vliruos

sharing minds, changing lives

Cuba

Country Reference Framework

(Updated version of March 2026)

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Country reference framework Cuba

Background

In FYP1 the VLIRUOS country strategies presented the strategic niche for future VLIRUOS cooperation in a specific country, leading to strategy-based calls for proposals. These country strategies created a framework for project formulation, but could limit project identification to geographical and/or thematic foci and/or to a limited number of partner institutions. Country strategies also aimed at enabling synergy and complementarity between VLIRUOS projects and projects from other (Belgian) stakeholders working in that country.

In FYP2, however, we shift towards an approach whereby a country reference framework provides information rather than strategic guidance. The country reference frameworks will be used mainly to support teams of academics when identifying and formulating project proposals, by providing a context analysis focused on Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development and the higher education sector in a given country, and by providing an overview of Belgian actors, their ongoing projects and partners in that country in view of exploration of opportunities for synergy and complementarity.

The country reference frameworks consist of three components:

(i) overview of VLIRUOS projects in the country;
(ii) context analysis focused on the Agenda 2030 framework and the higher education sector;
(iii) overview of Belgian actors (ANGCs involved in thematic or geographic JSFs & Enabel), their local partners and their regional/thematic focus.

The frameworks have been elaborated based on information available at the time of drafting this actor programme and through consultations with both Flemish and local project promotors and with geographic JSFs, when applicable, to ensure relevant information for coherent project formulation is included.

Prior to the launch of competitive calls, the ANGCs active in the country/region will be invited to list a number of research themes/questions that can be addressed by HE&SIs in the framework of VLIRUOS funded projects or scholarships. Synergy and complementarity will be integrated as an element in the selection of project proposals, more in particular when discussing the (developmental) relevance and coherence of the proposals and the extent to which the multi-stakeholder partnership principle has been reflected in the project's implementation set-up. By this mode of operation, the thematic JSF on Higher Education and Science for Sustainable Development links up with the other geographic JSFs.

Evidently, the frameworks will be updated regularly in consultation with the HEI&SI stakeholders and with the respective geographical JSFs and, where appropriate, also with ARES, and especially prior to the launch of competitive calls by VLIRUOS, to be compatible and responsive to evolving/emerging needs and priorities of academic and international actors active in the country/region/sector.

1. VLIRUOS in Cuba

1.1. Facts and figures projects & scholarships (1999 – 2025)



Legend

Universidad de la Habana		Universidad de Cienfuegos	
Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de las Villas		Universidad de Holguin	
Universidad de Oriente		Universidad de Camaguëy	
Universidad "José Marti Pérez"		Universidad de Pinar del Río	
Universidad Tecnológica de la Habana "José Antonio Echevarria"		Universidad de las Ciencias Informáticas	
Universidad de Granma		Universidad Agraria de la Habana	
Centro de Neurociencias de Cuba		Centro Nacional de Sanidad Agropecuaria	
Institute of Tropical Medicine "Pedro Kouri"		Universidad de las Artes	

Projects1999-2025				Scholarship Type	Finished	Ongoing	Total
Type	**Budget (€)**	**Number**		**ICP**	8	1	9
Total	***30.610.374***	***101***		**ITP/KOI**	31		31
IUC	12.750.805	3		**SRS**	15		15
NETWORK	2.626.833	1		**Total**	54	1	55
TEAM	11.803.023	42					
SI	2.028.281	33					
JOINT	363.387	3					
Crosscutting	738.750	16					
RIP	299.294	3					

Cuba is one of the key partner countries of VLIRUOS. From 1999 to 2025 VLIRUOS spent over € 30,6 millions in cooperation projects with Cuba, including long-term Institutional University Cooperation (IUC) Projects with **Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de las Villas (UCLV)**, **Universidad de Oriente (UO)** and the **NETWORK ICT.**

More detailed information can be found on the VLIRUOS website vliruostats (statistics).

1.2. Ongoing projects and future calls (2022-...)

List of projects during FYP 2022-2027						
Type	**Runtime**	**Title**	**Flemish promoter**	**Local promoter**	**Local institution**	**Total budget (FYP 2) (€)**
IUC	2025-2026	Institutional University Cooperation with Universidad de Holguin (Uho) Phase-in (11 months, starting 1 October 2025)	M. Snoeck (KUL)	J. Ruiz de la Pena	Universidad de Holguin	140.000
IUC	2019-2024	Institutional University Cooperation with Universidad de Oriente (UO) (phase 2 & phase-out)	R. Vounckx/ J. Vandemeulebroucke (VUB)	T.O. Ratón	Universidad de Oriente	515.000
Subproject 1		*Sustainable risk management plan for biodiversity and food production in the eastern of Cuba*	*A. Cuypers (UH)*	*E. I. Alemán*		
Subproject 2		*Biomedical technologies and services for improving the medical assistance in the eastern region of Cuba*	*J. Vandemeulebroucke (VUB)*	*J. C. Garcia Naranjo*		
Subproject 3		*Natural Products and Pharmaceutical Services to improve the patient quality of life in Eastern Cuban Hospitals*	*P. Cos (UA)*	*J. C. Escalona Arranz*		
Subproject 4		*Safeguards of the cultural heritage. Tools and practices for its integrated management*	*P. Meers (UA)*	*M. V. Hernández Garrido*		
Subproject 5		*Obtaining, characterization and production of new materials and technologies for industrial systems*	*D. Vandamme (UH)*	*H. C. Sariol*		
Subproject 6		*Transversal Project: Institution-wide instruments for high performance research, innovation and technology transfer*	*R. Vounckx (VUB)*	*R. L. Robaina*		
Networks	2019-2023	Network ICT with Universidad Central “Marta Abreu” de las Villas (UCLV) (phase 2 & phase-out)	A. Nowé (VUB)	H.C. Enriquez	Universidad Central “Marta Abreu” de las Villas (lead). PUs:	270.000

