Bringing Western Balkan Countries closer to the Innovation Union

-An example of EURAXESS regional collaboration-

WP3 – Identifying the Remaining Mobility Obstacles in the WBC

Synthesis Report

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Introduction

As a part of the project WEB-InUnion (Bringing Western Balkan Countries closer to the Innovation Union), we have conducted a study (policy analysis and a survey) to examine the remaining mobility obstacles hindering mobility for researchers. The following are some of the topics we addressed during the study: quality of doctoral training, attractive employment conditions and gender balance in research careers, mobility across countries and sectors, open recruitment in public research institutions.

We started the analysis with the identification of the research stakeholders in each country. The number of science performers was divided according to state and public research institutions, private research centres, universities, and other research performers. The next part of the analysis included identifying the research legislative framework in each country respectively. We asked each country to identify all relevant documents regulating issues related to all topics that we identified as relevant for the study, and that are mentioned in the previous paragraph. This included laws and by-laws, national strategies and programs, initiatives and reports, institutional regulations, previous projects, and international agreements. These served as a good database to come back to when looking over these issues, as well as the sources and references where these issues are tackled and which can be useful for further analysis on the subject matter. We also created two questionnaires, one aimed at researchers, and the other at research organizations and industry, which were disseminated on a national level by each partner and covered all the aforementioned topics.

We believe that these issues are also the basis for the brain drain phenomena that exists in our countries. To that end, we would like to point out a few key elements that we believe contribute to researchers migrating abroad, as we have concluded in our findings. We would also like to point out some positive examples that are being taken to improve the research environment in the region. Finally we provide policy recommendations to our governments, with the final aim being to hopefully attract some of our researchers abroad back home, and prevent existing researchers from migrating.

This report is a summary of all 7 national reports, which were done by each partner, and which highlight the remaining obstacles to mobility in the Western Balkan.

Policy Framework

Quality of Doctoral Training

The **quality of doctoral training** is more or less the same in all of the Western Balkan countries. All of the countries have adopted the Bologna process and the subsequent organization of doctoral studies at institutional level is in line with this process. The only exception is Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is still transitioning to the Bologna system, until the end of 2014. The **principles for recruitment and selection of doctoral candidates** are also very much similar. Enrolment in third cycle of studies – doctoral studies enrolment is possible only after meeting the following minimum requirements: completed 2nd cycle of studies in line with the European Credit Transfer System, knowledge of a foreign language (except Serbia, Albania, and some cases in BiH), and in the case of Croatia and Greece, also letter(s) of recommendation. These are the general requirements; however, there can be exceptions depending on the internal rules of the university/faculty in question. There is no **system for evaluation** per se in the Western Balkan Countries. Rather, this is the responsibility of the mentor of each PhD student. In most cases, the general rule is that, there is one **mentor** per student. The possibility of having more than one mentor is open, however rarely practiced. This mentor is responsible for monitoring and assessing the work carried out by the doctoral student. The mentor is always an employee of the university, and holds the title of professor (ranging from Assistant Professor to Full Professor). This further stipulates the number of students a professor can have, according to his rank. Only in Croatia is there a system of evaluation in place, but only for doctoral students which are also employed by the university. In this case, the mentor has to submit a report which can determine whether or not the doctoral student keeps his job. In Montenegro and Croatia the mentor is required to submit an annual progress report on the student. In Croatia and in Greece, the doctoral student himself has to submit this report, as a means of outlining the progress of the research taking place. All of the WBC are signatories to **international agreements for collaboration and mobility**. These are generally TEMPUS, ERASMUS-MUNDUS, BASILIUS, etc. Joint PhD programs, however, are relatively rare. PhD students in all Western Balkan Countries enjoy the **status (title)** of students. However, most of the universities employ PhD students, in which case they enjoy the status of both a student and an employee of its respective institution. This makes their status unclear, and sometimes confusing, especially when it pertains to their roles and responsibilities as both students and researchers, and certain benefits. This combined status does not clearly define the role of the early stage researcher, and does not offer the needed protections for his or her career.

Attractive Employment Conditions

The laws in the WBC cover the basis for **working conditions** which are stipulated as the same everywhere. They are covered by Labour Law which provides for minimum working conditions which have to be guaranteed. However, there are no specific regulations which stimulate researchers' employment or emphasize any attractive employment conditions which are specifically geared towards the researcher.

Positive Example:

The Case of Montenegro

Montenegro adopted an Action Plan on mobility for the period 2011-2012 and the following year (2012-2013), with the goal of improving researchers working conditions. Montenegro offers extra funding to research projects that bring in scientists to the country and train scientists and broaden the knowledge base.

