

# EnVision Virtual Exchange Toolkit

Sharing Best Practices of Designing Virtual Exchange programmes in the Nordic-Baltic Region



## EnVision Virtual Exchange Toolkit. Sharing Best Practices of Designing Virtual Exchange programmes in the Nordic-Baltic Region

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# Glossary

**ASYNCHRONOUS COMMUNICATION:** Interaction that does not happen in real time. For example, emails or discussion forums.

**BLENDED LEARNING:** A mix of traditional face-to-face and online learning experiences.

**COLLABORATIVE ONLINE INTERNATIONAL LEARNING (COIL):** Programs that foster intercultural competence and global understanding through international online collaboration. They are sometimes used as a synonym for class-to-class virtual exchange.

**CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION:** Interaction between individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

**DIGITAL LITERACY:** The ability to effectively use digital tools and platforms for communication and learning.

**DIGITAL PEDAGOGY:** Teaching and learning practices that incorporate digital tools and resources.

**E-LEARNING:** Learning conducted via electronic media, typically on the Internet.

**GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP:** Awareness, understanding, and involvement in international issues and diverse cultures.

**GLOBAL LEARNING:** Educational experiences that emphasise understanding of global interconnectedness.

**INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE:** The ability to interact effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures.

**INTERACTIVE MEDIA:** Digital media that allows for active participation and interaction.

**LANGUAGE EXCHANGE:** Mutual learning and practice of languages between speakers of different languages.

**LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (LMS):** A software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, and delivery of educational courses or training programs.

**ONLINE COLLABORATION:** Working with others digitally to achieve a common goal.

**PEER LEARNING:** Students learn from and with each other through collaboration.

**REMOTE LEARNING:** Education where teachers and students are not physically present in a traditional classroom environment.

**SOCIAL PRESENCE:** The sense of being with others in a virtual environment.

**SYNCHRONOUS COMMUNICATION:** Real-time interaction, such as video conferencing or live chat.

**TELECOLLABORATION:** Use of digital communication tools for collaborative learning across geographical distances.

**TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION:** Education that crosses national borders, often through virtual means.

**VIRTUAL CLASSROOM:** An online learning environment where teachers and students interact.

**VIRTUAL EXCHANGE:** Collaborative online learning between participants from different geographical locations under the guidance of an educator.

**VIRTUAL MOBILITY:** Participation in international experiences without physical travel. The experience does not necessarily involve exchange among participants (it could involve, for example, remotely attending a course offered by an institution in a different country).

**VIRTUAL TEAMWORK:** Collaborative efforts by individuals working from different locations via digital tools.

## Executive summary

In recent years, virtual exchange (VE) has rapidly developed in higher education. VE can be conceptualised as an umbrella term that encompasses a range of online learning initiatives and methods involving learners in on-going collaborative interactions with partners from different cultural backgrounds under the guidance of teachers or trained facilitators as an integral part of the curriculum in their home institutions (O'Dowd, 2022).

The integration of VE in teaching activities is often motivated by the desire of higher education institutions to internationalise the curriculum and enhance the intercultural competencies of learners. VE can be integrated into existing courses or developed as a stand-alone course or program.

The development and integration of programs have also rapidly developed in the Nordic-Baltic region. While it has frequently been used in foreign language learning, academic staff in social sciences have not experimented enough with integration. In this respect, the Nordplus consortium EnVision was formed, bringing together innovation-oriented universities in the Nordic-Baltics region - University of Tartu, Vilnius University, Uppsala University and the University of Helsinki, to conduct teacher trainings to develop and increase the awareness of teaching staff in social sciences in VE, develop a practical VE toolkit which could help them to integrate this teaching method in their practices and develop scenarios in collaboration with their peers in the network.

A group of 12 participants completed two teacher training events in Tartu and Vilnius and collaborated in pairs on a VE scenario for more than four months. In the post-training survey conducted in April/May 2024, 78% of respondents stated that the program has significantly increased their knowledge about VE, and almost 2/3 who took part in the training are interested in implementing the developed scenarios in the future. The feedback collected during the project also indicated that the teaching staff appreciated the collaborative nature of creating a VE scenario and the opportunity to learn from their peers.

The following VE toolkit collects further reflections and best practices on integrating teaching practices, especially for academic staff in the field of social sciences.

## Introduction to the VE toolkit

The main target audience of the following toolkit is the teaching staff, administrators, and management of higher education institutions who are interested in integrating VE as part of their teaching practices and strategies for internationalisation at home.

The main aim of the following toolkit is to introduce the academic staff members to the rationale and methodological design of and showcase practical scenarios for integrating teaching practices. The practical case studies of this toolkit were drawn based on the teacher training which took place as part of the Nordplus project “Building virtual exchange capacities in the Baltic Sea Region (Envision)” (NPHE-2023/10034).

The first part of the toolkit introduces the readers to the theoretical context of VE by defining the term and explaining the instructional design and its integration into the curriculum. The second part of the toolkit introduces the readers to the rationale of the Nordplus project “Building virtual exchange capacities in the Baltic Sea Region (Envision),” showcases the impact of the training by providing some statistics and feedback on teaching staff participating in the program and finally presents the VE scenarios developed as part of the training program. The final part of the toolkit also lists some practical lessons learned, which could be helpful for administrative and management staff of HEIs who are interested in running and organising similar training programs at their home institutions.

## Theoretic context

### What is virtual exchange? How does it differ from other forms of exchange?

Virtual exchange (VE) has rapidly developed in higher education over the recent years. In this regard, newcomers to the field might face the challenge of navigating a vast array of terminology related to digital approaches in international education, including virtual and online learning. The sheer number of terms, coupled with their inconsistent usage by different authors and practitioners, often results in confusion and misunderstandings (O’Dowd, 2022). Thus, it is very important to define the core characteristics of VE and its divergence from other forms of online teaching and learning, such as virtual mobility and blended mobility, which scholars often use interchangeably.

According to O’Dowd, VE can be conceptualised as an umbrella term that encompasses a range of online learning initiatives and methods aimed at involving learners in ongoing collaborative interactions with partners from different cultural backgrounds under the guidance of teachers or trained facilitators as an integral part of the curriculum at their home institutions (O’Dowd, 2022). He further outlines six key characteristics which make VE distinguishable from other forms of online teaching: a) a predominant focus on interaction between learners, supported by technology; b) engagement with representatives of other cultures; c) integration of VE into the curriculum and study process at respective HEI<sup>1</sup>; d) provision of dialogue facilitation and support by educators or trained staff in VE communication; e) a strong emphasis on development of soft skills and intercultural competence as part of the learning process; and f) a student-driven, collaborative approach to learning (O’Dowd, 2022).

<sup>1</sup> This often implies a form of recognition of the following experience by HEIs either in terms of credits, grades or badges.



It is important to note that VE is increasingly used as an umbrella term to refer to different models of this kind of pedagogical practice. When describing a class-to-class, teacher-designed model, it is often called Online Intercultural Exchange (OIE), Global Digital Exchange or, especially in the North American context, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL). Other terms referring to VE, particularly in foreign language education, include Telecollaboration, e-Tandem and Teletandem.

Regarding other forms of online teaching and mobility, it is important to highlight the difference between VE and virtual mobility and blended mobility.

The FRAMES project's report on scenarios for the integration of VE in Higher Education defines virtual mobility as "educational practices that allow students from one educational institution to follow courses organised at a different institution (usually based in a different country) without having to leave home" (Beaven, A., Pittarello, S. & van Der Heijden, C. 2021). The report further mentions that the main aim of virtual mobility is to deliver subject-specific knowledge, often in areas or on topics not available at the student's home university, by leveraging the expertise of the host institution. What differentiates virtual mobility from VE is that the former does not necessarily require a learner to interact with the peers at the host institution. (Beaven, A., Pittarello, S. & van Der Heijden, C. 2021).

Finally, blended mobility can be conceptualised as integrating physical mobility and structured online collaboration (European Commission, 2021). In essence, blended mobility involves students in online activities and collaboration with teachers and students from other countries in their subject area. It is coupled with physical mobility to one of the partner universities to work together in person in the same location. (Mühlbauer, J. & van der Velden, B, 2022).

## Why virtual exchange?

Over the years, multiple studies have shown that the VE methodology can function as a sustainable, synergistic, more affordable and complementary option to physician mobility, enhancing learners' intercultural and international experience. (Mühlbauer, J. & van der Velden, B, 2022).

Two important and large-scale initiatives concerning VE, the US-based Stevens Initiative<sup>2</sup> and the European-funded EVOLVE project<sup>3</sup>, have shown, based on data collected in a variety of geographical areas, students' overall high satisfaction with VE experiences, and their development in terms of cultural knowledge and foreign language skills (Stevens Initiative, 2023). The EVOLVE reports (2020) have also shown that VE experiences help learners overcome their anxiety when communicating in a foreign language.

Finally, Guth and Helm (2017) report that VE can develop learners' soft and transferable skills, boosting students' overall employability upon graduation.

Regarding the benefits for the teaching staff and higher education institutions, it can be argued that VE represents a great way to expand universities' internationalisation strategies. It can also help teaching staff expand their academic networks, diversify and broaden the scope of teaching, develop their digital competencies, and serve as a great way to experiment with innovative teaching practices.

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<sup>2</sup> See more information at <https://www.stevensinitiative.org>

<sup>3</sup> See more information at <https://evolve-erasmus.eu>

## Methodological design of virtual exchange

Over the years, multiple models have been developed to design VE programs. Two main approaches can be distinguished among the most common ones: a) ready-made programs and b) co-design models.

