being explored with Latin American partners of the Dentarget Network – Instituto FioCruz, Brazil; University of Antioquia, Medellin, Colombia; Universidad Autonoma de Yucatan, Mexico; Instituto Pedro Kouri, Cuba. The scope of the project is on the impact evaluation of public health strategies to prevent/control diseases.

Participation in the Erasmus Programme will enable to further contribute to global capacity strengthening in health with partner institutions in countries that are not prioritised under the Belgian development cooperation framework and therefore expand ITM's cooperation capacity.

Knowledge Alliances

At ITM, a 'Wikitropica' platform is being developed. The concept of Wikitropica is to develop online open educational resources to be used for continuous medical education on tropical infectious diseases by students and healthcare professionals worldwide. Infectious diseases are not only common in the global south but increasingly also in the EU due to migration, travel and global warming, as exemplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Small and medium-sized enterprises strong in marketing, software development, knowledge management and data analysis and artificial intelligence will be involved in partnerships. The platform will become part of an information portal for EU healthcare professionals ITM is currently developing online. The further development of the Wikitropica platform is also supported by the HITIHE project for use beyond the EU.

For specific training and research projects, ITM collaborates with NGOs and small and medium-sized enterprises. An example is the Afya Tek project aiming at digitizing community healthcare in Tanzania. The project is implemented by a consortium of public and private partners. ITM is in charge of conducting the monitoring and evaluation of the integration of the digital tools into the healthcare system. Within the Erasmus Programme, ITM aims at piloting Knowledge Alliances to digitalize global health(care) and to initiate new public-private partnerships with partners in EU Programme countries.

Project Management

The management of potential Erasmus+ projects will be within the structure of ITM's project management structures, consisting of several internal offices with converging responsibilities.

ITM is structured in 3 scientific departments with each an education unit headed by the departmental education coordinator and backed by a departmental course secretariat. At institutional level, policy development for education is managed by the Education Office. Among other tasks, the Education Office is tasked to formulate, prepare and monitor educational, internationalisation and alumni policies, and to develop strategies for national and international collaboration and networking in education, improving international students and staff mobility.

International collaboration initiatives are decided at the level of the institutional Management Committee (MC) including the director, the general administrator and the 3 heads of department.

European and international cooperation projects in education (Erasmus+, Alliance-initiatives, ...) are being developed both at departmental level and/or at institutional level and coordinated/managed by the Education Office in close collaboration with the involved scientific department(s). A Project Office in the ITM finance department is responsible for budget management and monitoring of European projects and other external (research) projects.

Administrative support for incoming and outgoing students (e.g. visa, travel, insurance, social welfare and health) is the responsibility of the ITM student services. Formal incoming or outbound traineeship contracts are managed by ITM's HR department. For outgoing mobility in general, coaching the student together with the hosting academic institution (registration, study support, certificates) is the responsibility of the concerned course secretariat. A special service supports staff mobility (e.g. visa, tickets, safety guidance) again backed by the HR department in case contracts are required (e.g. staff secondment contracts).



What is the envisaged impact of your participation in the Erasmus+ Programme on your institution?

Please reflect on targets, as well as qualitative and quantitative indicators in monitoring this impact (such as mobility targets for student/staff mobility, quality of the implementation, support for participants on mobility, increased involvement in cooperation projects (under the KA2 action), sustainability/long-term impact of projects etc.) You are encouraged to offer an indicative timeline for achieving the targets related to the Erasmus+ actions.

ITM is convinced that its participation in the Programme will have a significant impact on its educational and internationalisation strategy. Participating in actions of the Programme, will enable ITM to further **enhance the international dimension, quality and relevance** of its educational portfolio through cooperation between Programme and Partner-Country Higher Education institutions. Specific ambitions in the field of education, such as increased collaboration, innovation and knowledge sharing, considered as key strategies for a relevant and sustained scientific and societal impact, will be strengthened through Erasmus+ participation. Below a number of goals – with indicative targets – are emphasized. The goals and targets are in line with the institutional policy plan. Participating in Erasmus+ will allow ITM to either reach those targets, either to go beyond the aspired performance.

