



# Key Recommendations of the Thematic Working Group on Mobility

#CSFTirana2023

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**About the process**

These recommendations stem from the consultation process held in the framework of the Thematic Working Group (TWG) on Mobility led by SCiDEV. The TWG deliberated on how enhanced cooperation and sustained support in mobility-driven R&I are pivotal for equipping the WB6 with the requisite tools and knowledge to address shared challenges, such as climate change and digital transformation, while curbing brain drain and fostering a generation of innovators who can reshape the region's future. Over the summer of 2023, four consultation meetings were held, bringing together a multi-disciplinary group of stakeholders (43 participants), including representatives from universities and research centres, intergovernmental organisations, civil society organisations, think tanks from the Western Balkans countries (WB6) and the EU. A final public consultation event was held in September hosting 55 participants as well as a presentation at the Joint Science Conference of the Berlin Process. The findings and recommendations were validated during advocacy visits in Berlin, Brussels and networking events in Sarajevo and Munich in September 2023.

## INTRODUCTION

Mobility and migration in the Western Balkans (WB6) have profound implications for the region and its evolving relationship with the European Union (EU). There is a pressing need to address the challenges in the region and capitalize on the potential of mobility for fostering regional development and integration into the EU. Research and innovation (R&I) and knowledge transfer in the WB6 constitute a transformative potential of accelerating sustainable growth and convergence of the WB economies with the EU, which can be attained only if the pressing challenges of R&I and mobility-driven innovation in the region are addressed in a timely and systematic manner. Even though the WB6 have made significant strides in aligning their R&I ecosystems with EU standards, steadfast support, and investment in mobility-driven R&I – both intra-regionally and with the EU – are still needed.

This policy paper addresses the state of affairs, identifies barriers and areas for improvement, and proposes concrete recommendations for the Leader's Summit of the Berlin Process. The insights presented herein are reinforced by a collaborative advocacy strategy, which seeks to engage pivotal stakeholders within the WB6 and the EU.

## STATE OF AFFAIRS IN MOBILITY-DRIVEN R&I IN WB6

Firstly, one of the main achievements of the Common Regional Market Action Plan (CRM AP) mobility agenda<sup>1</sup> is the signing of mobility agreements in the field of higher education: the Agreement on Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications, and the Recognition of Professional Qualifications for Doctor of Medicine, Dentists and Architects,<sup>2</sup> which are yet to be ratified by all WB6. The two agreements have made it easier for diplomas to be recognised by shortening the approval process to a maximum of fourteen days and removing existing fees for the processing of applications. The agreements' implementation will advance the mobility of students, academics, and professionals in the WB6 and will stimulate competitiveness and cooperation among higher education institutions.

Taking this work forward, in January 2023, the Regional Cooperation Council<sup>3</sup> (RCC) prepared a draft Agreement for Recognition of Professional Qualifications for Midwives, Nurses, Pharmacists and Veterinary Surgeons, and technical negotiations were launched.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, at the Berlin Process coordination meeting that took place in May 2023 in Tirana, participants supported the initiative to negotiate a regional Agreement on Access to Study in Higher Education, aiming to boost mobility of students from the region to universities in the EU.<sup>5</sup>

The stakeholders at the consultation meetings argued that these developments could pose challenges for both national institutions and universities, including a lack of capacity in universities and questions of how EU national administrations would process the increased number of applications. In that respect, the sub-regional network of ENIC/NARIC<sup>6</sup> centres and the common information system will be instrumental for students to access updated information on the higher education system and diploma requirements in the WB6, and for national administrations to closely cooperate in facilitating the implementation of the agreements. Cooperation and greater engagement of national quality assurance bodies will be key in ensuring the quality of study programmes and to establish and maintain trust between the education systems in the Western Balkans. Until recently, regional cooperation among universities and research institutions in the WB6 often occurred via participation in European projects led by EU academic/research institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> CEFTA, Common Regional Market 2021-2024 Action Plan, Retrieved from:

<https://cefta.int/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Common-Regional-Market-2021-2024-Action-Plan.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> European Western Balkans. (2022, Nov 3) Berlin Process: Western Balkans leaders sign agreements on increased mobility, Retrieved from: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2022/11/03/berlin-process-western-balkans-leaders-sign-agreements-on-increased-mobility/>

<sup>3</sup> More about RCC <https://www.rcc.int/>

<sup>4</sup> RCC. (2023, March 15) Report on the activities of the Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat for the period 1 November – 1 March, Retrieved from:

<https://www.rcc.int/docs/653/report-on-the-activities-of-the-regional-cooperation-council-secretariat-for-the-period-1-november-2022-1-march-2023>

<sup>5</sup> Report Berlin Process Coordination Meeting, Tirana 18-19 May 2023, Retrieved from:

[https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/report-bp-coordination-meeting-19-may-2023-tirana\\_1692197246.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/report-bp-coordination-meeting-19-may-2023-tirana_1692197246.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> The ENIC-NARIC Networks are the result of an ongoing collaboration between the national information centres on academic recognition of qualifications of in total 55 countries. The national information centres are operating under the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997). The joint website of the ENIC (European Network of Information Centres in the European Region) and NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union) Networks is an initiative to enhance navigation to relevant online resources.

Secondly, while reports point to growing participation of WB6 researchers in EU research programmes, with research projects in the WB6 having tripled between 2014 and 2019 in Horizon Europe, overall, it seems, the WB6 suffers from capacity problems.<sup>7</sup> Apart from Serbia, whose performance has quadrupled making it the most successful country of the WB6,<sup>8</sup> other countries lag behind. Participation in the EU's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) for doctoral networks, post-doctoral fellowships and staff exchanges is also low in absolute numbers.<sup>9</sup> In addition, a very limited number of researchers in the region have been awarded European Research Council grants. Moreover, participation in the European Cooperation in Science and Technology programme (COST) has increased at individual researcher level, but fewer institutions join as partners in COST actions.<sup>10</sup> Participation in European Innovation and Technology (EIT) has also improved with four different EIT Hubs are currently established in the WB6 region.

Thirdly, the Joint Science Conference of the Western Balkans Process,<sup>11</sup> initiated by the German National Academy of Sciences, Leopoldina, established a platform uniting principal stakeholders from education and science systems to discuss challenges and advancements for science systems in the Western Balkans and the broader South-East Europe. Over its span, seven meetings were conducted, culminating in 2023 in Tirana. The recommendations of this TWG are also synchronised with the Joint Science Conference.

Fourthly, in the 2017 Western Balkans Summit in Trieste, WB6 and EU leaders committed to establish the Western Balkans Research Foundation. The outline, structure and activities of the Foundation were led by Leopoldina in the framework of the Joint Science Conference. Though this was a highly appreciated development by WB6 research and innovation ecosystem stakeholders, eventually, the commitment<sup>12</sup> did not come to fruition. This led WB6 researchers to submit a petition to the EC in 2021, urging EU representatives to live up to the commitment and move forward with the establishment of the foundation. A response to this petition from the Directorate General for Research & Innovation noted that the Commission had launched a Twinning Action for the WB6 under Horizon Europe, which would help strengthen research and innovation excellence across the region.<sup>13</sup> Although such actions were welcomed by WB6 researchers, they only contribute to islands of excellence, and cannot substitute a regional entity that systematically fosters cooperation between WB6 researchers and provides for brain circulation and transfer of excellence.

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<sup>7</sup> Zubaşcu, F. (2021, August 24) Science Business Publication. Retrieved from:

<https://sciencebusiness.net/news/interest-eu-research-mobility-schemes-growing-western-balkans>

<sup>8</sup> European Commission, Research and Innovation, Retrieved from:

[https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-2020-2024/europe-world/international-cooperation/association-horizon-europe/serbia\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-2020-2024/europe-world/international-cooperation/association-horizon-europe/serbia_en)

<sup>9</sup> Zubaşcu, F. (2021, August 24) Science Business Publication. Retrieved from:

<https://sciencebusiness.net/news/interest-eu-research-mobility-schemes-growing-western-balkans>