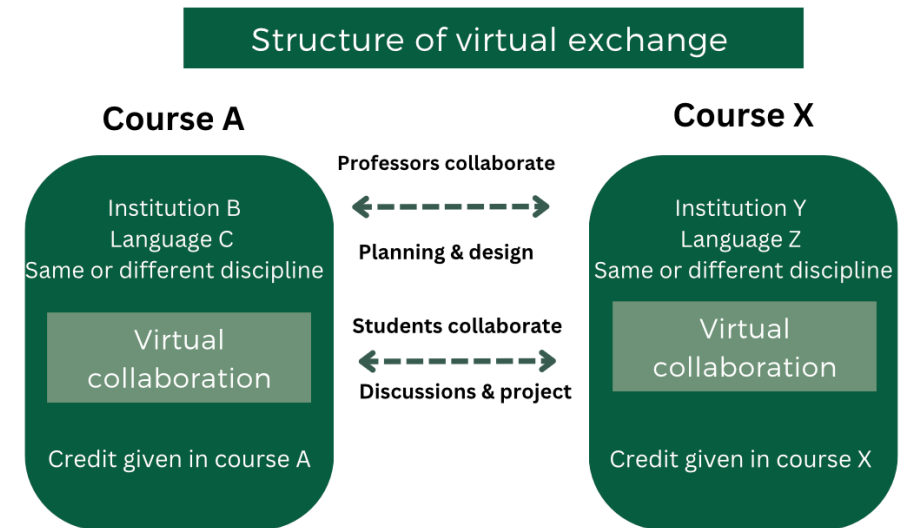
The ready-made programs, developed by consortia of universities or external organisations, imply a pre-packaged set of video lectures and assignments combined with synchronous online meetings where students discuss the contents of the resources and collaborate on group projects. Universities can integrate these programs into their curricula, and students can earn recognition by assigning credits for their participation. Examples of such ready-made VEs include programs and activities developed by The Sharing Perspective Foundation and Soliya, partners of the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange initiative (2018-2020), offered to universities at no cost. These programs are usually dialogue-based and facilitator-led, involving students from various disciplines and universities in different geographical areas.

The second format includes “co-designed” exchange programs (COIL). This model of VE applies a bottom-up approach since the development of the VE is led by educators of partner institutions, who collaboratively design a shared curriculum for part of their course, bringing together their students to interact and collaborate on specific activities or projects. Examples of successful co-design courses are listed in the FRAMES report “Scenarios for the integration of Virtual Exchange in Higher Education” (Beaven, A., Pittarello, S., & van der Heijden, C. 2021).

When engaged in the co-design methodology of VE, the teaching staff at partner institutions need to carefully consider several components in the study process to align the schedule and collaborative assignments and organise the VE experience for learners smoothly. An example of the co-design methodology applied by one of the largest providers of VE - SUNY COIL - is depicted below:

The image illustrates the structure of a VE between two courses, Course A and Course X, hosted by different institutions. Course A, taught in Institution B and Language C, and Course X, taught in Institution Y and Language Z, can be in the same or different disciplines. Professors from both courses collaborate in the planning and design phase, ensuring that the virtual collaboration aligns with the academic goals of each course.

Students from both courses engage in virtual collaboration through discussions and joint projects, allowing cross-institutional learning and cultural exchange. However, credits are usually given by the students’ respective home institutions: students in Course A receive credit for their participation by Institution B, and similarly for Course X in Institution Y.



■ Source: taken from SUNY COIL at <https://coil.suny.edu/>, and readapted by Anna Beitane in Canva.com



## Integration of virtual exchange programs and recognition

Virtual exchange is utilised in universities to support different aspects of internationalisation, particularly Internationalisation at Home (O’Dowd, 2022).

The FRAMES Toolkit (<https://frames-project.eu/outputs/toolkit/>) identifies four distinctive scenarios for integrating VE programs into a study curriculum. The factors helping to determine the right fit for the integration will depend on a given HEI’s institutional and administrative capacities, its strategic vision and organisational needs, and the stakeholders involved in the process. The following scenarios include options such as: a) VE as a preparatory or follow-up activity to physical mobility, b) VE as an intertwined component of physical mobility, c) VE as a stand-alone learning activity, and d) VE as a component of a course. While our toolkit will mostly focus on integrating VE as a course component, it will briefly comment on each scenario separately.

In the first scenario (a), the VE is offered to students before or after their physical mobility experience. In this sense, it represents a type of blended mobility. Examples of such exchange include E-Tandem at the University of Padova or I-TELL PREP at the Universities of Limerick and Leon (Mühlbauer, J. & van der Velden).

The second option (b) refers to the case where VE is seamlessly integrated with physical mobility into a single educational experience from the outset. This scenario often occurs while students complete their “study abroad” period at a host institution or during events such as seasonal schools, international conferences or workshops. What is distinctive in this case is that the VE component should be directly related to the activities learners engage in during the physical mobility period. (Mühlbauer, J. & van der Velden, B, 2022).

The third option (c) implies that VE is recognised as an independent learning activity, with credits granted to learners upon completion. For instance, this accreditation can be positioned within a broader curriculum by offering

the VE as a compulsory or elective course within a language degree. Additionally, the VE can serve as a “practicum,” involving practical work that complements more theoretical courses (Mühlbauer, J. & van der Velden, B., 2022).

The final scenario (d) entails VE as an essential part of a longer course and must be completed successfully to finish the course. In this respect, recognising the VE experience is tied to other course requirements. Moreover, in this scenario, the VE is usually used to support specific learning objectives within that course, unlike in the previous scenario, where the VE has its learning objectives and contributes to the broader goals of an entire program or major. (Mühlbauer, J. & van der Velden, B, 2022).

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<sup>4</sup> For detailed cases, refer to FRAMES Toolkit for integration of Virtual Exchange in Higher Education (page 12, case studies).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

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<sup>6</sup> For detailed cases, refer to FRAMES Toolkit for integration of Virtual Exchange in Higher Education (page 12, case studies), p.16.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.18.

# Case studies and practical considerations

## Rationale and objectives of the EnVision network

The EnVision network brings together four innovation-oriented universities in the Nordic-Baltic region (University of Tartu, Vilnius University, Uppsala University, and University of Helsinki) with a range of experiences in designing and running VEs in order to 1) facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best-practices and 2) co-design VE course scenarios and produce shared guidelines for implementing VEs. The network will strengthen regional cooperation channels, creating a hub of excellence in innovative digital teaching methods and VE.

The EnVision network builds on pre-existing successful cooperation among partners as part of the Coimbra group, the Utrecht network, the ENLIGHT network, Horizon 2020 projects, Erasmus+ mobility visits, and previous Nordplus cooperation (BAMSE 2020-3 with Vilnius, Tartu, and Helsinki; InnovaEDU with Tartu and Uppsala), favouring the further consolidation of horizontal good practices.

The network addresses the need of social sciences departments to 1) expand the scope of international and intercultural opportunities offered to students to create competitive, inclusive, and diverse study environments and 2) integrate digital competencies and transferable skills (intercultural communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork) into course curricula to enhance graduate employability.

In order to achieve these goals, the EnVision network brings together social sciences teaching staff to gain practical training on VE implementation and facilitation, share best practices, and collaborate to develop VE teaching materials. The outputs are two teacher-training seminars, co-created VE scenario design templates, and a compiled VE Toolkit. The Toolkit, with a

glossary of VE terms in national languages, will be distributed within the network to incentivise lecturers to integrate VEs into social sciences curricula after the end of the project. The information below lists a more detailed overview of the following process.

## Seminar at the University of Tartu “Introduction to virtual exchanges in the social sciences: tools, methods, processes, and challenges.”

The initial two-day training program for academic staff at partner universities brought together 12 participants (3 lecturers per partner institution). The main objective of the training was to introduce participants to theoretical aspects of VE, VE terminology and didactics, tips, and case studies of effective implementation of this format in the curriculum. The EnVision consortium also introduced the template for the design of VE scenarios to the teaching staff. The seminar also served as a networking opportunity to form the pairs to work collaboratively on their chosen VE scenario. The seminar trainers consulted individually with each working group to discuss initial ideas.

## Virtual Exchange Scenario Design

In the 4–5-month interval between Seminars 1 and 2, the lecturers worked in tandem on their chosen VE course design. It was also possible to use the time available for additional teacher and student mobility between the institutions to develop the courses further and strengthen institutional cooperation. Tartu, in collaboration with the Uppsala and Helsinki project managers, held an online clinic to check on the progress of the groups and provide additional pedagogical assistance. Before Seminar 2, the groups filled in at least 75% of the VE template (see Appendix 1).

### Seminar at Vilnius University: “Evaluating virtual exchange possibilities and integration into social science curricula at Nordic-Baltic universities.”

The follow-up two-day seminar served as a venue for the participating teaching staff of the consortium to present their VE course scenarios, get feedback from the partners, and discuss the challenges and opportunities of integrating VEs into existing courses. After the event, the lecturers finalised their VE scenarios and submitted the templates for final review by the consortium members for inclusion in the toolkit.

