

## In Focus: RTDI capacity and capacity building in WBC

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*Ines Marinkovic*

*Centre for Social Innovation, Vienna, Austria  
marinkovic@zsi.at*

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### 1 Introduction

As we have discussed in the last WBC-RTI.info newsletter, several studies so far confirmed that all WB countries need not only to increase investment in research in general but also **to further strengthen the research and innovation capacity** at national level as well as **to strengthen the administrative capacity** in order to ensure successful participation in Horizon 2020 and other national, regional and EU research funding programmes.

*“Although sustained funding remains an obvious enabler for research excellence, growing the quality and volume of human talent that carries out the research, produces the publications, wins grant income, trains the next generation of researchers and contributes to economic and societal innovation, engagement and education remains an essential element when growing a successful, sustainable university or national economy.” Prof. Peter W Halligan*

This is one of the reasons why we focus this time on RTDI capacity and potential of WB countries that might be of interest for regional but also EU and international researchers, as well as on some capacity building opportunities for researchers from WB countries.

Please find below some related information.

Besides, You are warmly welcome to upload any further relevant call for papers, training and internship opportunity for young researchers, national training opportunity for administrative project staff etc. When registered at the WBC-RTI.info, you have the opportunity to upload your content by yourself. Otherwise, you can any time provide the information via email to [office@wbc-rti.info](mailto:office@wbc-rti.info).

### 2 “Global war for talent” – Western Balkans continues to lose highly educated

It is no secret; those highly skilled individuals from Western Balkans are still leaving their home countries in search of a better life somewhere else – if they get a chance. Also the new World Bank report on the economies of the WB countries, published in September this year warns again that the region is losing a vital part of its young and educated population and urges governments to take action to deal with the consequences. It states furthermore that while the recovery has encouraged job creation, unemployment is still very high, especially for the young. **Youth unemployment in the region is about 45 percent**, which has not only near- and longer-term economic costs, but also social consequences.

In the discussion about the impact of highly educated migration on the economic development – two concepts prevail. One refers to brain drain as a *phenomenon that negatively impacts the sending country's human capital accumulation and fiscal revenue* thus underline the need of implementing public policies targeted at restricting highly educated labor mobility while the other focuses on the nature of highly educated *Diaspora acting as a powerful force in promoting economic development through a variety of instruments, such as remittances, trade, foreign direct investment (FDI), and knowledge transfer.* (Stankovic 2014)<sup>1</sup>. The scholars from the region (either living in WB or abroad) repeatedly emphasize the need for structural measures in this regard and call on governments to further increase their efforts:

*“Developed countries are introducing innovative developments to attract “the best and the brightest” from around the world, while developing countries are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of human capital for their development, and are putting in efforts to retain their most educated citizens within the country's boundaries. Unfortunately, the countries of the Western Balkans, not surprisingly, behave as if they are not aware of the worldwide race for talent, and put almost no effort into either retaining their highly skilled individuals or attracting the ones from their own diasporas; despite the significant outflow of highly skilled individuals from the region.”* (Nermin Oruc)<sup>2</sup>

*“To mitigate and reverse this process, the WB countries' governments should proactively foster the process of brain circulation through the adoption of a regional approach to this issue. This will provide expatriates with the opportunity to transfer their expertise and skills to the country of origin, without necessarily returning home permanently. The WB countries will gain access to the knowledge and expertise of expatriates, and to the knowledge networks that they form in the host countries.”* (Bratislav Stankovic)

However, also the national and regional strategies continuously deal with the topic of brain drain and suggest indeed concrete measures (see for example WB regional R&D strategy on innovation and its strategic goal 1.1 “Slowing down brain drain and supporting “brain gain”; investing in human capital” (p.15) and suggested “Research Excellence Fund” (p.19)).

Unfortunately, quite often national and regional strategies, action plans and initiatives are simply not implemented or are only partly implemented due to other pressing issues (such as currently migration). In this way, the impact of good national and even regional R&D initiatives is naturally limited.

In the end - highly educated individuals are still leaving the region and those who stay struggle in some cases for fundamental working and living conditions – as this week's protest of researchers in Serbia shows. “*Naucni rad vodi u glad*” (“*Scientific work leads to famine*”) – they say and call for urgent action.

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<sup>1</sup> Stankovic Bratislav (2014): „Innovation and Brain Drain in the Western Balkans“. In: Marinkovic/Dall (2014): “R&D and Innovation in Western Balkans. Moving Towards 2020.” WBC-INCO.NET

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.suedosteuropa.uni-graz.at/biepag/node/47>

### 3 “Should I stay or should I go?” – What are the opportunities for young academics that stay?

A great number of researchers from the region successfully collaborate since years with their peers (diaspora and international researchers) around the globe. They publish joint papers, they cooperate in different projects, they network and exchange on a regular basis – WBC-RTI.info and prior WBC-INCO.NET regularly inform on successful projects and researchers from the region.

However, the national governments in Western Balkans would be well advised if they urgently implement concrete and sustainable measures to further support the research and innovation potential of the countries in the region – in particular related to young researchers. In parallel – concrete measures in order to support the administrative capacities at universities and research organisations are needed in order to increase participation in Horizon 2020 and other national, regional and EU research funding programmes.

Young researchers in the region are well advised if they take the opportunity of networking, different courses on e.g. project proposal writing, internships abroad (or in the region), summer schools etc. There are lots of such opportunities which are fully funded by the organizers – please check regularly also our Calls section. To name one of the initiatives: the EU Action Western Balkans Youth Window under Erasmus+ started to support learning opportunities for young people as a whole, and aims to support development of competences and skills that among others should increase young people’s **employability or self-employment prospects**. Under Erasmus+ Key Action 2, which fosters cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practice and, more specifically, **capacity building in the field of youth**, the Western Balkan Youth Window will also promote the sustained development of youth organisations in the region and the practice of youth work.

Instead of conclusion:

Maybe one of the most important (and at the same time so simple) advise a person from diaspora could give to a young academic in the region: inform yourself (there are plenty of helpful links also on this website), be pro-active, and be innovative!

Do not wait for your professor or your scientific manager/director to come up with the idea on what could you do and how you could improve your skills (such as project proposal writing). Do it yourself! And then – make an effort to communicate your idea to your professor or your scientific manager/director! Maybe you will be surprised with the result!

If you are unemployed - do not wait for a company or research institute to find you or to announce the call for vacancy – find the company / research institute you would love to work at and send your motivation letter explaining what would be the benefit for the company / research institute to give you a chance. (Do not explain what the company / research institute should do for you. You know it, right?) And yes, I know the issue “this is not how the communication is working in the region”. Well, for many of my friends in the region it worked very well. Maybe you should just try?