

## Expression of Interest

### Call for Stakeholder Engagement from Western Balkans and the European Union for Increased Investments and Opportunities in Mobility-Driven Research and Innovation in the region.

Name of the Project: “Enhancing Mobility-Driven Research and Innovation in Western Balkans For Sustained Economic Growth and Convergence with the European Union”

Location: Western Balkans (WB6) and European Union (EU)

Duration<sup>1</sup>: October 2024 - March 2025

Lead Organization: Center Science and Innovation for Development (SCiDEV)

Supported by: Open Society Foundations - Western Balkans (OSFWB).

#### 1. BACKGROUND

To build up on our efforts to strengthen mobility-driven research and innovation in the region, as a result of the achievements within the [Mobility thematic working group](#) that SCiDEV led in 2023, within [Civil Society and Think Tank Forum 2023 \(CSF2023\)](#) of the [Berlin Process](#), we are launching a follow-up project dedicated to enhancing mobility-driven research and innovation in the Western Balkans (WB6) for sustained economic growth and convergence with the European Union (EU), supported by the [Open Society Foundations - Western Balkans \(OSF-WB\)](#).

The “**Enhancing Mobility-Driven Research and Innovation in Western Balkans For Sustained Economic Growth and Convergence with the European Union**” project aims to influence European and regional decision-makers to increase investments and create more opportunities for mobility-driven research and innovation (R&I), while strengthening the results of its predecessor, and contributing to a stronger research and innovation ecosystem across the Western Balkans.

Building synergies with the [Joint Science Conference of the Berlin Process](#) and the [Chairs’ Conclusions of the Leaders’ Summit in Tirana in October 2023](#) and using the momentum of the [New Growth Plan of the EU for the Western Balkans](#), SCiDEV will continue to conduct research and advocacy efforts regarding mobility – driven research and innovation in the WB6 and with the EU for sustained economic growth and convergence with the EU. More specifically, SCiDEV will continue to engage with stakeholders to push for specific and concrete recommendations

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that the consultation process will span from October 2024 to March 2025. This timeline includes several key milestones, with specific dates for meetings and engagements communicated well in advance. While the consultation will occur over several months, your active involvement will be concentrated around these scheduled meetings and tasks, ensuring efficient use of your time and expertise.

such as support and co-finance the establishment of a Western Balkans Research Fund, the strategic use of IPA (Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance) and New Growth Plan funds to support R&I initiatives in WB6 and with the EU and more focus of the Framework Programme 10 on Western Balkans including a specific Widening Call for Horizon Europe.

In 2023, SCiDEV led the [thematic working group on mobility](#) in the WB6 as part of the [CSF2023](#) of the Berlin Process, supported by OSF-WB. The group held four consultation meetings, bringing together 43 participants from various sectors, including universities, research centers, and civil society organizations from the WB6 and the EU. These discussions focused on enhancing regional mobility, engaging the diaspora, and integrating the region's higher education and research systems with European frameworks. The findings and recommendations were presented at advocacy visits in Berlin and Brussels and networking events in Sarajevo and Munich, emphasizing the importance of regional cooperation and EU integration in education and science.

SCiDEV also hosted [a high-level panel](#) during CSF2023, focusing on strengthening the integration of the Western Balkans into the European Research Area. Following the panel, a [policy document with specific recommendations](#) was published, highlighting the current efforts to promote mobility in education and research between the WB6 and the EU. Despite progress in some areas, such as increased participation in EU education, research, and innovation programs, challenges remain, including low public funding for research and innovation across the region and limited capacities, resources, and infrastructure for high-quality research and innovation.

Building synergies with the [Joint Science Conference of the Berlin Process](#) and the [Chairs' Conclusions of the Leaders' Summit in Tirana in October 2023](#) and using the momentum of the [New Growth Plan of the EU for the Western Balkans](#), SCiDEV will continue with its research and advocacy efforts regarding mobility – driven research and innovation in the WB6 and with the EU for sustained economic growth and convergence with the EU.

In this light, SCiDEV will continue to engage with stakeholders to push for specific and concrete recommendations such as support and co-finance the establishment of a Western Balkans Research Fund, the strategic use of IPA (Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance) and New Growth Plan funds to support R&I initiatives in WB6 and with the EU and more focus of the Framework Programme 10 on Western Balkans including a specific Widening Call for Horizon Europe.

**Specific Project Objectives:**

- To advocate for enhanced investments in mobility driven research and innovation (R&I) within Western Balkans 6 (WB6) and with the EU.
- To analyze recent developments in R&I within the WB6 in light of the Chair's Conclusions, the upcoming EU Framework Programme 10, and the New Growth Plan for WB6.
- To foster dialogue and collaboration with key stakeholders through dissemination of knowledge and awareness raising for the seamless integration of the Western Balkans; research, innovation, and higher education sectors into the European Research Area (ERA).

**Key Activities:**

- Hosting a public event in Tirana with stakeholders from the WB6, EU, and Albania to discuss progress and new strategies following 2023's efforts.