Three teachers from each HEI received training to enable them to integrate VEs into existing social sciences curricula: Tartu (MA programs in International Relations and Regional Studies, Politics and Governance in the Digital Age; European Studies), Uppsala (MA programs in Department of Governments, Business Studies, Educational Sciences), Vilnius (ARQUS Joint MA: European Studies, MA in Eastern European and Russian studies, BA in Politics of Global Challenges), and Helsinki (MA programs in Russian, Eurasian, and Eastern European Studies (MAREEES), Expertise in Russian and Eastern European Studies (ExpREES), East Central European, Balkan and Baltic Studies (ECEBB), and Ukrainian Studies).

The project’s innovative aspect was to build VE capacity in the Nordic-Baltic region’s social sciences field. Currently, the potential of VEs is mainly used in the humanities for language learning and is underutilised in the social sciences. Considering that VEs help students develop interpersonal and intercultural skills, their benefits should be incorporated and added to social science curricula to prepare graduates for the workplace.

### Virtual Exchange Toolkit

The final reflections, lessons learned and examples of VE scenarios have been evaluated and further integrated into practical guides for the EnVision consortium’s teaching staff and other educators interested in this topic. The document contains practical guidelines for designing, facilitating, and moderating VEs, the example scenario templates produced in WP2, and tips and

best practices. A summary has been translated into Estonian, Lithuanian, Swedish and Finnish languages, and a glossary of key VE pedagogical terms.

In this respect, the network has produced the following tangible outcomes, which can be used after the conclusion of the project:

- VE training seminars, including slides, training syllabus, practical activities, case studies of best practices
- VE Toolkit with practical guidelines on VE design, implementation, and facilitation, sample VE course design scenarios, and a glossary of VE terminology in the partners’ national languages to be circulated among teaching staff
- Dissemination of the project activities and results on social media to raise awareness of the innovative concept of VEs among teaching staff and students

The network contributes to the strategic objectives of the partner universities by 1) enhancing the competencies of teaching staff to work in intercultural and online environments, 2) enriching mobility offerings by enabling students to gain international experiences at their home institutions, and 3) developing teaching materials to integrate transferable skills into curricula, in order to improve student employability. The project aligns with the strategic plans of the ENLIGHT network (European Universities alliance between 9 research-intensive universities in Europe) and the Nordic Council of Ministers, which identify improving young people’s digital skills for employability and the digital transformation of the Nordic-Baltic region as key priorities.

## Overview of Virtual exchange opportunities in the Nordic-Baltic region with a focus on the EnVision consortium

VEs and blended intensive programs (BIPs) have been rapidly expanding. During the Erasmus+ VE pilot initiative (2018-20), around 28000 young people from 44 European, Middle Eastern and Southern Mediterranean countries participated in a VE (EACEA, 2021). VEs do not aim to fully replace physical study abroad programs like Erasmus+ but expand the scope and inclusivity of international exchanges: 1) to students who might financially struggle to study abroad; 2) to those facing mobility restrictions due to health or visa issues; 3) and by providing environmentally friendly and sustainable opportunities to gain intercultural experiences. VEs also provide opportunities to enhance digital competencies and soft skills (intercultural communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork). These skills are in high demand in the current labour market (Coursera Campus Skills Report, 2022). HEIS must integrate digital and transferable skills into course curricula to prepare students for employment.

Currently, VEs in the Nordic-Baltic region are small-scale and explorative, and there is a strong intent among HEIs to develop and expand offerings to provide competitive, inclusive, and diverse study environments. Each EnVision partner brings specific competencies and experiences to enrich the network. All partner universities have participated in or piloted various VE initiatives.

The University of Tartu (network coordinator) is part of the ENLIGHT European University Alliance<sup>8</sup>, which puts the development of VE programs and challenge-based learning at the forefront of its pedagogical practices. Thus, this approach and its development are strategically important to the university. In this regard, the University of Tartu provided training for its teaching

<sup>8</sup> See more information at <https://enlight-eu.org/index.php/university-about-us/about-enlight>

staff as part of the ENLIGHT framework<sup>9</sup>, and students of the University of Tartu could also take part in ENLIVE,<sup>10</sup> a VE project run by the Espace Langues at Bordeaux University. At the strategic level, the development of VE and internationalisation is part of the University of Tartu's Strategic Plan.

The main unit involved in the project - the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies - has participated and contributed to the VE programs developed by the Sharing Perspectives Foundation, such as “European Refuge/es: Cultivating Diversity Together” in 2017 and 2018 and offered to its students the program “Cultural Encounters: Perspectives on Populism” in 2019. The institute also participated as an associate partner in the project “The internationalisation of education”, coordinated by Uppsala University and aimed at enhancing the digitalisation of partner institutions through an introduction to VE. In addition to this experience, the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies has coordinated and contributed to the implementation of Blended Intensive Programs (BIPs) together with other European partners: examples include the summer school “Agile Governance in the Digital Age” (organised together with KU Leuven and the University of Konstanz) and the intensive course “Current European affairs: East and West cleavages” (organised together with the Prague University of Economics and Business and the University of Siena).

When it comes to Uppsala's engagement with the VE practices, it could be argued that formal interest in VE was enhanced by the European University network ENLIGHT development, as the partner-networking and interaction ambitions underlying the project call for more strategic and unified utilisation of VE in the courses/programmes that interlink several university partners. As a result, the definition of both purpose and method regarding VE has been, to some extent, clarified to organise a unified mode of implementation. This, in turn, requires both tools and training, which this particular NordPlus-financed programme supports. Current developments regarding implementation of VE at Uppsala University include a fully online training programme regarding serious gaming and conflict management, arranged

<sup>9</sup> See more information at <https://enlight-eu.org/university-about-us/news-events/158-news/738-enlight-offers-trainings-on-virtual-exchange-collaboration>

<sup>10</sup> See more information at <https://enlight-eu.org/index.php/students/courses/957-enlive>

by the Department of Game Design and partners and where VE is a central learning element; VE-moments embedded in global health management programmes, arranged as multidisciplinary courses; on the topic of global warming and challenges related to climate change, which are also interdisciplinary courses spanning earth and social sciences, as well as the various programmes provided by educational sciences for future teachers. In these cases, students are invited to expand and test their intercultural skills with their international peers, exploring their assumptions and training for future professional roles.

Vilnius University sees the development of VE as one of its activities, helping it seek interdisciplinary and international research and studies. The aim to ensure the ability of university graduates to operate in a global environment by creating conditions for all students to engage in global exchanges of scientific ideas through physical or virtual mobility is embedded in the strategic plan of Vilnius University.<sup>11</sup>

The Institute of International Relations and Political Science of Vilnius University (IIRPS VU) partakes in short intensive courses and full-time study programs, which have been integrally incorporated into the study program design. In March 2023, IIRPS VU hosted a blended intensive program, “Memory Studies: Peace, Conflict and Transformation”, organised with the University of Granada and the University of Jena. Among the participants in the program were students of these three universities and two additional partner universities – Åbo Akademi University and Coimbra University. The program, consisting of an online study activity week and face-to-face group work in Vilnius, was a successful example of setting the foundation for further cooperation between partner universities and the internationalisation of the study process.

In Autumn 2023, IIRPS VU launched a new full-time Master’s program – “ARQUS European studies”.<sup>12</sup> It is a joint study program delivered by the University of Granada, Leipzig University, and the University of Graz. The program is flexible and adaptable to the needs of potential students, combining

<sup>11</sup> See more at [https://www.vu.lt/site\\_files/Strateginis\\_planas\\_2020\\_II\\_dalis\\_EN.pdf](https://www.vu.lt/site_files/Strateginis_planas_2020_II_dalis_EN.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> See more at <https://arqus-alliance.eu/study-in-arqus/joint-masters-programmes/master-european-studies/>

different teaching methodologies (face-to-face, hybrid and online) and integrating jointly conceptualised and taught virtual courses with local seminars led by lecturers at the participant universities. Virtual courses delivered by teachers from partner universities allow students who cannot participate in physical mobility to participate in the VE of ideas and experience a multicultural environment in their studies by meeting peers from other partner universities online. Additionally, IIRPS VU is preparing to launch a new virtual course, “Atrocity Crimes and Responsibility to Protect”, delivered in partnership with the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The individual study module is envisioned as an elective course, integrating students at both universities and allowing for the collaboration of teachers in developing innovative teaching and assessment techniques that would emphasise the international dimension of the individual study module.

The University of Helsinki (UH) mentions in its strategic plan for 2021–2030<sup>13</sup> that one of its goals is to promote the physical and virtual mobility of its staff and students and to develop the University into an increasingly attractive and international environment for our international staff and students. The key international channels of influence for UH are the Una Europa alliance and the LERU network.

The Institute for Atmospheric and Earth System Research (INAR) at the University of Helsinki is currently coordinating two large ERASMUS+ virtual exchange projects: the Climate University for Virtual Exchanges (CLUVEX) and UnaEuropa for Virtual Exchanges (UnaVEx).

In the field of Social Sciences and Humanities, the UH Aleksanteri Institute’s East Central European, Southeast East European, and Baltic Studies co-taught a course on Democratic Erosion in Eastern Europe together with the Arizona State University (ASU) School of Politics and Global Studies & Melikian Center in spring 2023. As a VE element, the UH and ASU students had seven online lectures together, group work in mixed groups and individual assignments. The ASU students had a theoretical part before the joint online course, and both universities had their assignments for their students.

