

VILNIUS UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

Strategic plan



VILNIUS UNIVERSITY
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2025-2030

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Our mission -

to educate responsible creators of the future for Lithuania and the world.

Our vision -

to be a leading institution in the social sciences and higher education, a center of regional expertise in Europe.

Values -

academic freedom, respect, responsibility.



VILNIUS UNIVERSITY
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STRATEGIC DIRECTION

IIRPS VU aims to become an internationally recognised centre of regional expertise in Europe, demonstrating leadership in political science that fosters high-quality education, internationally renowned research, expert advice based on science and research, an inclusive and sustainable academic community, and a strong, value-driven communication.

The strategic direction of IIRPS VU is based on the aim of developing internationality in studies and science and educating socially significant and responsible personalities. The Institute aims to be an internationally recognised study and research space that educates students capable of solving complex problems, integrates modern technologies, and maintains a close relationship with society and the labour market by integrating lifelong learning principles. The strategy is based on the values of academic freedom, respect and responsibility, which are reflected in all areas of activity, from studies to communication.

The Institute aims to ensure sustainable research development, with many researchers producing internationally significant publications and active scientific networks. It also focuses on community members' well-being and psychological health to maintain a strong, supportive and inclusive academic environment. In the area of communication, the aim is to effectively disseminate the Institute's values, expertise and achievements both locally and internationally, enhancing the Institute's scientific, economic and social impact, image and visibility in the public sphere.

This strategic direction shapes the vision of IIRPS VU - to create and sustain a vibrant community of teachers, learners and graduates.

IIRPS VU SWOT analysis (2025-2030)

The results are based on the IIRPS VU Self-Assessment of Political Science Studies (2020-2023), the IIRPS VU Report for Comparative Peer Review (2018-2022), the results of external international peer reviews of science and studies, and the results of the Strategic Session of the IIRPS VU Community (September 2024).

Strengths

- National leadership in political science research: international external evaluation of science 4.5 out of 5 (Lithuania's highest social science score).
- High quality scientific publications.
- High quality of studies: student satisfaction rates are 82-98%, graduate employment rates within one year of graduation are 80-90%, and external evaluations of the field of political science are 4 out of 5 (the highest in Lithuania).

Weaknesses

- The Institute's financial dependence on state tuition fees is high (76%).
- Insufficient attraction of external research funding.
- The Institute's legal and administrative dependence on the central VU administration often creates "inflexibility" problems and high time costs.
- Dependence on VU marketing to compete for international students: the Institute is too small to compete for students in the international arena, and competition is between universities.

Strengths

- Academic leadership: leadership in the development of the Vilnius University Study Quality Manual, the VU Interdisciplinary Studies Inventory, the National Political Science Inventory, and the European International Relations Curriculum Development Manual.
- Integration of research and studies: the Institute has active researchers who integrate research results into the curricula.
- Relevance and visibility: ongoing engagement with social partners and the media (commenting, expertise, education).
- Involvement in international scientific (TEPSA, ECPR, AABS, NISPAcee, MEDem, ARES) and study (Arqus, Coimbra, Erasmus+, ISEP) networks, active participation in high-level scientific events.
- A vibrant academic community: events, conferences, community celebrations, active student organisations, well-functioning community support and integration systems (community psychologist, mentoring).

Weaknesses

- We don't have an effective digital marketing strategy.
- Declining enrolments in bachelor's degree programmes.
- Master's programmes admit students with different backgrounds.
- Unsystematic collection of alumni feedback and career data.
- Lack of space: insufficient number of large lecture rooms, lecturers' offices, and common student spaces.
- "Survey fatigue" in the community: overload reduces the effectiveness of feedback.
- Low involvement of the alumni community in the Institute's initiatives.
- The Institute's participation in Lifelong Learning projects is rather weak.

Strengths

- A clear and effective quality assurance culture: a well-developed feedback system, annual staff interviews, open planning, curriculum committees, and quality-oriented community values.
- A strategic research support ecosystem: teaching load relief, English editing services, support for preparing project proposals and administering ongoing projects, and an operational science unit.
- Broad academic expertise: researchers work in the fields of security, foreign policy, political economy, memory studies, governance, and feminist politics, and they are, therefore, both disciplinarily deep and socially relevant.
- High involvement in expert working groups, the economic and social impact of expert support

Weaknesses

- Inadequate prioritisation of research themes and identification of the Institute's distinctive research profile: too many themes with a limited focus; unclear links between research groups and the main thematic areas (which spills over into the curricula).
- The internationalisation of PhDs is low: there are no international PhD students, and few dissertations are written in English.
- Weak or fragmented cooperation with public authorities in some policy areas hinders greater impact.
- Limited digital transformation strategy: digital innovation is scattered across teaching, research, and data analysis (e.g. there is no centralised agenda for artificial intelligence or big data).
- The number of postdoctoral trainees, (visiting) lecturers and researchers from abroad is low enough.