When it comes to **training and development** there are no such activities that take place to support the development of transferable skills.

Positive Example:

The Case of Montenegro

This is not a government action per se, but in line with the TEMPUS project "TRAIN"; new coming academics are trained to improve their teaching and research practices. This is geared towards Assistants, junior professors, post=docs, and PhD students aiming at an academic career from the WB area.

Again, although trainings are offered in the case, the negative side to this is that these trainings are "academia" based and do not support inter-sectoral mobility, nor do they make researchers more compatible to the working environment of industry.

Positive Example:

The Case of Croatia

With the start of a new IPA supported project, Modernising Doctoral Education through Implementation of CROQF (Croatian Qualifications Framework), started in September of 2013, a new set of transferable skills is developed for doctoral students. All the Croatian universities are taking part of this project. The transferable skills which are specified under the project are: self-management (time management, entrepreneurial skills, protection of IPR), professional effectiveness, career building, and leadership. After 18 months of project implementation, the goal is to sustain the training structure and make Croatian doctoral students more competitive in the European labour market.

Balance between work and life is stipulated in the law, which states that employers have to ensure a good balance of work and life for their employees, although how this is supposed to be implemented is not clearly defined. Usually absences of leave for a period of time are allowed, for scientific purposes, as are maternity and in some cases (Macedonia) paternity leaves.

When it comes to **gender balance**, this is obviously not an issue in the Western Balkan Countries, as all of the countries have some of the highest rates of female representation in science and research, and most are close to an even 50-50 percentage of male/female ratios.

All of the WBC offer and demand that **researchers are a part of the decision-making process**, and most researchers are involved in the different decision-making bodies of their universities, and thus have a direct say and impact in the outcomes of those entities.

Intellectual property rights are well protected by Law, and are in harmony with the EU standards and laws; however there are no specific trainings on these issues being offered to researcher. If they want to know about IPR, they have to find events to inform themselves, which are generally sporadic.

Positive Example:

The Charter & Code

*The **Human Resources Strategy for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (The Charter and Code)**, is an initiative to help create better employment and working conditions for the researcher, by implementing the principles which are outlined in Charter and Code, and which deal specifically with the topics which are discussed above.*

Thanks to the WEB-InUnion project and EURAXESS, the Charter and Code is now present in all Western Balkan countries. Before the start of the project, there were signatories in all countries except Albania. After a successful promotional campaign of the Charter and Code, there have been more than 50 new signatories of the Charter and Code in the WBC countries, and Macedonia and Serbia have also received the first HR excellence logo.

Mobility across Countries and Sectors

There are **international and national research collaboration agreements** in place in the WBC. We have already mentioned these before in the previous sections. Besides bilateral cooperation agreements, all countries are a part of the EU programmes for mobility such as ERASMUS MUNDUS, TEMPUS, etc. There are no existing **human resources strategies** in place on a national level in the WBC. However, universities and research centres are taking the initiative, with the help and introduction by projects like these, to develop their own Human Resources Strategy by adopting the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of the Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.

Positive Examples:

The Case of Serbia

In 2012, approximately 5% of the government budget for science in Serbia was allocated for development of human resources. This budget is spent on the programs of incentives and funding for researchers. It is designed to support: 1) participation on the scientific events and meetings abroad; 2) study visits of foreign researchers to Serbia; 3) post-doctoral research activities

The Case of Croatia

Croatian institutions took the bottom up approach and started implementing the Charter and Code and developing their own human resources strategy. Today, all public universities in Croatia are signatories of the Charter and Code and 14 institutions have received the HR Logo of Excellence by the European Commission.

This is a positive example of how each individual institution can create a better working environment for their researcher and make their institution a more attractive destination, thus inviting brain=gain, and discouraging brain-drain.

The overall statement regarding the percentage of **mobility and participation in EU educational programmes** is that the number is low. This is an area where all the WBC have to improve on significantly. Furthermore, statistics are not well kept for outbound and inbound mobility in Bosnia, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. All these countries report low numbers on mobility. Only Greece and Croatia keep statistics on mobility where the numbers are consistent and a bit more promising. Furthermore, mobility is not recognized formally, and it is not a prerequisite for any job promotions. However, most countries report that mobility is becoming more and more recognized by employers, but on an informal basis.