<sup>13</sup> See more at <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/about-us/strategy-economy-and-quality/strategic-plan-2021-2030>

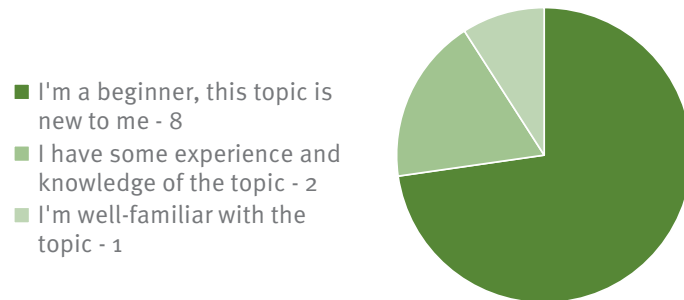


## Insights from training and feedback

### Training at the University of Tartu

The first EnVision training, “Introduction to Virtual Exchanges in the Social Sciences: Tools, methods, processes, and Challenges”, was conducted at the University of Tartu on October 23 and 24, 2023.

The pre-survey<sup>14</sup> for the training was conducted between August and the end of September 2023. In total, 11 participants filled in the form. The composition of participants who took part in the training is the following:



Three participants from the University of Tartu, Vilnius University and University of Helsinki were registered in the training, while 2 represented Uppsala University. It is also important to note that 9 participants participated in the event in person. At the same time, two representatives followed the training online (1 representative from Vilnius University and one representative from Uppsala University).

When it comes to the job position of participants of the training, the majority of seminar attendees held academic positions, which include:

- lecturer (4x)
- associate professor (3x)
- researcher (3x)

Among the participants were also management and administrative representatives:

- Educational developer (1x)
- Deputy Head for Academic Affairs
- Program directors (2x)
- Project Manager, continuous learning (1x)

### Domain and subject area

Regarding the research and teaching profile of seminar participants, 5 out of 11 respondents indicated that they are teaching political science or international relations (IR).

5 respondents (45%) answered **Political Sciences** for this question.



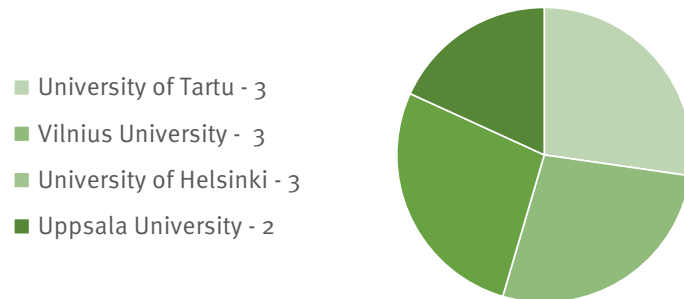
Delving deeper into the answers, it can be noted that lecturers also specified the regional studies focus of their teaching and research. Namely, lecturers are teaching:

- European Studies, Political Science (3x)
- Political science, Methodology (3x)
- History (2x)
- Comparative politics (1x)
- English for Academic Purposes and Research in Political Sciences (1x)

<sup>14</sup> Anna Beitane, University of Tartu (2023). Pre-seminar form. Available at: <https://forms.office.com/e/z8UVRcLSF9> [Accessed 11 September 2024].

## Participants' prior knowledge

Evaluating prior knowledge of the topic, 8 out of 11 respondents stated that they are beginners regarding VE. At the same time, two respondents mentioned that they had some prior knowledge and general familiarity, and only one participant indicated that they were very familiar with the topic.



## Motivation

Looking at the main motivation behind participation in the training, respondents were mostly interested in developing new teaching skills and providing students with more opportunities for intercultural learning. More of the teachers' responses are listed below:

- **Enhancing Teaching and Learning:** several participants are interested in integrating VE into their teaching activities to offer virtual participation options for international students, incorporating VE elements into their courses, and exploring how students can benefit from VEs. They aim to gain new skills and insights to improve teaching methods and enhance student experiences.
  - “We are starting a new master’s programme where part of an obligatory course will be taught online. We are also thinking about VE opportunities.” (Vilnius University)
  - “I want to learn new skills since I think they are an important part of the studies in the future. It will provide me and the programme new ways to plan and organise teaching.” (University of Helsinki)

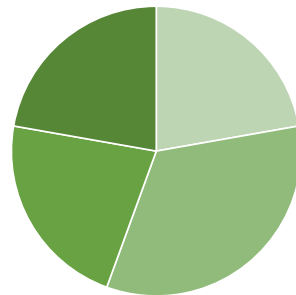
- **Networking and Collaboration:** the training provides an opportunity to network with peer institutions and colleagues from other universities. Participants seek to connect with others interested in VE, share best practices, and potentially collaborate on cross-cultural teaching projects.
  - “I hope to spread this knowledge to teaching staff at the university.” (Uppsala University)
  - “To support instructors considering the use of VE at the department, and to potentially incorporate elements of VE to my courses.” (University of Tartu)
  - “First, I would like to understand how to integrate it into my teaching activities. Second, see how students can profit from VE. Third, connect with colleagues from other universities who might be interested.” (University of Tartu)
- **Addressing Practical Challenges and Sustainability:** participants are keen to address challenges related to engaging students in virtual environments and to understand how to make online learning effective. Additionally, there is a focus on the environmental benefits of reducing travel and providing intercultural experiences while being mindful of sustainability.
  - “I am new to the topic, but I imagine it would help give courses / teaching with the lower climate impact - especially in the case of summer schools and international collaborative teaching projects.” (Uppsala University)
  - “Engaging students in virtual learning environments seems challenging compared to onsite teaching. I would like to gain insights on the best experiences and practical tips for making the online learning experience good for students and teachers.” (University of Helsinki)

- “This is an opportunity to gain skills in providing intercultural experiences for students while being mindful of mobility possibilities and the environmental cost of travelling. I hope this will inspire teachers to introduce and utilise cross-cultural teaching components and maybe provide a place to network for such cooperation.” (University of Tartu)

### Post-course survey

The post-survey<sup>15</sup> for the training was conducted between October 25 and November 1, 2023. In total, 9 participants filled in the form. The distribution of participants who filled in the form is depicted below:

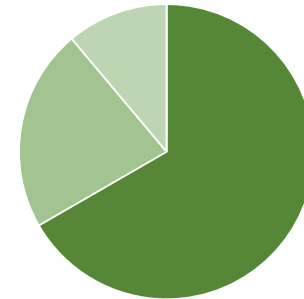
- University of Tartu - 2
- Vilnius University - 3
- University of Helsinki - 2
- Uppsala University - 2



### Overall quality and satisfaction with the training

In evaluating the overall satisfaction with the training, 6 out of 9 participants were very satisfied, 2 out of 9 participants were somewhat satisfied, and only 1 was somewhat dissatisfied.

- Very satisfied - 6
- Somewhat satisfied - 2
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied - 0
- Somewhat dissatisfied - 1
- Very dissatisfied - 0



Participants appreciated the well-chosen topics and comprehensive nature of the training. The sessions were informative, professional, and supported by practical examples and theoretical overviews. The training effectively raised awareness of VE and prompted thoughts on its applicability and potential for collaboration with other institutions. The direct testimonials include:

- “I appreciated the topics of the sessions. I thought they were well chosen; I enjoyed the style of the training, but there was plenty of room for discussion.” (University of Tartu)
- “It was informative, good examples and ideas for future planning.” (Uppsala University)
- “Professional, comprehensive, hands-on and well supported by theoretical overviews.” (Vilnius University)
- “The training was useful not only to make participants aware of what VE is and how it works but also to start thinking of potential applicability and cooperation with other participating universities.” (University of Tartu)

Some feedback highlighted a desire for more discussion opportunities and a more compact format. While the content was generally valued, a few participants felt the training could have been shorter. Additionally, there was a mention of already being familiar with some of the material, suggesting that participants’ varying levels of prior knowledge should be considered.

<sup>15</sup> Anna Beitane, University of Tartu (2023). Post-seminar form. Available at: <https://forms.office.com/e/twoqvGHuPA> [Accessed 11 September 2024].

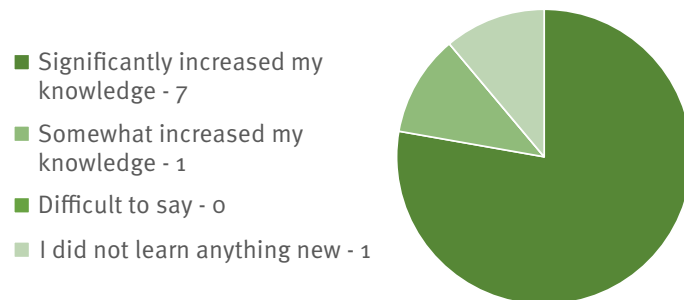
- “The training content was good, although there was not so much new information for me since I have taken some pedagogical studies at my home university. However, a recap never hurts; some participants might be less familiar with the topics than others. I also gained some new insights into teaching and was introduced to the concept. Taken together, I think the workshop was worth my time.” (University of Helsinki)
- “I liked the topic and the lecturer. At the same time, I think the training could have been shorter and more compact.” (Vilnius University)

Among somewhat dissatisfied evaluations were:

- “Perhaps the session could have been strengthened by a greater focus on the technical platforms and more concrete discussion over the possible topics and modalities of collaboratively taught study modules.” (Vilnius University)

### Impact of the training on knowledge

Looking at the data concerning the impact of the training on the knowledge about VE, 7 out of 9 respondents of survey argued that the program has significantly increased their knowledge. At the same time, only one participant mentioned that the training “somewhat increased my knowledge”, and one representative argued that they did not learn anything new.