Subproject 1		*Strengthening the research on ICT and its knowledge transference to the Cuban society*	*K. Steenhaut (VUB)*	*R. Bello Pérez*	UCI, UNPR, UH, UC (and IUC Uo)	
Subproject 2		*Open ICT Systems and Management (ICTSYS)*	*D. Roefs (UG)*	*M. O. Dominguez*		
Subproject 3		*ICT supporting the educational processes and the knowledge management in higher education (ELINF)*	*M. Goovaerts (UH)*	*F. A. Ciudad Ricardo*		
TEAM	2019-2022	Control of antimicrobial resistance in bacteria of animal origin in Cuba in order to improve animal and human health	P. Butaye (UG)	I. Espinosa	Centro Nacional de Sanidad Agropecuaria	83.094
TEAM	2019-2022	Improving Cow Milk Production Potential by Introducing a Herd Health Management Program on Camagüey's Dairy Farms in	P. Bols (UA)	G. Garay	Universidad de Camagüey	54.492
TEAM	2022-2027	RESTORE - Restorative processes for conflict resolution. Towards an effective implementation of restorative justice in	A. Pemberton (KUL)	Jorge Luis Barroso González	Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de las	279.321
TEAM	2022-2027	Building in vitro plant biotechnology capacities for ecological sustainable production of marine phytochemical formulations against skin-cancer in Cuba.	W. Vanden Berghe (UA)	José Alfredo Herrera	Universidad de La Habana	299.946
TEAM	2022-2027	Internet4Cuba: Cost-effective wireless broadband internet for Cuban people.	W. Joseph (UG)	Glauco Guillén Nieto	LACETEL - Research and Development Telecommunications Institute	279.169
TEAM	2022-2027	In vitro mass production of "biotized" plants for sustainable food security in Cuba (BIOFOCUs)	K. Audenaert (UG)	Kalyanne Fernández Suárez	Universidad Agraria de La Habana	299.867
TEAM	2022-2027	A Cuban platform to support the 'continuum of care' of neurodevelopmental disorders	D. Marinazzo (UG)	Nancy Estévez Pérez	Centro de Neurociencias de Cuba	299.994
TEAM	2022-2027	Climate-adapted production of plants with neuro-active compounds in the South-Eastern region of Cuba	B. Brône (UH)	Gabriel Llauradó	Universidad de Oriente	299.073
TEAM	2024-2029	Primary Healthcare Cuba: Multistakeholder approach	J. Stiens (VUB)	Juan-Carlos García-Naranjo	Universidad de Oriente	300000

TEAM	2024-2029	Developing a cloud computing ecosystem to foster a smart city paradigm in Cuba (CuBeCloud)	A. Nowé (VUB)	Hector Cruz Enriquez	Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de las Villas	299987
TEAM	2024-2029	Capacity building for the Cuban software industry's use of Model-Driven Engineering	M. Snoeck (UA)	Jenny Ruiz de la Peña	Universidad de Holguín Oscar Lucero Moya	294905
SI	2022-2024	Better Digital Services for Cuba through Model-Driven Software Engineering	M. Snoeck (KUL)	Jenny Ruiz de la Peña	Universidad de Holguín Oscar Lucero Moya	69.367
SI	2022-2024	Development of new capacities and expertise for new and enhanced vaccine formulations	A. Madder (UG)	Daniel Garcia Rivera	Universidad de La Habana	69.982
SI	2022-2024	Development of a research data management strategy in Higher Education and Research Institutes in a Latin American context	S. Vancauwenbergh (UH)	M. Os-. Machado Rivero	Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de las Villas	69.828
SI	2022-2024	ViolenceStop: Protocols for the Care and Protection of Women and Children in Cuba	L. Volinz (VUB)	Yisel Muñoz Alfonso	Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de las Villas	69.984
SI	2022-2024	(COVID-19 PROMPT) Toward PrecisiOn Medicine for the Prediction of Treatment response to Covid-19 in Cuba.	N. Deligiannis (VUB)	Evelio Gonzalez-Dalmau	Centro de Neurociencias de Cuba	69.976
SI	2023-2025	Smart Water management to improve water balance control and environment preservation in hydrographic basins	K. Steenhaut (VUB)	E. Ortiz Guerra	Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de las Villas	69.991
SI	2023-2025	Capacity strengthening to use proteins obtained from a Caribbean sea anemone in affordable novel imunotherapeutic strategies against cancer	D. V Krysko (UG)	C. M Alvarez	Universidad de La Habana	63.524
SI	2025-2027	Towards a Real-Time Dengue Early Warning System in Cuba for Outbreak Prediction and Public Health Decision-Making	J. Baetens (UG)	Wilfredo Morales Lezca	University of Havana	68926