<sup>10</sup> Schuch, K. Patterns of geographical mobility of researchers from six Western Balkan Countries in Regional and European Mobility based training programmes, Fteval Journal for Research and Technology Policy Evaluation. Retrieved from:

[https://repository.fteval.at/id/eprint/575/1/fteval\\_J52\\_10.22163\\_fteval.2021.516.pdf](https://repository.fteval.at/id/eprint/575/1/fteval_J52_10.22163_fteval.2021.516.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Leopoldina Nationale Akademie Der Wissenschaften. Western Balkans Process – Joint Science Conference. Retrieved from: <https://www.leopoldina.org/en/international/science-diplomacy/jsc/>

<sup>12</sup> Western Balkan Info Hub. (2021, May 1) Establishment of Western Balkan Research Foundation (Petition). Retrieved from:

[https://wbc-rti.info/mobile/object\\_view/21783](https://wbc-rti.info/mobile/object_view/21783)

<sup>13</sup> Response to the Open Letter on the establishment of the Western Balkans Research Fund, dated 17/08/2021

Finally, research infrastructures (RIs) in the WB6 are currently underdeveloped and underused.<sup>14</sup> Participation in the pan-European RIs varies across countries, as well as across scientific fields. Although joining some pan-European RIs requires a significant level of development of the research infrastructure, participation in others can be instrumental for capacity building and modernisation,<sup>15</sup> as well as for regional and European integration. The joint efforts of the WB6 in accessing RIs in the region and EU have the potential to enhance the overall research and innovation potential of the region.<sup>16</sup> Some regional cooperation in this field has already taken place with both positive effects and identified challenges. For example, in the case of European Social Survey<sup>17</sup> ERIC, a regional network of WB institutions was established as a platform for exchange of experiences and other types of collaboration.<sup>18</sup> However, currently not all governments of the WB6 support access and membership to RIs such as the European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure (ESS ERIC).

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<sup>14</sup> Kutlača, Đ., & Živković, L. (2022). Western Balkans Research and Innovation Infrastructure Roadmap. Regional Cooperation Council. p.10, Retrieved from: <https://www.rcc.int/download/docs/Western%20Balkans%20Research%20and%20Innovation%20Infrastructure%20Roadmap.pdf/b8c6603c0e7171059c5e09f2e93cc4.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> For example, CESSDA runs a mentorship program for less mature or not fully established service providers from current and potential member institutions. <https://www.cessda.eu/Strategy-Expertise/Mentorship-Programme>

<sup>16</sup> RCC, 2023, Western Balkans Research and Innovation Infrastructure Roadmap

<sup>17</sup> The European Social Survey (ESS) is implemented bi-annually, fulfilling the highest methodological standards of research in the domain of social sciences. It measures the attitudes, beliefs and behavioural patterns of diverse populations in more than thirty nations. The ESS data is available free of charge for non-commercial use.

<sup>18</sup> Western Balkans European Social Survey Regional Network. Retrieved from: <https://wb-europeansocialsurvey.org/>

## BARRIERS TO MOBILITY-DRIVEN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN WB6

Improving mobility requires tackling the demographic shifts in the WB6, particularly the migration of young and skilled people towards Western countries. In fact, sustained migration of well educated people, combined with the low likelihood of return, “jeopardises economic growth and development in the medium and long run”.<sup>19</sup> Despite improvements in human capital within the WB6,<sup>20</sup> the disparities between development and the skills gaps between Western economies and those in the region became acutely apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting once more that the region is ill-equipped to face the Fourth Industrial Revolution.<sup>21</sup> Brain drain hampers the region’s ability to drive innovation and economic progress. Addressing this issue requires not only improved domestic opportunities but also the cultivation of an environment that values local expertise.

### Lack of funding and political will

Budgetary allocations for research and development (R&D) are very low across the WB6, ranging from 0.25% in Albania to 0.9% in Serbia.<sup>22</sup> Limited R&D funding is one of the causes of the non-competitiveness of WB regional research at the European level and insufficient integration of regional research institutions into the large pan-European research infrastructures (RIs). Because of the limited funds, regional research infrastructures and facilities are outdated and mainly used for education rather than research. They are also not connected to the industrial sector.<sup>23</sup> As such, they are not able to support the knowledge accumulation and transfer that is necessary for the economic development of the region.