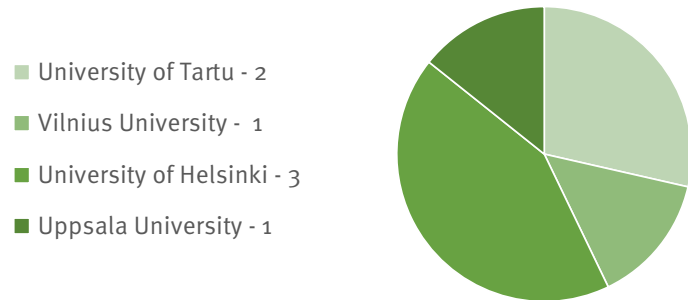
Among qualitative justifications for the following assessment are:

- “Above all, I learned about the differences between VE and other short online learning opportunities; various aspects to take into account + practical suggestions regarding platforms and others.” (University of Tartu)
- “I did not know a thing before, but now I do understand what the VE is.” (Uppsala University)
- “I plan to take what I have learned back to my colleagues.” (Uppsala University)
- “Before starting the training, my knowledge of VE was very limited. Now I feel much more confident.” (University of Tartu)
- “I was not familiar with the concept before the workshop. It seems that it has much overlap with online teaching, but some extra factors need to be taken into account in planning VE compared to “normal” online teaching.” (University of Helsinki)
- “I had some basic ideas and experiences (which I did not consider virtual training), and got to know more about it.” (Vilnius University)
- “I did not have any knowledge about VE prior training. Now I know to evaluate if it is applicable in our case.” (University of Helsinki)

## Training at Vilnius University & overall evaluation of the Envision trainings

The second EnVision training, “Evaluating virtual exchange possibilities and integration into social science curricula at Nordic-Baltic universities,” was conducted at Vilnius University on April 24 and 25, 2024.

The post-survey<sup>16</sup> for the training was conducted between April 26 and May 5, 2024. In total, 7 participants filled in the form. The composition of participants who took part in the training and filled in the form is the following:



Three participants from the University of Tartu, Vilnius University, and the University of Helsinki were registered for the training. In comparison, one in-person participant and 2 participants representing Uppsala University participated in the event online.

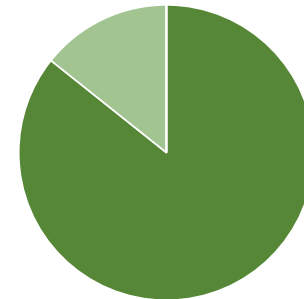
Since this second training was a follow-up event, the affiliation and job position of the participants remained the same. Thus, no data in connection to this aspect was collected in the post-survey evaluation.

### Satisfaction with the training

Evaluating the overall satisfaction with the training, 6 participants were very satisfied with the training, and 1 respondent was somewhat satisfied with

<sup>16</sup> Anna Beitane, University of Tartu (2024). Post-seminar form. Available at: <https://forms.office.com/e/DyjynDGYgg> [Accessed 11 September 2024].

- Very satisfied - 6
- Somewhat satisfied - 1
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied - 0
- Somewhat dissatisfied - 1
- Very dissatisfied - 0



the training.

Participants found the training materials to be well-structured, interesting, and relevant. The resources provided a solid foundation for future VE activities and were praised for being clear, helpful, and encouraging. The balance between addressing the teachers’ and the students’ perspectives was appreciated, ensuring a comprehensive approach to VE. Some of the direct testimonials include:

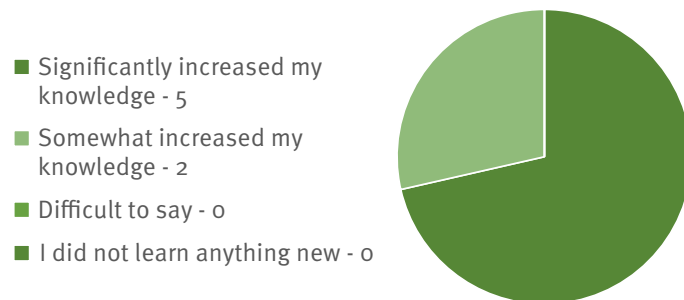
- “Materials were well-structured and useful, provide the basis for any future actions regarding VE” (University of Tartu)
- “It has all been very clear, the tone very helpful and encouraging!” (Uppsala University)
- “I liked that it was a good balance between thinking from the teacher’s perspective about the feasibility of organising VE but that the student’s perspective was equally considered.” (University of Tartu)
- “The content, including materials, were well-thought-out in connection with the idea of the training.” (University of Helsinki)

Several participants suggested that the training could have been more concise, with a preference for shorter sessions or fewer trips. There was also a request for ready-made templates to facilitate the integration of VE elements into courses. Feedback indicated that the evaluation process could have been simplified, potentially using a lighter scale or separating the evaluation into distinct phases for planning and post-course assessments:

- “From a manager’s point of view of the project, I feel that the project goals were met; all groups presented a feasible course plan with a VE element. While discussing this with some teachers, I discovered they might have wished to have a couple of ready-made alternative templates for integrating a VE element into a regular course. They also felt that the evaluation was maybe too heavy with a 0-5 scale; maybe a traffic light-type scale would be lighter. Also, they felt that the evaluation form could be divided into a planning phase form and a post-course form, and they also thought that maybe the managers’ and teachers’ forms should be separated.” (University of Helsinki)

### Impact of EnVision trainings

Looking at the data concerning the impact of the training on the knowledge about VE, 5 participants argued that the program has significantly increased their knowledge. In comparison, 2 participants mentioned that the training “somewhat increased my knowledge”.



For many participants, the training significantly expanded their understanding of VE. Those with limited prior knowledge found the training particularly beneficial, providing them with a solid grasp of the VE process and its practical applications. Participants who were new to VE felt that the training was instrumental in introducing them to the concept and its potential:

- “I did not know anything about VE before EnVision trainings, but now I think I do have a pretty good idea.” (Uppsala University)
- “I was not overly familiar with VE before this training, so I have benefited greatly from the training and materials.” (University of Tartu)
- “Prior to the training, I did not have any knowledge about the VE. As an outcome of the training, I have created a course that could be organised as a VE.” (University of Helsinki)

Participants with experience in VE found the training useful for re-evaluating their previous activities and exploring theoretical and empirical aspects in greater depth. The training also supported those with existing VE experience in refining their approach and integrating VE elements into new course designs:

- “Prior to workshops, I had very little knowledge about VE, so in that sense, workshops significantly increased my knowledge. However, I was familiar with many aspects of online teaching, and VE overlaps with many aspects of that field. Thus, I feel that my knowledge increased only “somewhat”.” (University of Helsinki)
- “I have been involved in the management of a VE course (a whole course), but it was interesting to go deeper into VE theory and empirical data gathered on previous VE courses and to look into possibilities of having VE as one common element on two different courses.” (University of Helsinki)



When commenting on the most valuable aspects of the training, the participants mentioned the following elements:

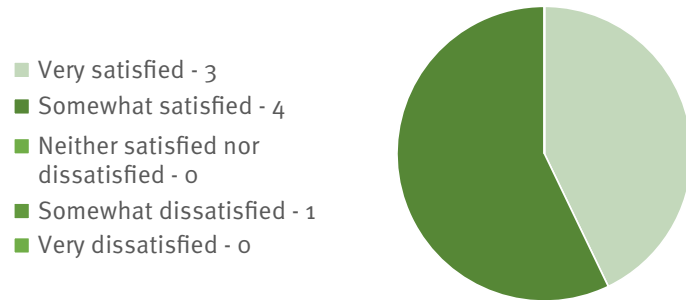
- **Teacher Collaboration:** a primary benefit noted across the feedback was the opportunity for teacher collaboration. Participants valued the chance to work with colleagues from other institutions, seeing it as a key aspect of the training. This collaboration has fostered ongoing partnerships and opened avenues for future joint projects.
  - “Definitely the collaboration with a colleague from another institution with whom we plan to continue our cooperation, possibly beyond the current VE project.” (University of Tartu)
- **New Teaching Methods:** the training provided insights into new teaching methods and techniques, which participants found valuable for enhancing their practices. Learning innovative approaches and sharing best practices with peers contributed to their professional development.
  - “Learning about new teaching methods and teacher collaboration from other universities.” (University of Tartu)
- **Networking and International Collaboration:** the training facilitated valuable networking opportunities, allowing participants to connect with colleagues from different universities. This eye-opening international collaboration significantly improved participants’ understanding of organising and managing VE projects.
  - “International collaboration is always eye-opening, and I felt that my knowledge on organising a VE exchange increased significantly.” (University of Helsinki)

Elaborating further on teacher collaboration, the survey respondents shared the following testimonials:

- “Very satisfied as we plan to continue collaboration. The most challenging part was, in general, to discuss the very practical matters (schedules, assignment requirements), and we were more or less on the same page regarding content, target groups, and learning outcomes.” (University of Tartu)
- “If you want to implement your VE scenario in practice, I think differences between university systems (e.g. admin, timetable, etc.) are probably the most challenging. Also, getting interested people to engage in the project can be challenging. I was satisfied with my group collaboration because I think my colleague and I were “on the same page” on what to do, and the division of labour seemed to go quite nicely with the 50%-50% principle.” (University of Helsinki)
- “Very satisfied. The major challenge is the cross-national differences in the length of courses.” (Uppsala University)
- “It was great” (Vilnius University)
- “I am very satisfied. It was initially quite challenging to find a good overlap that could serve as the basis for the VE scenario, and there were multiple technical issues that we did not address in detail. However, the cooperation worked nicely and was a nice creative challenge.” (University of Tartu)
- “From the manager’s point of view, the VE scenarios are perfectly credible, even if teachers say that they are very busy and cannot put as much time into planning the VE scenarios as they would have wished.” (University of Helsinki)
- “Collaboration was very good and inspiring. Challenging was to find time to discuss and to fit different systems to the same idea.” (University of Helsinki).