Open Recruitment in Public Research Institutions

The **recruitment procedure** in public research institution is administered through a public call. This also ensures the transparency of the recruitment procedure. There is usually sufficient time period for candidates to apply. In most cases, the jobs are published online on the respective website of the organization offering the job vacancy. However, in some cases, the job vacancy is published only in the local newspapers.

Positive Example:

The Case of Croatia

*The use of the **EURAXESS network** was made obligatory in Croatia by the Croatian Government. Now, all public institutions in Croatia must publish the job vacancy on the EURAXESS Jobs portal, besides making a public call and publishing it on their own website. This ensures transparency and an **open and fair recruitment process**. The other countries in the region could follow this example from the Croatian government.*

Comparable Research Career Structures

The **status of researcher** is vague in most of the WBC countries. The only country to have a more specific definition is Greece. It states that, “researchers are scientist/scholars with a PhD degree who work for the creation of new knowledge or for the improvement of the existing knowledge and its implementation for the production of products, devises, processes, methods or systems while they can be engaged in education and managerial work.” There is no formal division of the research

career into stages, but rather this division is made at the institutions themselves. These EU standards are not adopted in regard to the division of the research career into stages.

EU sector-neutral division of the career stages of a researcher

R1 First Stage Researcher (up to the point of PhD)

R2 Recognised Researcher (PhD holders or equivalent who are not yet fully independent)

R3 Established Researcher (researchers who have developed a level of independence.)

R4 Leading Researcher (researchers leading their research area or field)

Scientific Visa and Blue Card Application

As Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina are not a part of the EU, the **Scientific Visa** and **Blue Card** are not applicable for these countries. Greece has fully integrated the Scientific Visa since 2008, and Croatia has also implemented it into the legislation as a form of special bylaw. However, consulates and relevant institutions are not yet fully aware of the Scientific Visa and personnel are not experienced in issuing this type of visa. There is also a language barrier, as most of the administrative staff does not speak English, as is the case in Croatia, or the procedure itself is completely in the national language (as is the case in Greece), which prohibits the researcher from filling out the necessary forms without the help of a person fluent in the language. However, efforts are being made to eliminate these barriers through increased communication with aforementioned institutions. On the contrary, a Blue Card permit has not been issued so far in either country (for a researchers, at least).

Creation of Supplementary Pension Funds

There has been no cases of creation of a **supplementary pension** fund for researchers.

Findings from the Survey

In line with this study, three questionnaires were conducted, with three target groups identified: Researchers, Research organizations and Policy Makers. Three different questionnaires were disseminated to each target group respectively. The questionnaires aimed at researchers and research organizations were disseminated through Google drive. A second reminder was sent out as well. The questionnaires to Policy Makers were conducted through interviews. The target was set to 3 interviews conducted with relevant policy makers. The questionnaire was limited to 11 questions and the questions were all open-ended. These are the main results/conclusions from the aforementioned questionnaires.

Response Rate & Demographics

Country	Researchers	Research Organizations & Industry
AL	79	15
GR	171	21
SR	136	31
ME	36	5
BA	48	14
HR	274	40
MK	55	20

- The respondents from the survey aimed at researchers were generally representatives from universities, with a wide range of experience from early stage to leading researchers;
- Gender was distributed evenly among the respondents;
- The respondents from the survey aimed at research organizations and industry were mostly representatives from university (Albania had most of the respondents from NGO);
- Industry with very low representation.

Quality of doctoral studies

- No written agreement signed between the PhD candidate and the university;
- Generally only one supervisor (mentor);
- Infrastructure only partially satisfactory;
- Researchers are not taught transferable skills;
- Overburden of researchers (at universities) by teaching obligations, preventing quality research work;
- Universities have their own administrative rules in terms of PhD programs;
- Status of the PhD candidate is not clearly defined;
- Relationship between student and mentor not clearly defined;
- Mentor acts according to his or her own whim, sometimes not offering real support or guidance.

Attractive working conditions

- Transparency in the recruitment process not fully realized;
- Infrastructure only partially satisfactory;
- Unregistered labour – no health and pension benefits in some cases;
- Travel costs (to and from work) not included in salaries and very important (to be included) to researchers;
- Flexible working hours very important to researchers;
- Training opportunities are sporadic and lack national funds;
- Researchers are mediocrely satisfied with salaries;

- Researchers are not made aware by organizations of the working conditions fully when interviewing for a job (organizations also report to not fully explaining the working conditions, e.g. salaries, career opportunities);
- Organizations believe they offer good research infrastructure;
- Organizations value highly R&D in their organization as well as the role of researchers;
- Organizations report to offer training opportunities to their researchers;
- Organizations report very low satisfaction to offered salaries;
- Administrative obstacles (legislation and internal acts of research organization not being aligned with EU regulations);
- Definition of “researchers” is not in line with the definition of “researchers” in EU.