SI	2025-2027	Unraveling Linkages Between Coastal Social-Ecosystems and Climate Change to Enhance Resilience in Eastern Cuba	N. Beenaerts (UH)	Ofelia Pérez Montero	Universidad de Oriente	68413,32
SI	2025-2027	Tackling Online Transgressive Behaviours in Cuban University Communities - Strengthening Institutional Responses for Non-Discrimination and Non-Violence in Online Spaces.	G. Coene (VUB)	Maylen Villamañan Alba	Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de las Villas	66932,8

Abbreviations (type): IUC=Institutional University Cooperation; SI=Short Initiatives; TEAM projects. Abbreviations (Flemish institutions): KUL= Katholieke Universiteit Leuven; UG=Ghent University; UH=University of Hasselt; VUB= Vrije Universiteit Brussel; UA=University of Antwerp.

Competitive calls for new projects will be launched and announced on our website. Nationals of Cuba are eligible[1] to apply for scholarships for the International Master Programmes (ICP) and International Training Programmes (ITP).

[1] Admission requirements, application procedures and selection procedures differ across the programmes and host institutions.

2. Cuba and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

2.1. Cuba and the Sustainable Development Goals

For Cuba, the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a commitment of the State and a national priority. The Sustainable Development Goals in Cuba 2020 marks the beginning of a Decade of Action to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, where the next five years will be critical.

In the recent Cuban Voluntary National Review 2021 (in Spanish), Cuba went as far to institutionalize the SDGs and indicate responsible line ministries per SDG:



Cuba outlined a "National Plan for Economic and Social Development until 2030 "(PNDES 2030) in line with the SDG Agenda 2030. In the PNDES six strategic axes are established, designed under a systemic approach.

Gobierno socialista, eficaz, eficiente y de integración social;

Transformación productiva e inserción internacional;

Infraestructura;

Potencial humano, ciencia, tecnología e innovación;

Recursos naturales y medio ambiente

Desarrollo humano, equidad y justicia social.

These axes of the PNDES were then outlined towards the SDGs as follows:

FIGURA II.2. ARTICULACIÓN ENTRE LOS EJES ESTRATÉGICOS DEL PNDES 2030 Y LOS ODS



Fuente: MEP y Cepal (2020). «Priorización de los ODS en Cuba»

The above mentioned 6 Strategic Axes mainstream a gender approach, and a priority towards reducing inequalities, economic growth with zero hunger, fundamentally, integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental). The contents of the 17 SDGs are implicit in each of the 6 Strategic Axes, being the Human development, equity and social justice axis, the one that integrates the most SDGs within its specific objectives, which shows the multidimensional nature of Cuba's development model.

Other sources on sustainable development in Cuba include information about the UN and SDGs in Cuba (in Spanish), and articles attesting the commitment of Cuba published by the official voice of the Communist Party of Cuba Central Committee (in English) and by Juventud Rebelde Development Group (in English).

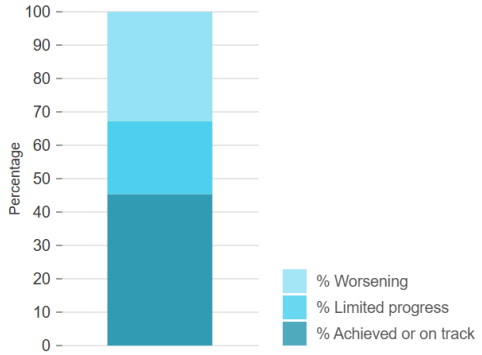
On 16 April 2019, the EU and Cuba held in Havana their first Dialogue on advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. This dialogue, which stems from the EU-Cuba Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA), took stock of the progress that Cuba and the EU have made, the challenges they face and opportunities for bilateral and multilateral joint initiatives towards the Agenda 2030. The agenda focused on the SDGs considered as most pertinent for both sides, namely, **SDG 2 (zero hunger), 5 (gender**

equality), 7 (sustainable energy), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 10 (reduced inequalities) and 13 (climate change). It also analysed some key strategies in encouraging investments and promoting triangular and regional cooperation. Both parties agreed on shared views in the upcoming multilateral related fora. The Cuban side expressed how the negative effects of the US embargo undermined their efforts towards sustainable development. The EU restated their long standing position against the embargo and the illegal nature of its extraterritorial provisions.

Taking into account the global aspect of the SDGs, the Sustainable Development Report 2025 assesses where each country stands with regard to achieving the SDGs. Cuba ranks 40 out of 167 countries included in the report. The Cuba Country Profile shows that 7 goals remain with major or significant challenges and also that some goals lack information. We notice that even in domains where Cuba scores really well, such as quality of education, decent work and economic growth, challenges remain.