Some developments can be noted in the wider innovation ecosystem,<sup>24</sup> e.g. with the emergence of Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs).<sup>25</sup> However, often DIHs do not offer a full range of services.<sup>26</sup> Another missing but crucial component is the scale-up, or investment.<sup>27</sup> In fact, mobilisation of R&D funding from the private sector, e.g. through venture capital, is minimal. There is a clear need for the political leadership of WB6 to allocate substantial funds for education and scientific research, aiming to reach at least the average level of EU investments and beyond. This has been articulated in many initiatives through the years. It will be important to diversify programmes and grants to focus on increasing research capacities across the region<sup>28</sup> and promoting collaboration on joint projects.

<sup>19</sup> Hanzl-Weiss, D., Holzner, M., Mara, I., & Pichler, D. (2020). Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area (MAP REA) in the Western Balkans – Diagnostic Report. RCC. Retrieved from: <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/111/multi-annual-action-plan-for-a-regional-economic-area-map-rea-in-the-western-balkans--diagnostic-report>

<sup>20</sup> As measured through the average years of schooling (Hanzl-Weiss et al., 2020, p.72)

<sup>21</sup> Schwab, K. (2016, Jan 14). The Fourth Industrial Revolution: what it means, how to respond. World Economic Forum. Retrieved in May 2021 from: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-what-it-means-and-how-to-respond/>

<sup>22</sup> European Training Foundation. (2023). Analysing the skills dimension of technology transfer in the Western Balkans. Retrieved from: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/document-attachments/analysing-skills-dimension-technology-transfer-western-balkans>

<sup>23</sup> Kutlača, Đ., & Živković, L. (2022). Western Balkans Research and Innovation Infrastructure Roadmap. Regional Cooperation Council. Retrieved from: <https://www.rcc.int/download/docs/Western%20Balkans%20Research%20and%20Innovation%20Infrastructure%20Roadmap.pdf/b8cdbh6603c9e7171059c5e09f2e95cc4.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Kutlača, Đ., & Živković, L. (2022). Western Balkans Research and Innovation Infrastructure Roadmap. Regional Cooperation Council. Retrieved from: <https://www.rcc.int/download/docs/Western%20Balkans%20Research%20and%20Innovation%20Infrastructure%20Roadmap.pdf/b8cdbh6603c9e7171059c5e09f2e95cc4.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> The European Commission describes Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) as one-stop shops supporting companies / public sector organisations in improving their production / service delivery processes through the use of digital technologies.

<sup>26</sup> With the full cycle including pre-incubation services, training and education activities, networking, advice on the development of new products and services.

<sup>27</sup> RCC. (2021). Mapping of digital innovation hubs, and identification of needs within Western Balkans and of prospective regional cooperation actions. Retrieved from: <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/130/mapping-of-digital-innovation-hubs-and-identification-of-needs-within-western-balkans-and-of-prospective-regional-cooperation-action>

<sup>28</sup> European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency. (2020.) Erasmus+, Capacity building in higher education (CBHE) action – Regional report – Western Balkans, Publications Office. Retrieved from: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/503574>



Increasing participation is affected by factors, including: (i) Inadequate institutional governance – Higher education institutions (HEIs) in the region, as the main anchors for scientific research, face many challenges ranging from insufficiently developed research and internationalisation strategies to severe understaffing and heavy administrative workload. Furthermore, HEIs lack financial autonomy; thus, research funding administration requires lengthy procedures involving approval at many administrative levels. This disincentivises HEIs' academic staff to pursue research activities. In the long run, it leads to a lack of long-term vision for projects (and consortia development). In addition, accreditation processes and delays are sometimes problematic. (ii) Limited project design and implementation capabilities – Capacities for project design, writing and implementation need to be improved across the region. Project teams often face administrative and management challenges due to the complex rules and regulations (particularly for tendering procedures, which are even more cumbersome for cross-regional projects). The creation of key project management documents for quality assurance, management processes, promotion and disseminations often does not meet expected quality standards (e.g. lack of indicators, milestones, responsibilities, and timelines) for a well-managed project. Partnership creation, particularly with non-academic partners, remains a challenge. Capacities for communication and dissemination of project outcomes and results also needs to be improved.<sup>29</sup>

The ability of the WB region to adopt new technologies is significantly constrained. Their competitiveness is rooted in cheap labour rather than technological advancements. This situation is further exacerbated by brain drain, which not only weakens a company's inclination to collaborate with research institutions but also undermines its capacity to adopt new technologies.