Mobility across Countries and Sectors

- Employers value mobility as a factor of career development;
- Participation in mobility programs low;
- Lack of scientific and mobility policy on a national level;
- Inter-sectoral mobility ad-hoc;
- Lack of overall funding for mobility;
- Difficulties to obtain funding for long-term mobility (longer than 3 months);
- Need for more inter-sectoral mobility and networking between researchers in the country and abroad.

Conclusions and Recommendations to Policy Makers

We have tried to outline the main remaining mobility obstacles to researchers in the region. We have specifically highlighted the obstacles so as to provide our governments insight into the research environment, to outline the points where our legislature and institutional practices are weak, and where they need improvement, and to provide recommendations, especially with the goal of creating better working conditions for our researchers so we can stop losing our most valuable asset to other countries, such as the USA. We must also emphasize the importance of aligning ourselves with the standards set by the European Union, so as to create comparable research career structures, where our researchers can be more mobile. Although the low level of investment in R&D from our national governments remains an obstacle, it does not have to be the driving force behind stagnation in improving our overall research infrastructure. There are certain actions that can tackle these challenges that require limited financial resources and could address the problems revealed through the national data analysis and the survey.

These actions respond to the calls of the Innovation Union and, more specifically, to commitments #1 and #4.

Quality of doctoral training (commitment #4)

The current framework regulating PhD programmes should be updated. PhD students should be identified, legislatively, as early stage researches and as full-time professionals with all the rights and obligations that come with those. Universities have to put in place regulations for the supervision of PhD Students (mentor) and the evaluation of their research. Universities should also place greater emphasis on teaching their PhD students transferable skills such as time management, entrepreneurial skills, protection of IPR), professional effectiveness, career building, and leadership. Universities have to start valuing mobility as integral part of the career development of a researcher. Investing in research infrastructure, if not through national funds, than through the use of European programmes such as IPA, is an integral part in providing quality doctoral training.

Promoting attractive working conditions (commitment #1)

One of the most important mechanisms for creating attractive working conditions is by implementing the principles of the Charter and Code. Each university has to create their own Human Resources Strategy, so that these principles, which researchers finds so valuable for their research career, are implemented at institutional level. If the principles of the Charter and Code are followed, then an open and transparent recruitment process will follow. All job vacancies should be published on the EURAXESS Jobs portal, and the Croatian case is a perfect example of a top-down approach to ensure the open recruitment process. The principles of the Charter and Code also call for providing researchers with flexible working hours, full benefits, and training opportunities, among else. Again, research infrastructure is something that has to be invested in.

Promoting mobility of researchers

Governments should create a strategy for researchers' mobility. Authorities should build appropriate mechanisms (e.g. budget, procedures criteria for selection), for financing short periods of mobility of researchers either to another country or to a different sector. It is a practice being followed by competitive to EU economies (e.g. Brazil) and aims exactly at benefiting from the experience and achievements of other countries. The short character of the mobility (e.g. as part of a doctoral training) ensures that the researcher will return to their country of origin and apply the experience acquired during their mobility period.

Summary of Key Recommendations

- Clearly define the status of the PhD student;
- Increase the number of doctoral candidates with two or more mentors (Academia and Industry) to promote cooperation between sectors and provide a multilateral perspective on research;
- Offer more PhD programs in English;
- Design and implement training and professional development (transferable skills);

- Set up system regulations for the supervision of PhD Students (mentor) and the evaluation of their research;
- Focus on implementing the Charter and Code to create more attractive working conditions to attract foreign researchers, and stop native ones from leaving (use EURAXESS to provide guidance);
- Promote staff exchanges, part-time positions, sabbaticals, honorary positions, or financial incentives (travel costs to and from work, holiday reimbursements);
- Include mobility as a prerequisite to professional development to a researcher;
- Make obligatory to publish all job vacancies on the EURAXESS Jobs portal to ensure an open recruitment process;
- Improve and invest in the research infrastructure to create better career opportunities;
- Create comparable research career structures by implementing the EU neutral-sector division of the career stages of a researcher;
- Decrease the administrative procedures by supporting a scientific visa;
- Ensure the protection of the researcher benefits by taking part in the European Supplementary Pension Fund;
- Use EURAXESS as consultants to government officials to eliminate the remaining obstacles to mobility and increase the attractiveness of the region as a research destination;
- Increase funding in R&D.