Status of SDG targets for Cuba (% trend indicators)



As an umbrella organisation that works with calls for proposals, VLIRUOS supports interventions for and through higher education institutes, supporting them in the areas of education, research and uptake and thereby strengthening them in their role as development actor. Doing so, the impact of the interventions supported by VLIRUOS can be found in a large variety of sectors. In line with its major intervention area, VLIRUOS positions itself within the education sector, especially focused on higher education, research and innovation (SDG 4 and 9). However, through its interventions, VLIRUOS intervenes in different sectors as well. VLIRUOS recognises that given the complexity, scale and interconnectedness of current societal challenges, meaningful social, economic and ecological transformations can only be realised by starting from a holistic and integrated approach to the SDGs. When translated into SDGs, the projects that were

financed by VLR-UOS in Cuba covered mainly, apart from SDG 4 and 9 the following SDGs 2, 3, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 15. Top sectors for VLIRUOS in this country for the past decade are sustainable agriculture and food security, and health. However many projects were also developed in the domains of clean and efficient technologies, renewable energy, ICT for development and general research and technology development and transfer.

More background information and context analysis on Cuba can be found in the **geographic Joint Strategic Framework** for Cuba, which will be shared with (potential) project promotors when new calls are launched.

Additional sources on progress related to higher education & science (SDG 4)

- UNESCO-UIS: overview data resources indicators related to SDG4
- Our World in data:
    - Indicators related to educational mobility and inequality
    - Indicators related to tertiary education
    - Indicators related to projections of future education (demand)
    - Indicators related to science and research

2.2. Higher education landscape in Cuba

The Cuban Ministry of Higher Education is the body responsible for directing, proposing, executing and controlling the state and government policy regarding higher education. This state responsibility is executed from the main functions that are reflected in the Agreement No. 4001 of the Council of Ministers. The MES system is made up of the Central Organ, which is in charge of the normative and methodological direction and the execution of State and government policy in that area, and by universities, science, technology and innovation entities and companies. It is based on a humanistic, universalized, scientific, technological, innovative, integrated and committed concept with Cuban society to build a prosperous and sustainable socialism.

Except for the study of Medical Sciences, the Ministry of Higher Education (MES) is the country's highest authority of the sector, governing 50 universities with more than 52 thousand professors, and more than 285 thousand students in 2022 . All HEIs are financed by the State. Each university has its own research centres and/or institutes where professors are encouraged to work in a multidisciplinary environment. MES designs the policies and controls the performance of the entire system. Degrees provided in the Cuban system of higher education are undergraduate, graduate and doctoral, in addition to certificates in training provided by faculties and research centres. The Ministry of Science Technology and Environment (CITMA), established in 1994, also has regulatory functions on scientific production and provides a support system for research institutes.

Accreditation is governed by the National Board of Accreditation (JAN), which is empowered to qualify and classify HEIs and academic programs. JAN also provides Awards of Excellence to programs and theses. Furthermore, the University Association of Ibero-American Postgraduate Studies (AUIP) is an important regional body, which is referenced in Cuba for quality assurance, best practices and accreditation or recognition.

There are also university-linked enterprises across the country, and one foundation in Havana, which operate as interface entities between their respective universities, the private sector and other entities. Regulated by Council of Ministers Decree No.363 of 2019, these enterprises help to market some of the products and services created by university faculty members and researchers, helping them to obtain an extra source of income, and/or to receive donations and equipment to improve their working conditions, thus sustaining higher education in general. The absolute majority of professors and faculty members (61.9% in course 2021/22) and students (65.7% in course 2021/22) in Cuba's system of higher education are women .

There are 3 types of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Cuba: universities, schools of medicine and a broad category 'other organisms' . All of them follow the methodological instructions from MES, in terms of professor categorization, graduate programs or examination commissions. However, while universities are directly subordinated to MES, schools of medicine are subordinated to MINSAP, and the others are subordinated to different organisms depending on their level of specialisation, such as the Universidad de las Artes is subordinated to the Ministry of Culture.

In Cuba there is a singular criterion for PhD evaluation followed by all universities, emulating graduate schools in other countries. It uses a system of cumulative credits; adding a series of exams the students must take, including one to demonstrate the skill to use a foreign language and an analyses of science problems in all the programs; the publication of articles in indexed reviews; and a demanding procedure before 3 different examination commissions: one for the project, another for pre-defense and a last one for defence . Postdoc research opportunities are provided for doctoral graduates who wish to continue their academic work.

Cuba has made education of their citizenry a high priority. They are proud of the fact that their education is free from cradle to grave. Individuals can attend the university system and earn as many undergraduate and graduate degrees as they might have the inclination to achieve, at no cost. Although higher education is available and free, students have to go through an interview and examination process and meet the university standards in order to be admitted.

Four basic principles underpin HE in Cuba, namely: 1) a broad profile curricula, with two leading ideas: a: the combination of instruction and education, b/ a close link between studies and work; 2) continuing education in all fields of knowledge; 3) research as an integral part of the university mission; 4) university extension (that is, into the local communities) as the integrating process of university work.