Strengths

- An interdisciplinary and inclusive research environment: gender balance, structured research groups, mentoring of junior researchers, integration into teaching and student research.
- A vibrant student and doctoral culture: competitive admissions, integration of teaching, participation in international conferences and methodological schools.

Weaknesses

- Researchers lack the willingness to take the lead in setting up research teams and participating in international projects.
- Lack of a culture of interdisciplinarity in research and studies.

Opportunities Threats

- Becoming a regional centre of expertise: IIRPS VU unique expertise in the field of post-Soviet, memory and security studies can be leveraged for strategic visibility and increased funding.
- Establishing a Visiting Fellows Programme: fellowships for junior and senior visiting researchers could increase the internationalisation of the community and improve the submission of research proposals.
- Thematic consolidation and strategic focus would increase competitiveness.
- The growing demand for interdisciplinary knowledge: the growing interest in the energy transition, digital policy and global governance coincides with the Institute's themes of interest and opens the door to new research groups and funding streams.
- Insufficient number of publicly funded PhD places.
- Increasing administrative and evaluation burden: research staff are overwhelmed by internal reporting, funding bureaucracy and grant management.
- Burnout and overwork remain a problem: heavy teaching and administrative workloads threaten motivation, creativity and staff retention.
- Unpredictable research regulatory environment: rapid changes in national rules and R&D policies lead to instability in planning and evaluation.
- Inadequate public sector funding and structural inertia: continued reliance on Lithuanian grant schemes and minimal English-language funding opportunities reduce global competitiveness.
- The declining student base and the volatility of the higher education sector have a negative impact on financial sustainability and reduce the pool of potential academic talent.

Opportunities Threats

- Developing research support systems: professional development for early-stage researchers, better management-academia relations and mentoring lines can increase the capacity and resilience of grant-making.
- Public interest in the themes developed by the Institute and the growing relevance of these themes (security, disinformation, memory and good governance) may create opportunities to offer Lifelong Learning courses, to develop new programmes (MPAs), to offer micro-qualifications and short programmes for professionals, and to create networks of expertise.
- The growing international visibility of the Institute's experts opens up new spaces for expert, scientific and project-based cooperation.
- The digitisation breakthrough is creating opportunities for more efficient study and research processes.
- Increasing financial burden on students - students are forced to start working from the first year of their studies, affecting their ability to study.
- Geopolitical instability (war in Ukraine) affects the Institute's ability to attract students and researchers/lecturers from abroad and the psychological health of the community.
- Volatile research funding and intense competition make it difficult to plan research, requiring large internal administrative resources for research support (there is a significant shortage of research administrators in Lithuania) and additional funding.
- We are increasingly competing with other VU faculties (e.g. Faculties of Philosophy, Law, Economics and Business Administration) for students.
- Too broad a research topic can dilute the focus of the institution.

Opportunities Threats

- The changing governance and university environment opens the door to new forms of cooperation and the development of a network of social partners.
- The Institute has a growing alumni community, which, if properly recruited, can create new opportunities for mentoring, career paths and support.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

Strengths

The Institute of International Relations and Political Science at Vilnius University is undoubtedly one of the leaders in political science in Lithuania and the Baltic States.

The Institute is successfully implementing new study programmes in English to attract international students and reduce dependence on domestic students. There is a strong emphasis on interdisciplinarity and innovation. The high quality of studies and student satisfaction are evident - as many as 92.6% of students would recommend studying at the Institute to their friends. This indicator is the highest in Vilnius University. Moreover, in a recent external evaluation of study programmes, both internationally and nationally, all IIRPS VU study programmes were rated *very good*, with no shortcomings. This is the best assessment of political science in Lithuania.

In the field of science, IIRPS VU also demonstrates excellent results. International experts have rated the quality of research conducted by the Institute's researchers as the highest in the social sciences (benchmarking) in Lithuania, and the number of internationally recognised publications and projects is steadily increasing. In addition, geopolitical changes and elections in Lithuania have increased the demand for the Institute's expert expertise, making the Institute more visible and recognisable.