- Development of three policy briefs with critical short analysis and recommendations in three specific areas: (i) analysis and recommendation for the participation of WB6 in the Horizon Europe 2025-2027 Programme and planning for the Framework Programme 10 of the European Union; (ii) monitoring of the Policy Measures related to Research & Development envisaged in the New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans; (iii) analysis of the results of the mobility opportunities and the implementation of agreements signed as part of the Berlin Process.
- Collaborating with the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum 2024.
- Working with the Joint Science Conference of the Berlin Process.
- Developing an advocacy campaign to boost investments in mobility-focused R&I.

**To achieve this, we are seeking to engage key stakeholders from the WB6 region and the EU to collaborate with us in driving this initiative forward. Stakeholder engagement will ensure fostered dialogue and collaboration through dissemination of knowledge and awareness raising.**

The members of the working group bring diverse expertise and perspectives, contributing to comprehensive research, meaningful discussions, and the development of impactful policy recommendations.

By engaging with stakeholders through the Quadruple Helix model—which includes academia, civil society, business industry, and government—the project ensures a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges of R&I mobility. This multi-stakeholder engagement fosters a collaborative environment conducive to shared learning and joint problem-solving, enhancing the impact of SCiDEV's work across different sectors.

## 2. SCOPE OF ENGAGEMENT

Interested stakeholders will play a critical role in the following areas:

### ***Participating in Advocacy, Research Work, and a High-Level Public Event in Tirana:***

- Engage in discussions with fellow stakeholders from the WB6 and EU to review progress made in 2023 and strategize future directions for mobility-driven research and innovation. This will be implemented through online and offline consultation meetings.

### ***Collaboration on Policy Brief Development and Awareness Raising:***

- Contribute insights and feedback during the development of three key policy briefs that will address investments and opportunities for R&I in the Western Balkans and with the EU.
- Support the development and dissemination of an advocacy campaign aimed at boosting investments in mobility-focused research and innovation. This will include strategic engagements with policymakers, media outreach, and public awareness efforts across the Western Balkans.

Please note that:

- Ongoing stakeholder engagement will be maintained to facilitate collaboration and involvement in implementing endorsed policy recommendations. Dissemination of project outcomes to relevant parties will ensure that key stakeholders are informed and can act on the recommendations.
- Our advocacy agenda includes strategic engagements with the European Commission and key stakeholders, advocacy visits at the WB6 government level, and reputable media at the EU and WB6 levels. Depending on resources, project, and budget provisions, we will ensure spaces for the direct engagement and

involvement of representatives from our stakeholders pool in these meetings and the overall advocacy agenda. We aim to organize at least five targeted advocacy meetings with European Commission officials and relevant stakeholders and at least six targeted advocacy meetings with representatives of WB6 governments.

**Working Modality:**

Our approach involves several key steps to ensure efficient and well-structured collaboration:

- Setting Dates and Sending Invitations: We will establish the dates for our meetings and send out the invitations to all participants.
- Meeting Agenda: Before each meeting, we will prepare and distribute an agenda outlining the key points for discussion.
- Moderator/Facilitator: Each meeting will have a designated moderator to guide the discussions and ensure the agenda is followed.
- Summary and Follow-Up: After each meeting, we will send out a summary of the discussions and decisions made. These summaries will serve as a foundation for future meetings, building on the topics and goals discussed, as well as feeding the inputs for policy documents.

**Indicative Timeline:**

1. Consultations and data collection: Four online consultation meetings with stakeholders are planned for **October and November 2024**.
2. Advocacy Visits/Meetings and related engagement for awareness raising: **October 2024 - March 2025**
3. High-level public event in Tirana and follow-up: **December 2024 with follow-ups during January 2025**.

**Benefits of participation:**

- Opportunity to shape and influence regional and European policies on research and innovation.
- Networking with key stakeholders from the WB6, EU, and beyond.
- Enhanced visibility through participation in high-profile events and campaigns.
- Contribution to the sustainable economic growth and integration of the Western Balkans into the European Research Area (ERA).

**3. PROCEDURE**

To express your interest in joining our stakeholder group, please fill out the [Registration here](#). The form will remain open on a rolling basis during the project's implementation.

We look forward to engaging with diverse stakeholders, including CSOs, academia, public authorities, individual experts, international organizations, think tanks, businesses, business associations, start-ups, tech parks, and others.

**Eligibility:**

- Active involvement in regional or national research, innovation, or higher education initiatives.
- Active involvement with themes of EU integration, European enlargement, research and development, innovation, and mobility programs and agreements.

- Strong interest in fostering collaboration between the Western Balkans and the EU in research and innovation.
- Willingness to actively participate in discussions, provide feedback, and collaborate on advocacy initiatives.
- Proven track record in research, innovation, or policy development within the Western Balkans or the EU context.

We value your contribution to our shared objectives and look forward to your involvement. Should you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact us at [mobility.csf@scidevcenter.org](mailto:mobility.csf@scidevcenter.org).

*Final note:* We have just launched the call for Experts from the Western Balkans to Develop Policy Documents for Enhanced Mobility-Driven Research and Innovation in the region. If you are interested in applying or referring to a colleague, please learn more about it [here](#).