Since the year 2000 significant moves have been made to **broaden access to HE for the least favored social sectors which shows in fact the commitment of Cuba with the concept of 'leaving no one behind'**. These initiatives include HEIs opening a number of university extension 'campuses' throughout all municipalities to increase access and reduce the dropout rate among working and part-time students, accompanied by investment in distance education methods and modalities. A close relationship is maintained between HE and all of Cuban society, particularly with local communities, for whom undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are offered to meet the needs of a specific productive sector or of a given region.

Research in HEIs and university research centres is required to contribute directly to Cuban socio-economic development, characterised by MES[2] as requirements to produce

- Strategic results for high value-added and high-impact exportable production
- Technological developments and results that apply technology for more competitive traditional production
- Innovative technological results to develop and revitalise local and industrial economies.

In MES strategic planning to 2015[3] the priority areas for institutional international cooperation match the broad national development priorities and are:

- Higher education and ICT
- Biotechnology and medical equipment
- Agribusiness and the environment
- Industry and energy
- Basic and social sciences

Also in line with national development priorities, MES places emphasis on the development of institutional capacity, doctoral programmes and research and innovation in institutions in the Eastern region of Cuba, although activities supported by international cooperation in Eastern institutions would also benefit other MES HEIs in the national network (see later in the strategy analysis). Improving skills, competences and facilities for the application of ICT within key thematic areas, such education, environmental sciences and medicine, is also a MES priority.

Academic and research collaboration, including joint curriculum development for masters course, information sharing and skills transfer, is one of the strengths of the Cuban HE system, and indeed is a mandatory requirement for MES institutions. MES HEIs are all part of a MES university network ("Reduniv") and there are also thematic networks maintained by individual HEIs on behalf of the academic and research community, such as the "RedMa: Portal de Medio Ambiente" (an Environment portal) maintained by ISPJAE[4].

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[2] La educacion superior en Cuba. Presentation by MES at the VLIRUOS Seminar, Havana 17th October 2011

[3] *ibid*

[4] http://redma.cujae.edu.cu/articles.php?article_id=2

MES provides HEIs with budget allocations for staff salaries, running costs (electricity, water etc.) and maintenance of buildings. These budgets have been declining in real terms for a number of years at the same time as the number of university sites has been expanding (for example, the development of outreach campuses and sites within municipalities).

In terms of Higher Education Institutes, Webometrics ranking provides the ranking of Cuban universities worldwide. None rank in the top 2000 worldwide. The former IUC partner UCLV is the second highest ranked Cuban university. No specific recommendations can be drawn from this apart from the fact that the institutions away from the Havana region and in particular in the Eastern Region of the country often received less funding. In line with its intention in strengthening university collaboration in Eastern Cuba, MES recommended stronger ties with institutions that play an important role in the sustainable development of the 'Oriental' provinces.

2.3. Leaving no one behind

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the international community pledged to leave no one behind and to endeavour to reach the furthest behind first. The principle of leaving no one behind can be defined as a three-part imperative: to end absolute poverty in all its forms, to stop group-based discrimination that results in unequal outcomes for disadvantaged populations, and to take action to help the furthest behind.

When referring to the strategic axes, for Cuba Leaving No one Behind in fact is a principle of state. Human Development, equity and Social Justice are put forward as central concept and the principle is put forward in relation to the universal right to education and health and the importance of social protection, broad social services and special programmes for vulnerable groups.

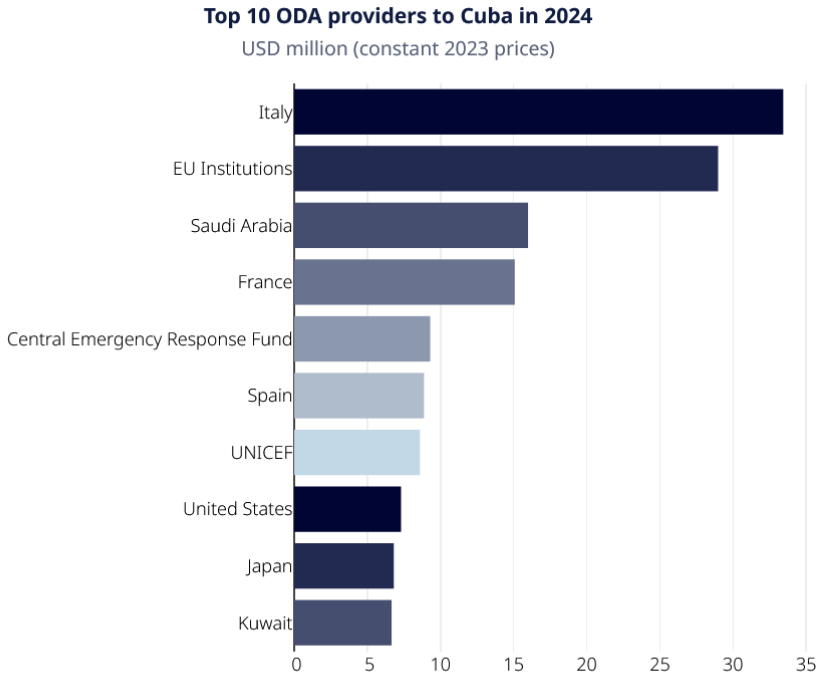


2.4. Multistakeholderpartnership - Stakeholder analysis

The complexity, scale, and interconnectedness of the current societal challenges that the SDG framework is seeking to address, requires a concerted effort of a wide variety of different stakeholders. As such, the principle of multistakeholderpartnership – which promotes cooperation and partnerships at different stages and spanning the boundaries of civil society, private sector, government, and academia – is ubiquitous across the 2030 Agenda. An analysis of these stakeholders is essential for each partnership.