### Satisfaction with the developed scenario and future sustainability of the VE toolkit

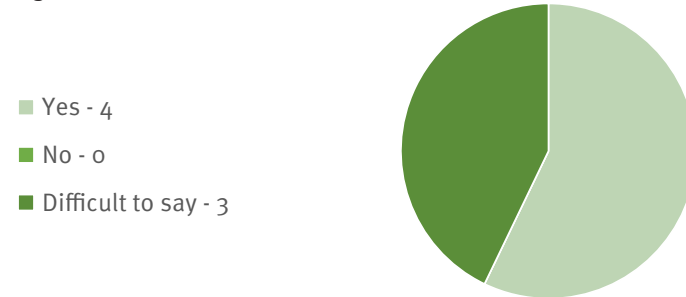
The post-training survey showed that the participating teaching staff were satisfied with the presented scenarios of VE. The graph below depicts the following argument:



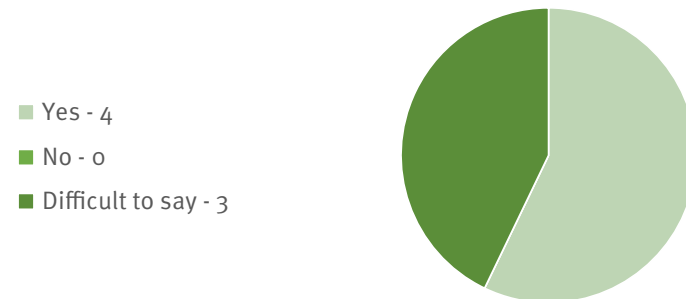
Among the reasons for satisfaction, the participants mentioned:

- “I think there are still issues which need to be sorted out, but overall, we completed the task beyond expectations.” (University of Tartu)
- “When you are an early-stage researcher with a non-established position in the academia, it is more complicated (and perhaps not motivating also) to plan a VE scenario since you do not know if it will be implemented.” (University of Helsinki)
- “We had several technical issues we did not solve, but seeing we are both fairly inexperienced with course planning, I am satisfied with the final VE scenario. It would be exciting to incorporate it into a future course.” (University of Tartu)
- “From my point of view, all presented scenarios were credible and interesting.” (University of Helsinki)
- “Taking into account the starting point, we managed to create a scenario that fulfils scholarly demands and practical needs.” (University of Helsinki)

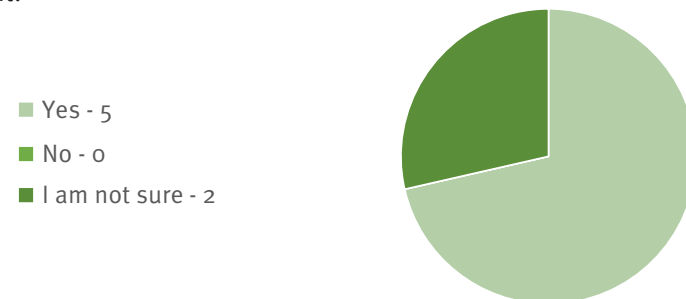
Evaluating the value of peer feedback during the final event in Vilnius, the opinions of respondents split into those (the majority) who found the feedback helpful (4 respondents) and those who found it difficult to assess the following element:



Speaking of the future sustainability of the developed scenarios, four respondents were interested in implementing their VE scenario, while 3 participants were unsure about its future feasibility.



Finally, 5 respondents indicated they would be interested in using the VE toolkit.



## Examples of VE scenarios from the EnVision network

The VE scenarios were developed using the “VE scenario template” (see Appendix 1). The teaching staff had time between October 2023 and early April 2024 to define and finalise their VE scenario. There was also an additional possibility to use the teacher exchange as part of Nordplus mobility to meet in person to discuss the scenario with the colleague and use the EnVision consultation with the organisers to discuss any pending questions.

In total, 6 VE scenarios have been developed as part of the project. Each mixed group consisted of 2 lecturers from different partner institutions of EnVision, including lecturers from the University of Tartu, Vilnius University, the University of Helsinki, and Uppsala University. The topics of the proposed scenarios included:

- Introduction to Studying Activism on Cross-Border Issues (University of Helsinki and University of Tartu)
- EU enlargement (University of Tartu and Vilnius University)
- Shared History – Finland and Sweden (University of Uppsala and University of Helsinki)

- Decolonisation in Eastern Europe (University of Tartu and University of Helsinki)

Two other scenarios did not include a specific title, but covered such topics as academic English writing, and international intervention. In the sections below, you can find some examples of the developed scenarios as part of the project, which include different integration methods: development of a new course, integration of the VE into the existing courses, and development of the new course with some customisation of working load/assessment to fit the needs of the partners.

### Scenario 1: Introduction to Studying Activism on Cross-Border Issues

The following scenario was developed between the lecturers at the University of Helsinki and the University of Tartu. The course aims to identify national or transnational activism on cross-border issues by linking political science and border studies perspectives. The main aim of the VE is that students gain insights from different fields and experts, such as political activism (Political Science, University of Helsinki) and cross-border issues (Border Studies, University of Tartu).

|                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Course structure</b> | <p>Module 1 – 2: Introduction and getting to know each other</p> <p>Ice-breaking activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Active introduction: 5 things that represent me from the room I am in</li> <li>■ Beehive exercise breakout rooms: “Describe in your own words 1) What is activism, 2) How do activism on cross-border issues differ from other forms of activism? 3) What is the difference between cross-border activism and activism on cross-border issues?”</li> <li>■ Individual task following start-up meeting: Find examples of cross-border activism (either cross-border issue or cross-border activism). Share on online platform (e.g., Moodle forum). Current news or from any point in time?</li> </ul> <p>Module 3 – 4: Collaboration on projects</p> <p>Module 5: Poster presentation on cross-border activism case study</p> |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Learning outcomes</b>             | Students can characterise and critically assess political activism, identifying cross-border issues.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Language of instruction</b>       | English (working language based on skills of the group)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Discipline/field of research:</b> | Political science, border studies, humanities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Technical setup</b>               | Zoom will be used as an online learning platform. In addition, lecturers will use break-out rooms for case-study groups and present appropriate tools which may aid during collaborative work, such as Mural and Miro. Lecturers will enable “sharing multiple screens simultaneously” and ask students to keep their cameras open and screens shared. This way, teachers can better engage with students and notice when focus is lost.                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Assessment</b>                    | The VE will be assessed based on the Poster presentation, which will define the final grade. In addition, students will be asked to record their reflections in a logbook.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Conclusions</b>                   | This VE would allow the students to learn about their specific field with other students in a different field. The structure is designed to create working groups, which develop mutual dependency among the participants (students from the University of Helsinki will bring on board the specialization in political activism; while students from the University of Tartu contribute with the input on cross-border studies) as they have to rely on the knowledge and skills of the students from the two separate courses.<br><br>It opens up to learning about activism across borders and lets students experience some of the conditions in which they study. |

### Scenario 2: EU enlargement

The following scenario has been developed between the lecturers at Vilnius University and the University of Tartu. The following VE collaboration will occur within two existing courses at partner universities. For the University of Tartu, the course will be “Regional Integration Processes in Europe and Eurasia,” for Vilnius University, it will be “Contemporary Challenges for the EU.” Both courses will integrate a three-week VE experience focused on enlargement policies and preparation of policy recommendations.

The course at Vilnius University covers the most pressing challenges facing the European Union (EU) at home and abroad. Its main objective is to provide students with the analytical tools and knowledge needed to critically assess issues relevant to the EU and formulate reasoned proposals on top-

ical issues. The language of instruction is Lithuanian, and the course lasts for 13 weeks. The course at the University of Tartu explores the institutional and historical developments related to the EU’s emergence, transformation, and consolidation while discussing post-Cold War attempts at regional integration in the former Soviet space. The course’s language of instruction is English and lasts for 16 weeks.