In the context of technology transfer, the provision of support services for both vertical and horizontal technology transfer is inadequate across the WB region. Although sector associations have historically offered some assistance for horizontal technology transfer, this function has not been effectively adopted by more contemporary cluster organisations.<sup>30</sup> While Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) have emerged with the mission to encourage the adoption of digital technology across industries and companies, they are still in their nascent stages within the WB. These DIHs mainly concentrate on aiding ICT start-ups.<sup>31</sup> In order to establish an environment of equitable negotiation and balanced business relations with the EU, it is imperative to elevate the level of knowledge and scientific expertise in the WB region to match the standards of developed EU countries.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> European Training Foundation. (2023). Analysing the skills dimension of technology transfer in the Western Balkans. Retrieved from: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/document-attachments/analysing-skills-dimension-technology-transfer-western-balkans>

<sup>31</sup> European Training Foundation. (2023). Analysing the skills dimension of technology transfer in the Western Balkans. Retrieved from: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/document-attachments/analysing-skills-dimension-technology-transfer-western-balkans>

## Effects of misaligned policy and regulation on knowledge transfer and innovation

Policy and regulatory complexities can be determinant factors in helping or hindering cooperation between academic, research institutions, innovation infrastructures and the private sector. 2022 Enlargement Package Country Reports show that the level of preparation and progress for negotiations on acquis Chapter 25: Science and Research vary across the WB6.<sup>32</sup> Knowledge transfer and smart specialisation policies/strategies are particularly relevant to mobility-driven innovation. While there is a shared emphasis on the adoption of Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) across the WB, its main focus is channelling research, development, and innovation funding towards priority sectors. Comparatively, little attention is being paid to technology transfer. Stakeholders have expressed concerns regarding the adequacy of institutional capacities to implement S3, the discrepancy in skills, and the level of collaboration with the private sector, which appears to be hesitant to engage with universities.

Efforts to update legislation related to technology and knowledge transfer in the WB6 are driven by the EU accession process. However, this area is regulated by multiple laws, making it difficult to ensure consistency when amendments are made. This is also reflected in the scattered institutional governance around innovation, knowledge transfer and mobility. Specifically, even though mobility is managed by the line ministry responsible for education, the latter is seldom responsible for industrial or smart specialisation policies. Finally, the spectrum of organisations dedicated to supporting technology transfer varies considerably across the WB6, with distinct strengths and weaknesses. Assistance for horizontal technology transfer (i.e., sharing and applying technology, knowledge, or innovations across different industries, sectors, or fields) remains limited.<sup>33</sup> More remains to be done to connect the ‘islands of excellence’ within the region and also with the EU.

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<sup>32</sup> Western Balkans Info Hub. (2022, Oct 16). What the enlargement package says on science and research. News. Retrieved from: <https://wbc-rti.info/object/news/23334>

<sup>33</sup> European Training Foundation. (2023). Analysing the skills dimension of technology transfer in the Western Balkans. Retrieved from: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/document-attachments/analysing-skills-dimension-technology-transfer-western-balkans>

**Lack of consistency in taking forward measures and establishing dialogue**

The consultation meetings highlighted that there appears to be a lack of consistent effort in implementing measures and initiating fruitful dialogue. Entities such as the EC, as well as other donor-supported initiatives, often prioritise their own agendas, leading to a mismatch between the support they offer and the actual needs or expectations of the Western Balkans. This inconsistency can be best exemplified by the case of the Western Balkans Research Fund. After the consolidation of its concept, the initiative was swiftly overshadowed by a different EU-backed programme, despite the former's potential significance to the region. This kind of abrupt shift not only disrupts local efforts but also further alienates stakeholders in the region.