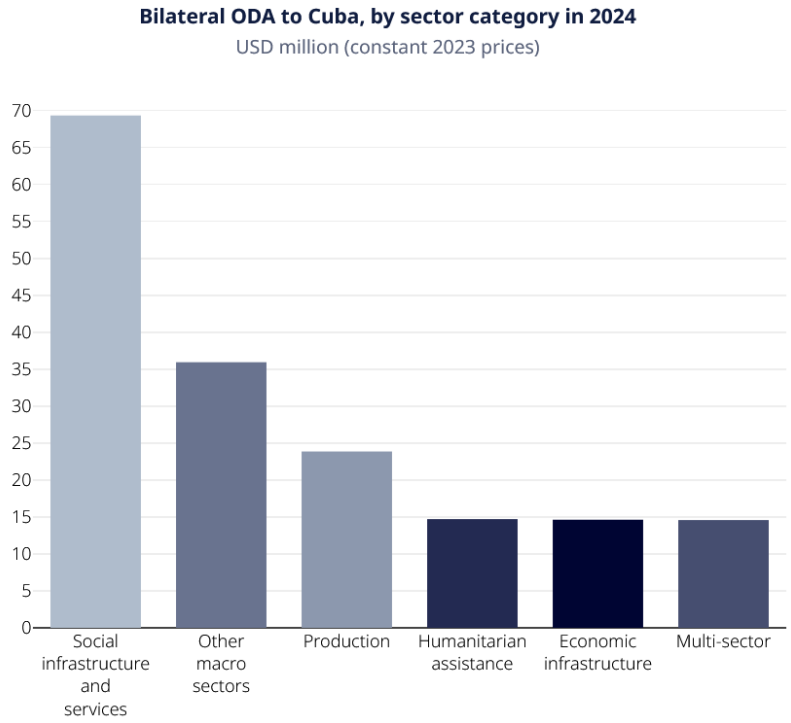
The universities in Cuba have as a mandate to provide extension services to society and work closely with national and provincial governments. In the context of Cuba and its economic reforms, growing attention is given to the relation with business, being in Cuba mostly state owned companies and a number of international private players as also the special economic development zone of Mariel. In this context the rules for technology transfer have been reformed and universities are adapting to this new context.

Looking at the international **partners** of Cuba, it needs to be said that until 2021, Russia was the main donor of gross official development aid (ODA) in the past, but since the Ukraïne conflict, no data is available and now Italy, followed by the EU institutions, is officially the main donor.

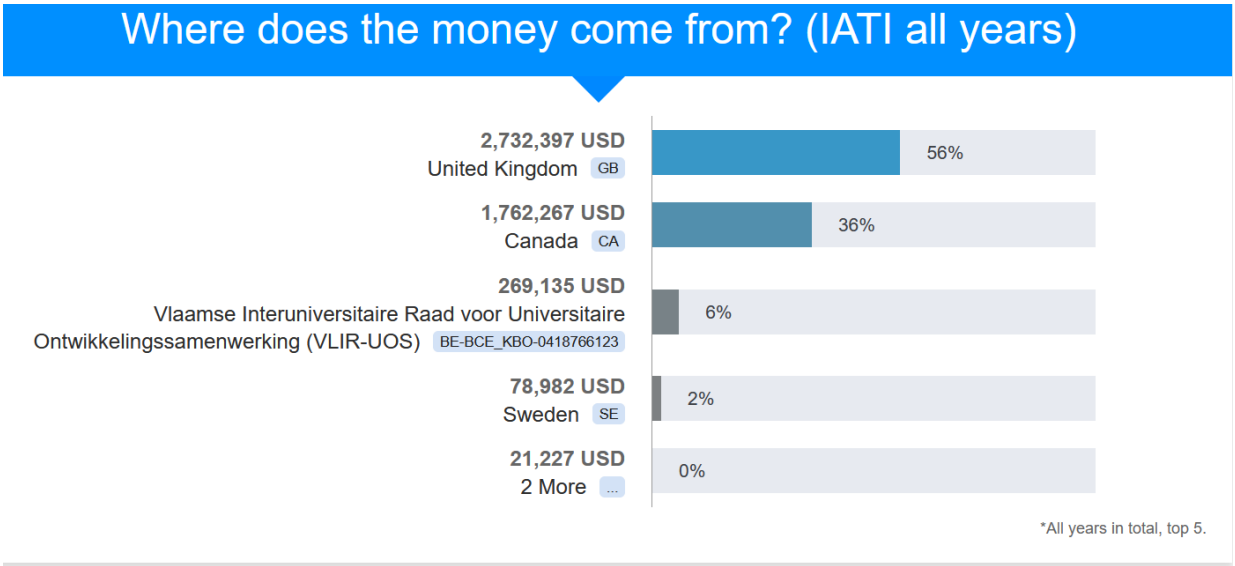


Sources: OECD (2025) , Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions [DAC2a]

The sector receiving the biggest funding is the social infrastructure and services (figure below), this is a change as compared to previous years, probably also linked to the fact that support from Russia is no longer quantified in these overviews.