These two courses complement each other well:

- Vilnius University: Knowledge of public policy recommendations but lack of systematic look at enlargement policies.
- University of Tartu: Systematic look at enlargement policies, but lack of knowledge/attention to preparing public policy recommendations.

|                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Course structure</b></p>        | <p>Vilnius University:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Internal challenges related to the functioning of the EU (voting reform, state sovereignty issues, etc.)</li> <li>■ Issues related to the EU neighbourhood</li> <li>■ Issues related to the EU’s engagement with other global actors</li> </ul> <p>University of Tartu:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Institutions and functioning of the EU</li> <li>■ EU Neighborhood and Eastern Partnership</li> <li>■ Regionalism in Eurasia</li> <li>■ Current issues</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Teachers’ collaboration</b></p> | <p>Close coordination before the beginning of the course (when drafting the programs for each course) to ensure that VE corresponds to each course’s objectives</p> <p>Introduction of the students to the task and its requirements and the nature of the cooperation</p> <p>Co-teaching and complementing each other’s teaching</p> <p>Joint consultations with students</p> <p>Joint evaluation of the VE-related tasks</p> <p>Both lecturers will grade them collaboratively.</p>                                                                     |
| <p><b>Technical setup</b></p>         | <p>For lectures and consultations – ZOOM</p> <p>For introductions/opinion exchange – Padlet, Mentimeter, Flipgrid</p> <p>To co-write a paper – OneDrive (it allows tracking the co-creation process)</p> <p>To share files – OneDrive</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <p><b>Assessment</b></p>              | <p>Assessment of VE will be one policy brief (5 pages) and a two-page reflection on the shared working experience. In both courses, the weight of the joint assignment will be 30% of the final evaluation, while the computation of points will be defined in the light of each course’s grading scales.</p> <p>Policy brief – 80%</p> <p>Reflection of joint working experience – 20%</p>                                                                                                                                                               |

### Scenario 3: Shared History – Finland and Sweden

The following scenario was developed for the lecturers at the University of Helsinki and Uppsala University. The following VE collaboration involves creating a new course. The course is online, and consideration has been given to maximise student well-being. The course aims to learn about Finland and Sweden’s common history. The main rationale of the VE is related to the following aspects:

- Cultural competence and awareness
- Collaborative and language skills
- Access to diverse perspectives
- Engagement and motivation
- Networking and future opportunities

|                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Course structure</b>        | The course includes short lectures on relevant topics, mainly emphasising group work, resulting in a poster/presentation and self-reflection. This course has modules with lectures and group work that have weekly student activities. Group work is done in groups of students from both Universities (4-6 students). There is time during meetings, and student should also meet in their own time. |
| <b>Learning outcomes</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Students have acquired some basic knowledge of the timeline and relevant source material</li> <li>■ Students have developed the ability to read the text and interpret the source materials critically</li> <li>■ Students have developed an interest in further exploring common history knowledge independently</li> </ul>                                  |
| <b>ECTS</b>                    | The credits allocated per partner will differ:<br>For Uppsala University, it will be 7.5 ECTS, while for the University of Helsinki, it will be 5 ECTS.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Language of instruction</b> | Swedish and English                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Technical setup</b>         | Moodle<br>Course materials<br>Assignments<br>Instructions, etc., are in Moodle<br>Zoom lectures<br>Breakout rooms<br>Quizzes/polls, for example, for “ice-breaking activity.”                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |



|                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Assessment</b>              | <p>Assessment of VE will be related to the following evaluation methods (Whole course):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The whole course evaluation method is divided equally into participatory grades about poster presentation (VE part), peer review, and self-assessment.</li></ul> <p>Virtual exchange evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Rubrics were created for participation, collaboration, and content presentation.</li></ul> <p>Each teacher in charge (one from each University) will grade their students' performance in the VE component on a pass/fail scale.</p> |
| <b>Teachers' collaboration</b> | <p>Study methods</p> <p>Course lectures subjects</p> <p>Learning objectives</p> <p>Scheduling</p> <p>Teachers will decide and produce:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Materials – articles etc.</li><li>■ Groupwork assignments, instructions and framework for assessment.</li><li>■ Instruction needed for completing the course.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Conclusions</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The course is implemented in cooperation between the history subjects of the two universities.</li><li>■ Students can acquire new knowledge about the common past and get to know the students from another university.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

### Scenario 4: Decolonisation in Eastern Europe

The following scenario has been developed between the lecturers at the University of Helsinki and the University of Tartu. This course provides an in-depth exploration of decolonisation, focusing on theoretical frameworks and practical applications. Students will engage critically with the concepts and theories of decolonisation, examining its historical, political, and cultural dimensions. Through lectures, readings, and discussions, students will comprehensively understand decolonisation and its relevance in contemporary contexts.

The course will also emphasise the application of decolonisation theories to specific case studies, enabling students to assess and interpret real-world scenarios. This practical approach will help students to identify and analyse the complex dynamics of decolonisation in various global contexts.

The main rationale of this VE is related to:

- Combining and exchanging expertise on the topic, filling the gap concerning certain topics in our institutions;
- Learning about different perspectives from two different countries/ international bodies of students;
- Giving students equal/increased access to an international/intercultural educational experience (no need to travel, no additional financial burden, or no need for instructors to secure funding, etc.)
- Supporting the partner universities in their effort to widen the teaching topics with less funding.

|                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Teachers' collaboration</b> | <p>Lectures by members of teaching staff from both universities</p> <p>Joint planning with instructors to avoid overlaps between each other and with other existing courses</p> <p>Discussion of group work assignment (criteria may differ depending on the University requirements).</p> <p>We are finding the best ways to combine discipline-based and pedagogical expertise to support online learning.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Course structure</b>        | <p>Week 1: Ice-breaking, roles within a group, working agreement, division of tasks</p> <p>Week 2: Individual task completed independently, comparison and summary of results - Case studies (initial findings) based on ideas/concepts presented in the lecture and discussed in the seminar.</p> <p>Week 3: Individual task completed independently, comparison and summary of results - Case studies (initial findings) based on ideas/concepts presented in the lecture and discussed in the seminar.</p> <p>Week 4: Preparation of presentations, writing the synopsis/ reflection.</p> <p>For four weeks, eight meetings (lectures, seminars) and group work discussions were decided in the groups.</p> |
| <b>Language of instruction</b> | <p>English</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>ECTS</b></p>            | <p>The course will award 3 ECTS to students at the University of Tartu and 5 ECTS to those at the University of Helsinki.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <p><b>Technical setup</b></p> | <p>The technical platform and tools for VE will be organised as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Main Moodle page for course information, guidelines, readings</li> <li>■ Main Moodle page subsections for groups to collect and share group-specific information (each group is given its own Zoom link)</li> <li>■ Students facilitate/ plan time for group meetings that are conducted independently by students</li> <li>■ Zoom for lectures, seminars, group work discussions, and informal meetings.</li> <li>■ Students decide the platform for group discussions/updates (Moodle subsection, WhatsApp, etc.)</li> <li>■ Guidelines for students on how to plan and carry out group work (updated weekly)</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Assessment</b></p>      | <p>Helsinki (assessment differentiated 0-5/5 cr.):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Attendance of 80% of the sessions (pass/fail)</li> <li>■ Participation in seminars and readings (pass/fail)</li> <li>■ Group work</li> <li>■ Report on the process during the course</li> <li>■ Reflection paper focusing on student learning</li> </ul> <p>Tartu (assessment pass/fail/3 cr.):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Attendance of 80% of the sessions (pass/fail)</li> <li>■ Participation in seminars and readings (pass/fail)</li> <li>■ Group work</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                        |
| <p><b>Conclusions</b></p>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The course would help the teaching tasks at both partner universities</li> <li>■ We can fill the expertise gap at both ends and supply the demand.</li> <li>■ There are topics for discussion, such as differences in the academic calendar and the number of credits expected, but all these are possible to settle on.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

## Lessons learned

From the academic and teaching perspectives, the participants mentioned several elements for potential improvement of the training or main takeaways taken from the experience:

- There was some confusion about whether the VE course was to be considered hypothetical or intended for immediate implementation: “Maybe it was a bit unclear to me – and to my partner from another university – we are dealing with a hypothetical VE course or one that should be implemented as soon as possible.” (University of Helsinki). In this respect, improving clarity in task communication is needed to ensure all participants understand the scope and objectives of the course.
- Developing a VE scenario proved challenging in some contexts due to differing approaches and institutional contexts. It would be beneficial to provide clearer guidelines on creating VE scenarios that can be applied to various courses, as well as expanding creative options by considering scenarios beyond the participants’ courses: “Initially, it was quite difficult to come up with a VE scenario taking into account differences between institutions, but I think this is simply part of the process. We all approached the VE scenario somewhat differently, so this could be something to keep in mind: It is difficult to imagine what a VE looks like if you have never participated in one. Also, to be clearer, a VE scenario could be created for courses other than your own, which would widen creative options for formulating a VE scenario.” (University of Tartu)
- Participants noted the potential advantage of using pre-existing VE templates to simplify the project process. Additionally, a suggestion was to include more hands-on practice with the VE toolkit and examples before starting the planning phase. Providing dedicated time for sharing best practices and experiences with online learning platforms could also enhance the effectiveness of VE training: “I always like sharing best practices/ real-world examples, which is always the most useful part. Next time, we could dedicate time to whatever element of VE the participants have tried/practised (even if it is not VE per se but, e.g. the experience

with online learning platforms). I would not say this was missing from this training, but just a suggestion to consider having it next time.” (University of Tartu).

From the organisational point of view, the coordinators of the EnVision network thought of the following elements:

- It might have been beneficial to divide lecturers into pairs or working groups before the training in Tartu in October 2023 so they could get to know each other and their respective backgrounds. Eventually, the group dynamics and collaboration worked well, except for only one pair that had to be regrouped.
- The training could also include more student perspectives and voices. In the future, it would be useful to include the learners who directly participated in the VE and could provide additional feedback and perspective to the seminar participants.
- The opportunity to offer lecturers the consultation before the final event was a valuable experience since it helped them address some of the pending questions they had in finalising their VE scenarios. It also gave the seminar organisers an insight into the groups’ progress with their presentations.
- Developing various templates (template for VE scenario development, VE checklist template, etc.) helped make the training more hands-on. It gave the organisers concrete input and feedback from the teaching staff on improving the VE toolkit.
- It might have been useful to integrate and invite the leadership or management from partner institutes responsible for internationalisation strategies or the development of VE. This could have ensured that their perspective was taken into account and more attention was paid to developing appropriate strategies and infrastructure to support the integration of VE at partner institutions.