1. As described in its Education Policy Plan, ITM has a strong commitment towards **enlarging participation in its programmes**. New course programmes will attract new students to ITM, globally. The scholarship programme, the reviewed tuition fee policy and increased study flexibility will support the achievement of these goals. The further development of short courses will allow for stronger partnerships with universities worldwide, and the development of joint educational initiatives. ITM stipulated as target for increasing student numbers, a minimum of 10% growth of awarded credit certificates for specialised short courses (calculated over a period of 3 years). Participation in Erasmus+ will support ITM in achieving those goals. Collaborative educational initiatives will allow to increase ITM's course offer and go beyond the above-mentioned target. Moreover, it will increase the international nature of its education and student population.
2. Linked to the first target, ITM does not only want to increase participation, but also to increase student and staff mobility to further **enhance the diversity of students and teaching / educational staff**. The targets stipulated by ITM - in terms of geographical diversity of students and lecturers - are to reach at least 30% international students in master programmes but not more than 75% of students from the same continent; and an increase in international lecturers. Note that the majority of the current international students are students from low-resource settings, enabling social/societal development and making our education inclusive. Erasmus+ participation will allow ITM to attract more students from other regions than low-resource regions in the world (e.g. other EU countries), in the spirit of a true 'open and global campus'. Herewith ITM can contribute to the development of the EHEA by offering its expertise to European students and through collaboration with other institutions and networks (e.g. TropEd). Regarding staff, there is a growing number of international guest lecturers that are ITM alumni and staff of partner institutions, sharing their expertise and field-experience with students in the courses. Further strengthening and consolidating our network of current and past alumni – many of whom are in positions of prominence – leading to future partnerships and networks is part of the ITM internationalisation strategy. Increasing this international collaboration between students, staff, alumni and professionals in the field of international public health and tropical medicine is a goal to which Erasmus+ can contribute.
3. ITM believes that increasing international cooperation and mobility, international diversity and exchange, and facilitating access to higher education will strengthen both the **quality as well as the relevance of its education**. The qualitative strategic partnerships are very often built on longstanding interinstitutional relations in the academic triad of research, education and international cooperation/capacity strengthening. On a general level, in terms of new collaborative educational initiatives, ITM targets – realistically - an average of two new educational projects over three years, though the number can also grow.
4. **Innovation and modernisation of education** at ITM will be strengthened thanks to an increased number of eLearning and blended short courses. Joint development of Technology Enhanced Learning and Teaching (e.g. blended, mobile or distance learning; multimedia creation) is a top priority for exchange and collaboration as identified by ITM and partner institutions. TEL policy support activities are also relevant to support this change towards digitalisation. Also, the global Corona pandemic revealed the vital role of virtual mobility and TEL initiatives. ITM is currently developing a comprehensive TEL policy plan.



5. To further enhance the quality of the mobility and cross-border cooperation, ITM will continue to ensure **full recognition of mobility** via the ECTS. This will be further enabled through interinstitutional joint course development and management initiatives under KA2.

It is clear that participating as an applicant or partner in Erasmus+ 'Partnerships for Cooperation and exchanges of practices' projects, contributes to the aim of the ITM international cooperation and development actions to induce positive changes at three complementary levels, including both individual and institutional capacity strengthening as well as policy influencing and networking. ITM will be supported in implementing its institutional cooperation policy focused on reorienting long-standing partnerships in LMIC from "North-South" capacity building to equal partnerships aiming for a shared scientific progress and conducting collaborative excellent science on priority health issues. It will strengthen ITM in its engagements to diversify its development actions to respond to existing needs for capacity building of partners as well as to develop new approaches of equal scientific partnerships. This way of conceiving and implementing international cooperation and development projects entails that all partners involved mutually benefit.