Based on data from the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), VLIRUOS is among the main donors in the higher education sector, however it needs to be said it is coded in multiple sectors and not only at HE.



In fact, from the viewpoint of the Cuban Ministry of Higher Education, VLIRUOS was acknowledged at many occasions to be the largest single international cooperation donor in HE, in terms of both funding and length of engagement with Cuban HEIs. The following countries/institutions were mentioned among the other donors to the Cuban HEIs: AECID (Spain), COSUDE (Switzerland), CIDA (Canada), DAAD, CAPES and CNPq (Brazil) and bilateral cooperation with the higher education systems of Mexico and Venezuela as well as other member states of the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (ALBA). In general, most of the international projects implemented by Cuban institutions have as main outputs the fostering of academic and scientist mobility.

VLIRUOS contributes to the 2030 agenda by realizing a societal impact, implying an impact on local communities, civil society, governments, private sector or other higher education institutions. In what follows we list the role and the desired change among the main actors involved in the change process that VLIRUOS envisages to support through *its interventions*.

Actor	Role and interest/influence
Higher Education Institutions in Cuba	HEIs in Cuba are important boundary partners in the realization of VLIRUOS outcomes in terms of its contribution to Agenda 2030, and the potential contribution to local sustainable development. As project owners they are expected to contribute to HEIs' enhanced institutional performance in the core tasks relating to education, research and societal service delivery strengthening the HEI's visibility and recognition as a centre of excellence. In the long-term, partner HEIs are also expected to have a multiplier effect on the higher education system and development sector in the country or region through their engagement in (global) knowledge-driven partnerships with academic and non-academic stakeholders.
DGD (incl. Belgian embassies in partner countries)	DGD has an advisory role in the VLIRUOS selection commissions and follows-up on the VLIRUOS portfolio and the thematic JSF on Higher Education and Science for Sustainable Development. The Belgian Embassies (e.g. Havana) can play a role in facilitating the uptake of knowledge, the identification, mobilisation and relation building with other stakeholders (e.g. links with European Union, national government, other donors), the contextual updates etc.
Students, professionals, and alumni	**Students** can be direct (e.g. as a recipient of a PhD scholarship within a project) or indirect beneficiaries (e.g. enjoying improved/innovative didactical approaches) of the projects. As direct beneficiary, their changed role will be about the generation and use of newly acquired knowledge, competences (e.g. global citizenship) and networks in view of sustainable development. Alumni from VLIRUOS-projects in Cuba will be important stakeholders in connecting VLIRUOS projects with each other, with other actors, etc.
Academics/researchers	As direct beneficiaries of the projects, academics and researchers affiliated within Flemish and partner HE&SIs play an important role in co-creating, disseminating and creating conditions for uptake of knowledge relevant to the achievement of the SDGs in line with the needs, policies and priorities of the partner HE&SIs, local/national or regional stakeholders.
Members of the thematic JSF on Higher Education and Science for Sustainable Development	VLIRUOS, ITM and ARES have initiated the JSF on HESD4SD to further unlock the developmental potential of higher education and science cooperation for sustainable development and make it accessible to other local, Belgian and international partners as scientific advisor to other partners' projects, partners or policy bodies, as a platform for sharing state of the art scientific results, information, expertise and experience and for exploration of possibilities for synergy and complementarity. In Cuba, alle 3 actors: ITM, ARES and VLIRUOS are present and were in fact in terms of budget the main actors in the former geographic JSF which was discontinued