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# Appendix 1

## Virtual exchange scenario template

| Name of the institution                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Partner 1 | Partner 2 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Title of the course                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |           |           |
| Brief description of the course                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |           |           |
| Course structure                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |           |           |
| Learning outcomes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |           |           |
| Language (if applicable)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |           |           |
| Discipline/field of research                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |           |           |
| Duration of the course (in weeks)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |           |           |
| Rationale for VE/virtual collaboration in the course                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |           |           |
| Please describe how VE will enhance the course learning process. What is the added value of VE in the courses for each partner?                                                                                                                                                           |           |           |
| Teacher collaboration                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |           |           |
| Please describe the process of involving partner universities/teaching staff in setting up the design of VE in the course. How will planning and overall coordination be managed between the partners before, during and after the courses?                                               |           |           |
| Duration of VE and activities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |           |           |
| Please describe the timing and duration of VE in the course. What type of activities are learners supposed to complete as part of VE? What tasks are they supposed to complete in VE format? (Think about ice-breaking activities at the start of the course and collaborative exercises) |           |           |
| Assessment of VE                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |           |           |
| Please describe how participation in VE will be assessed. What are learners supposed to accomplish during VE?                                                                                                                                                                             |           |           |
| Technical support and online learning environment                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |           |           |
| Please describe how students will be supported during the VE phase of the course. What online platform and tools for VE are you going to use?                                                                                                                                             |           |           |

- Source: developed by the partners of EnVision consortium: Anna Beitane (University of Tartu); Minna Oroza (University of Helsinki), Anastasiia Tkachuk (Vilnius University), Geir Gunnlaugsson (Uppsala University)

## Appendix 2

### Peer assessment of VE scenarios

| Criteria                                        | Excellent (5)                                                                                                                                                                                             | Good (4)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | FAIR (3)                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | LIMITED (2)                                                                                                                                                         | INADEQUATE (1)                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Rationale for VE</b>                      | The rationale for the VEs is clear, well-developed, and aligned with educational goals, cultural understanding, and global competence development.                                                        | The rationale for the VE is well-articulated and aligned with educational goals and cultural understanding.                                                                                                                                     | The rationale for the VE is somewhat clear but lacks depth or alignment with educational goals and cultural understanding.                                                                                                 | The rationale for the VE is unclear or absent, lacking alignment with educational goals and cultural understanding.                                                 | No rationale was provided for the VE.                                                                                                            |
| <b>2. Teacher collaboration</b>                 | Teachers demonstrate strong collaboration throughout the VE, actively engaging in planning, implementing, and reflecting on activities. Collaboration enhances the learning experience for students.      | Teachers demonstrate effective collaboration, contributing to the planning and implementation of activities. Collaboration positively impacts the VE experience.                                                                                | Teachers show some level of collaboration, but it lacks consistency or depth, impacting the quality of the VE experience.                                                                                                  | Limited collaboration between teachers, resulting in disjointed or ineffective implementation of activities.                                                        | There is no evidence of teacher collaboration during the VE.                                                                                     |
| <b>3. Duration of VE and activities</b>         | The duration of the VE is well-planned and appropriate, allowing for in-depth engagement and meaningful interactions. Activities are varied, and time is effectively utilised.                            | The duration of the VE is appropriate, allowing for engagement and interaction. Activities are planned but may lack variety or depth.                                                                                                           | The duration of the VE is somewhat appropriate, but activities may feel rushed or insufficiently developed.                                                                                                                | The duration of the VE is inadequate, limiting meaningful engagement and interaction. Activities are poorly planned or executed.                                    | The duration of the VE is significantly inadequate, preventing meaningful engagement and interaction. Activities are poorly planned or executed. |
| <b>4. Assessment</b>                            | Assessment methods are clearly defined, varied, and aligned with learning objectives. They effectively measure student learning and cultural competence development. Feedback is timely and constructive. | Assessment methods are defined and aligned with learning objectives but may lack variety or effectiveness in measuring student learning and cultural competence development. Feedback is generally provided but may be inconsistent or delayed. | Assessment methods are somewhat defined but lack alignment with learning objectives. They may be limited in measuring student learning and cultural competence development. Feedback is inconsistent or lacking in detail. | Assessment methods are unclear or poorly defined, hindering the measurement of student learning and cultural competence development. Feedback is minimal or absent. | No assessment methods are defined, hindering student learning and cultural competence development measurement. Feedback is absent.               |
| <b>5. Technical support and online learning</b> | Technical support is readily available and effectively addresses any issues during the VE. The online platform is user-friendly and enhances the learning experience.                                     | Technical support is available and generally addresses issues that arise during the VE. The online platform is functional but may have minor usability issues.                                                                                  | Technical support is somewhat available but may be slow to address issues. The online platform has usability issues that impact the learning experience.                                                                   | Limited technical support is available, resulting in unresolved issues during the. The online platform is difficult to navigate or unreliable.                      | No technical support is available, hindering participation in the VE. The online platform is inaccessible or unusable.                           |

■ Source: developed by the partners of EnVision consortium: Anna Beitane (University of Tartu); Minna Oroza (University of Helsinki), Anastasiia Tkachuk (Vilnius University), Geir Gunnlaugsson (Uppsala University)



# Appendix 3

## Checklist for designing VE programs

NB! The following checklist is framed from the perspective of an academic staff interested in designing either a brand-new VE with a partner or offering VE as part of an existing course.

| Criteria                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Rating<br>Not started (NS)<br>In progress (IP)<br>Under review (UR)<br>Approved (AP)<br>Not applicable (NA) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                             |
| <b>VE Program Course Description and Structure</b>                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                             |
| Descriptive title: Is the title of the VE program clearly defined and descriptive?                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                             |
| Overview of content and objectives: does the program provide an overview of the course content and objectives?                                                                                                   |                                                                                                             |
| Articulated structure: Are the modules or units, topics, themes, and learning activities clearly outlined?                                                                                                       |                                                                                                             |
| Stated and measurable learning objectives: Are the learning objectives clearly stated and measurable?                                                                                                            |                                                                                                             |
| Language of instruction/communication: Is the language of instruction or communication clearly stated?                                                                                                           |                                                                                                             |
| Disciplinary background and focus: does the program outline the disciplinary background and focus of the content?                                                                                                |                                                                                                             |
| Detailed schedule of activities and workload: does the program include a detailed schedule of activities and their duration? Does the program describe the workload necessary for the completion of the program? |                                                                                                             |
| <b>Target Audience</b>                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                             |
| Profile of learners and prior experience: does the program consider the profile of learners and their prior experience?                                                                                          |                                                                                                             |
| Digital skills and intercultural competencies: does the program consider the digital skills and intercultural competencies of learners?                                                                          |                                                                                                             |
| Language proficiency: does the program consider the language proficiency necessary for participation in the program?                                                                                             |                                                                                                             |
| <b>Rationale of VE</b>                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                             |
| Explanation of benefits: does the program explain why VE/collaboration is beneficial?                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                             |
| Description of improved outcomes: does the program describe how VE will improve learning outcomes?                                                                                                               |                                                                                                             |
| Identification of added value: does the program identify the added value for each partner institution?                                                                                                           |                                                                                                             |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Teacher Collaboration</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                          |  |
| Plan for collaboration: does the program include a plan for collaboration between teaching staff from partner universities? Does the program assign roles and responsibilities for coordinating VE implementation?                    |  |
| Management of planning and coordination: does the program consider the management of planning and coordination? Does the program establish regular communication channels between partner institutions?                               |  |
| <b>Assessment &amp; Feedback</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |
| Methodology for assessing participation: does the program include a methodology for assessing participation in VE?                                                                                                                    |  |
| Clear expectations for learners: does the program include clear expectations of what learners should accomplish?                                                                                                                      |  |
| Collaboration among students: does the program encourage collaborative work among students from different institutions?                                                                                                               |  |
| Feedback and Reflection: does the program include mechanisms for collecting participant feedback about their VE experience? Are there opportunities for reflection on the learning outcomes and challenges encountered during the VE? |  |
| <b>Cultural Sensitivity &amp; Awareness</b>                                                                                                                                                                                           |  |
| Cultural understanding: does the program incorporate activities or discussions to promote cultural understanding and sensitivity among participants? Does the program create a safe space for open discussion?                        |  |
| Intercultural communication: does the program include guidance on respectful communication and interaction across cultural differences?                                                                                               |  |
| <b>Technical Support</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                              |  |
| Support system for students: does the program include a support system for students during the VE phase?                                                                                                                              |  |
| Identification of online platforms/tools: does the program identify online platforms and tools for VE implementation?                                                                                                                 |  |
| <b>Recognition of VE</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                              |  |
| Explanation of how VE experience is counted: does the program explain how the VE experience will be counted for learners?                                                                                                             |  |
| Explanation of how VE experience is counted for the HEI: would the VE be recognised both by the HEI offering it and its partner institution?                                                                                          |  |
| <b>Quality Assurance</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                              |  |
| Monitoring and evaluation: does the program include regular monitoring and evaluation of VE activities to ensure quality and alignment with course objectives?                                                                        |  |
| Feedback monitoring: does the program adjust its implementation strategies based on feedback and assessment results?                                                                                                                  |  |

- Source: developed by the partners of EnVision consortium: Anna Beitane (University of Tartu); Minna Oroza (University of Helsinki), Anastasiia Tkachuk (Vilnius University), Geir Gunnlaugsson (Uppsala University)