In addition, stakeholders raised concerns about a pervasive oversight in considering the institutional fragility that characterises the WB6. The governmental institutions within these nations suffer from corruption, and the public administrative bodies are riddled with nepotism and political affiliations. Such endemic issues severely limit these institutions' ability to react promptly and enact measures conducive to societal and institutional growth.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the message of this thematic working group is “finance and support the ecosystem of research and innovation in WB6 through: (i) a comprehensive intra-regional mobility framework agreement; (ii) dedicated and customised funding schemes for research and innovation; and (iii) mobility-driven knowledge transfers and scientific cooperation within the WB and with the EU for sustained economic growth and resilient societies and accelerating integration of the region in the European Research Area”.

Key recommendations for European Commission:

- Support and incentivise **intensified collaboration, mobility, knowledge transfer and access to infrastructure in research and innovation ecosystem within the WB6 and with the EU through a paradigm shift** where the WB6 does not simply catch up with its European counterparts but collaborates in paving the path forward and addressing shared challenges, such as building resilient societies, climate change and digital transformation.
- **Commit to facilitate and finance the establishment of a comprehensive all inclusive regional mobility framework agreement** including students, researchers, university administrative staff, experts in the research and innovation ecosystem and professionals in related areas within the Western Balkans. This framework agreement must be dedicated and customised to the specific contextual needs and priorities of the WB6, paving the way for strengthened regional collaboration, knowledge transfer and access to infrastructure in R&I ecosystem within the region.
- The EU should consider again to **support and co-finance the establishment of a Western Balkans Research Fund** as a dedicated mechanism through specific granting and supporting schemes on mobility, knowledge transfer, access to infrastructure and engagement of diaspora in R&I ecosystem within the WB6 and with the EU, thus addressing the current shortcomings of the Widening Participation and Horizon Europe programmes and levelling up the capacities for science, research, and innovation of the region.
- **Support the creation and consolidation of regional digital information hubs across all the WB6 region.** This would reinforce digital collaboration and research synergy between the WB6 and the EU, but also with the private sector, academia, and policymakers. This should also include strengthening, supporting and incentivising the Horizon Europe National Contact Points in WB6.

Key recommendations to WB6 Governments:

- WB6 governments must commit to **increase the percentage of investment in research and innovation up to 2% of GDP by 2030** to nurture a generation of researchers, experts, innovators and thinkers who can redefine the region's future, provide avenues for brain circulation, and attract talents by engaging with peers in the region, EU and diaspora.
- WB6 governments must commit to **the implementation of a comprehensive intra-regional mobility framework agreement** including students, researchers, university administrative staff, experts in the research and innovation ecosystem and professionals in related areas within the Western Balkans, dedicated to and customised to the specific contextual needs and priorities of the Western Balkans. This will pave the way for strengthened regional collaboration, knowledge transfer and access to infrastructure in the research and innovation ecosystem within the region. It will also accelerate integration in the European Research Area, and contribute to curb brain drain by offering globally relevant opportunities locally and regionally.
- WB6 governments must commit to and co-finance **the establishment of a Western Balkans Research Fund** as a dedicated mechanism through specific granting and supporting schemes on mobility, knowledge transfer, access to infrastructure and engagement of diaspora in research and innovation ecosystem within the WB6 and with the EU, thus levelling up the capacities for science, research, and innovation of the region.
- WB6 Governments must **allocate sufficient financial resources and incentivise the integration of national and regional research infrastructures into pan-European Research Infrastructures and networks**. This implies ensuring that core expenses, like membership fees and primary activities, are catered for by the national research and innovation budgets. A concrete step is for the **WB6 governments to include in their policy agenda the finances for participation in the European Social Survey by 2024**, ensuring the participation in Round 12 of the European Social Survey for the region, contributing to informed policies and high-quality research.
- WB6 governments **should intensify their commitment to implementing the Common Regional Market Action Plan, specifically focusing on the research and innovation ecosystem and higher education quality assurance**. Governments should take steps to allow for automatic (national) accreditation of joint programmes, accredited according to the European approach (as defined in the Yerevan declaration) by a European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) accredited member.