Trends and challenges

Despite its great achievements, IIRPS VU faces challenges that may affect its growth. The uncertain geopolitical situation may reduce the opportunities to attract international students, while increasing defence spending may affect public funding for science and studies. The unsustainable state funding of science (currently, the tuition fees make up only 10% of the Institute's total budget) is a problem. Systemic problems in allocating these funds have led to revenue decline despite recent scientific funding improvements.

External experts and evaluators recommend that the Institute should prioritise and specialise its studies and research, but our core function as the leading political science institution in Lithuania makes this difficult to achieve.

Demographic trends also pose challenges. The declining number of graduates and students in Lithuania, a slight decrease in interest in political science and the increasingly early entry of students into the labour market may reduce the number of potential students.

The rapid advances in artificial intelligence (AI) technologies are also worrying, with students and researchers increasingly using AI applications. On the one hand, this offers new opportunities for study and research but also leads to abuses. There is a need to reflect on how to use AI in research and studies in a sustainable and ethical way, without compromising the quality of the research and studies, but rather enabling it to provide the highest added value.

Another challenge that is increasingly being faced is the deteriorating psychological health of students. While free psychological counselling is available to students and staff at the Institute, lecturers need clearer guidelines on communicating with students with psychological challenges.



Although the Institute's competitive environment is difficult to assess¹, we are a strong and successful institution with great potential to establish ourselves as one of Europe's leading centres of regional expertise and quality studies. It is important to continue to invest in studies and research at international level and to deepen our expertise. It is also important to diversify income, especially from research outputs, with an increased focus on international project funding. The Institute is expanding and becoming more ambitious, with growing staffing needs and infrastructural challenges. However, the financial situation is stable, with savings of €1 million as of 1 January 2025, which allows investment in the implementation of strategic directions.

¹The Institute carries out many different activities, such as studies, research, expertise, and public education. It, therefore, competes with many different organisations, both in Lithuania and abroad, which often specialise in only one or a few of these activities. For example, in the field of research in Lithuania and abroad, we compete not only with other public or private universities (KTU, VMU, ISM, Tartu, Warsaw, Cracow, Charles the Great University in Prague) but also with specialised think tanks (VPVI, International Center for Defence and Security, Finnish Institute of International Affairs). In the field of public education and expertise, we even compete with media outlets, NGOs, etc.

Strategic goals and objectives

1. STUDIES

Strategic direction:

we create an international learning environment and develop complete individuals who act professionally and responsibly in Lithuania and the world and successfully solve complex problems.

Indicators to see if we are moving in the right direction:

increasing numbers of international lecturers and students (permanent and/or studying and coming for short-term visits); good and very good feedback from lecturers and students about their work/studies at the Institute; stable enrolment rates (for Bachelor's and Master's programmes, first priority, with high enrolment scores); high study success rate (>75%); good and very good feedback from students and lecturers about their work/study at the Institute. High graduation rate (>75% of students graduate on time); High employability rate of alumni (>80% employed within the first year after graduation); Good and very good feedback from alumni and employers.

We aim to

continue to be one of the most international units of the VU, actively cooperate with international partners, and maintain high numbers of incoming and outgoing students and high quality of studies.

Key initiatives:

- 1.** Attracting international lecturers for short-term visits or permanent positions at the Institute.
- 2.** Attracting international students for short-term visits or permanent studies at the Institute (organisation of summer and/or winter schools, active work with children of Lithuanian expatriates, active participation in COIMBRA and ARQUS networks of international universities).
- 3.** Development of a Lifelong Learning (LL) strategy, establishing an LL Competence Centre at the Institute, and the restructuring of the Centre for Adaptive Leadership, expanding its activities, including the MPA.
- 4.** Increasing the number of technology-related subjects in study programmes: additional training in the effective and ethical use of AI applications in teaching and learning for the Institute's lecturers and students; updating of courses on research methods; prevention and management of the misuse of AI applications.
- 5.** Develop and implement a new publicity plan for studies; update and optimise the SEO of the IIRPS VU website. The aim is to make key information easy to find, clear and attractive.
- 6.** Redesign the feedback collection system to ensure timely and quality feedback from key target groups (lecturers, administration, students, alumni and social partners), exploring new formats.
- 7.** Dissemination of good teaching and learning practices (seminars and courses for lecturers, sharing knowledge among themselves and inviting external speakers; additional training on working and communicating with students with psychological health challenges).

