

Enhancing Mobility-Driven Research and Innovation in Western Balkans For Sustained Economic Growth and Convergence with the European Union

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 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 centres, and civil society organisations 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, emphasising 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 analyse 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 disseminating knowledge and raising awareness 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.