Belgian Actors of the Non-governmental Cooperation	VLIRUOS continuously tries to identify and encourage synergy and complementarity between Belgian ANGCs and academic stakeholders. Through the uptake of research results, mobilisation of local stakeholders, participation in trainings or courses, identification and communication of relevant research questions/opportunities, hosting of international internships, facilitating student mobility… these actors play a critical role.
Belgian bilateral cooperation (BIO & Enabel)	Cuba is not a partner country of Belgian bilateral cooperation. However, in case opportunities of Belgian foreign affairs or via BIO should appear, synergy and complementarity with academic projects of the partner HEIs (e.g. through country reference frameworks, JSF platform) will be looked into.
International organizations and other donors (e.g. WHO, UNESCO, World Bank, European Commission…)	Interventions undertaken by international organisations like UN agencies such as FAO or international donors active in higher education cooperation can be complementary in the achievement of the objectives of projects. They can, for instance, play a role in the use and upscaling of new knowledge or practices or serve as seed money for bigger interventions financed by these international organisations.
Academic/science (inter)national and regional networks	Regional or (inter)national academic/science networks (e.g. CAMES, IUCEA) are among the potential indirect beneficiary as targeted HE&SIs strengthened in their research/educational capacities can improve the functioning of the networks they are part of through the co-creation, exchange and uptake of knowledge among academic stakeholders. Similar effects can be realized in the case of alumni and scholarship networks/associations when former scholarship students act as agents of change within these networks.
Public sector: Local or central government and political community	Engage in evidence-based governance that puts knowledge to the test by being a stakeholder in the co-creation of inclusive (innovative) solutions and effective user of research results to foster good governance for sustainable and coherent policies.
State owned/Private sector	To ensure that the resource-led sustainable industrialization process is both sustainable and beneficial, the government will work closely with the private sector. This includes developing both the private sector and human capital to build an educated, skillful, and productive labour force to drive industrialization.
Civil society, social movements and local communities	Civil society actors, social movements and local communities are expected to co-create, access and use the knowledge and research products generated within the framework of *projects* thereby making a potential contribution to the entire range of SDGs.

3. Synergy and Complementarity with other (Belgian) actors in Cuba

3.1. VLIRUOS approaches to synergy and complementarity

Drawing upon their longstanding common history, VLIRUOS, ARES and the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) jointly developed the thematic Joint Strategic Framework on Higher Education and Science for Sustainable Development (JSF HES4SD). Through cooperation with civil society, private and public sector, the JSF initiators[5] aim to further unlock the huge developmental potential of higher education and science cooperation for sustainable development and make it accessible to other Belgian, local and international partners, in different ways: as partner in a multi-actor partnership, as scientific advisor to other partners' projects, partners or policy bodies, as a knowledge broker for sharing state of the art scientific results, information, expertise and experience and for exploration of possibilities for synergy and complementarity. This reference framework for Cuba will feed into the **platform** that the initiators of the JSF HES4SD plan to create to proactively communicate opportunities and facilitate such cooperation. More precisely, the platform can be used to:

(i) communicate about the launch and results of competitive calls for projects;
(ii) communicate other opportunities for projects or scholarships;
(iii) gather/exchange on collaboration opportunities (e.g. requests for scientific advice);
(iv) share information about ongoing projects, events and seminars in the country/region.

3.2. Bilateral cooperation (Enabel) in Cuba

Cuba has a longstanding history of cooperation with Belgium at level of bilateral, regional and cultural cooperation.
Cuba is no partner country of the Belgian bilateral cooperation, however the Belgian Embassy in Cuba is very present in all national and European cooperation fora and promotes intensive interactions among international actors. Currently, the support of the MYPYME, or strengthening of the small and medium enterprises that are popping up as part of the opening of the Cuban economic system, is high on the agenda but also the facilitation of calls coming from the EU local representation towards interested actors. Finally, every year the Belgian Embassy organised a Belgian cultural week culminating on the 15th of November with the Belgian day of the Dynasty.

Cuba remains an important country in the Belgian indirect cooperation but only a limited number of Belgian actors engaged in a Belgian level country platform to promote consultation and cooperation between the non-governmental actors, organised in a Country Joint Strategic Framework. However, since September 2022 this formal cooperation structure was discontinued and VLIRUOS cooperation is organised within the framework of a Thematic Joint Strategic Framework on Higher Education and Science for Sustainable Development (HES4SD), in which also the French speaking sister organisation ARES and the ITM are represented. These organisations are in fact also the most important other Belgian partners in terms of synergy potential, next to the alignment with EU programmers. How interaction among Belgian and European actors will continue, apart from the cooperation between ARES, ITM and VLIRUOS, is to be seen, but the Belgian Embassy is putting a lot of efforts to continue these exchanges.

In Cuba, VLIRUOS and ARES are active in Eastern Cuba and the Havana region in domains of agricultural production and clean and efficient technologies, and ITM and VLIRUOS are complementary in their

[5] The three JSF initiators represent 60 Belgian higher education institutions (HEIs), being 11 universities, 32 university colleges, 16 school of arts, and ITM.

cooperation with regard to topics related to infectious diseases and more specifically in the cooperation with IPK and Universidad de Oriente.

3.3. Belgian actors of the non-governmental cooperation in Cuba

3.3.1. Thematic Joint Strategic Framework on Higher Education and Science

Together with ARES and ITM, VLIRUOS forms a thematic joint strategic framework on higher education and science for sustainable development (JSF HES4SD): hes4sd.be

More info specifically about ARES in Cuba can be found on Moove ARES

Collaboration with Cuban HEIs will be facilitated by systematically sharing information on projects and grants, by allowing Belgian ANGC (still active in Cuba) to submit their needs in applied research or training, and by encouraging multi-stakeholder partnerships through competitive calls for proposals (VLIRUOS/ARES) and partnerships for ITM.

3.3.2. Cuba Joint Strategic Framework

There is no longer a Cuba Joint Strategic Framework since 2022 and it is not foreseen either for the next FYP 2027-2032.