2. RESEARCH AND SCIENCE

Strategic direction:

we are an internationally renowned social science institution with many researchers producing high-quality international publications and active participation in international projects and thematic research groups.

We aim to maintain

sustained growth in scientific output, in-depth Lithuanian case studies, active chairs and annual interviews, prizes for scientific achievement, a sustainable secondment fund, publicity and science communication for researchers, and a focus on doctoral performance.

Indicators to see if we are moving in the right direction:

the number of international researchers (including PhD students) attracted to IIRPS VU (+1 per year); the increase in the number of researchers who have published international high-level publications (10 new researchers have published international high-level publications in the last 5 years); the increase in the number of researchers' affiliations (increase in co-publications with international authors); the number of international R&D applications submitted (4 per year).

Key initiatives:

- 1.** Community discussions on scientific identity and priority research themes in departments and research groups.
- 2.** Use of project funding to attract postdoctoral trainees (The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) and Research Council of Lithuania (RCL) postdoctoral fellowships, co-funding from VU and VU Foundation).
- 3.** Providing administrative support, training and advice to those submitting research project proposals.
- 4.** Internationalisation of doctoral studies and review of subjects, evaluation of the possibility of investing the Institute's resources in increasing the number of doctoral places.
- 5.** Maintaining a sustainable research ethics and research data management system.
- 6.** Increasing the international visibility of IIRPS VU researchers (organisation of international scientific conferences, publicity of publications and dissemination of scientific output: clear and easily accessible information on the IIRPS VU website).

3. THE COMMUNITY

Strategic direction:

fostering an environment and relationships in which diverse and different community members support each other, are accountable to each other, seek mutual understanding and act together.

We strive to maintain

the active contribution of the community to decision-making; we are one of the faculties of VU that is most concerned with the development of the community and its psychological health. We enjoy active organisations, strong community ties, and a positive attitude towards the Institute and each other.

Indicators to see if we are moving in the right direction:

90% of academic staff (at least half-time) participate in the annual interview, and of these, at least 80% rate their work and the environment at the Institute as good or very good; 80% of non-academic staff rate their work and the environment at the Institute as good or very good; students' satisfaction is at least 80%.

Key initiatives:

1. Monthly community lunches are held to foster academic ties.
2. Informal activities for non-academic staff.
3. Revitalising the Alumni Association.
4. Alumni survey developed and implemented.
5. Renewal of the Board of Trustees and more active involvement in the life of the Institute (joint events, consultations on strategic issues to find synergies in innovation or experimentation).
6. Adapting Room 401 for community meetings.
7. Developing the Institute's infrastructure.
8. Improving the system for integrating international students, researchers and staff into the community.

4. COMMUNICATION

Strategic direction:

we are an internationally recognised and visible research and academic institution, effectively communicating our expertise and values both publicly and within the community.

We aim to maintain:

high visibility of the Institute in the media and social networks; active participation of experts in public debates; effective internal communication between different groups of the community; a strong image of the Institute in the international academic community; and active communication of studies both in Lithuania and abroad.

Indicators to see if we are moving in the right direction

(measures the achievement of the strategic direction, not initiatives): number of media mentions of the Institute's experts (at least 2000 per year); number of followers on the Institute's social media accounts (15% growth overall across all platforms annually); satisfaction of community members with internal communication (80% of the total number of followers on all platforms annually). The Institute has organised at least 10 expert events a year to raise the visibility of the Institute in society and the media.

Key initiatives:

- 1.** Organised strategic communication session / was organised
- 2.** A new communication strategy for the Institute has been developed, covering internal and external communication. The strategy will focus on expanding the international audience, developing new guidelines on social networks, publicising targeted campaigns to attract international students in cooperation with Lithuanian diplomatic missions, and broadcasting the high quality of the Institute's studies and research and the expertise of its teaching staff and researchers.
- 3.** The Institute's website has been updated to improve SEO, user experience and appeal to diverse audiences, especially potential international students.
- 4.** Update of the IIRPS VU communication brand.
- 5.** A video series on the Institute's alumni's success stories and career opportunities.

Principles for implementing the strategy:

The Strategic Plan is a living document, an evolving framework of guidelines that responds to changes in the Institute's environment, the needs of the community and the reflection of its activities. The progress and relevance of the implementation of the strategy are reviewed annually in various formats, such as strategy sessions, the preparation of annual activity reports, and ongoing community reflection. This ensures that the strategy is flexible, open to dialogue and adaptable to changing contexts while maintaining the Institute's long-term vision and focused growth.



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