



# Fellowship Report

**Organisation sending:** Riinvest Insitute

**Name of the fellow:** Benet Maloku

**Organisation Hosting:** EIZ

**Location of the fellowship:** Croatia

**Name of the mentor:** Marina Tkalec

## Background and introduction

The primary objective of this short-term fellowship was to screen the expertise of EIZ in managing EU-funded projects and to enhance the capacity of Riinvest in project administration. The focus was on transferring knowledge and skills to enable Riinvest to apply effectively for, secure and manage EU grants and funding programmes. Additionally, the fellowship served as an opportunity to establish long-term institutional partnerships between Riinvest and EIZ. This short-term mobility fellowship was developed within the framework of the POLICY ANSWERS project under the Work Package for Regional Pilot Activities.

The fellowship lasted from 9 to 20 December 2024 and was hosted at the EIZ in Zagreb, Croatia. During this period, activities, workshops and meetings were organised to provide hands-on training and practical insights into the management of EU-funded projects. These activities aimed to close knowledge gaps and equipped Riinvest with the tools and expertise necessary to succeed in a competitive funding environment.

## Review previous EIZ's experience with EU-funded projects

The short-term mobility started with a detailed presentation by Zoran Aralica, who shared EIZ's experience in Horizon Europe projects and other European Union framework projects. This presentation, in addition to focusing on EIZ's expertise in applying for and managing EU funds, also highlighted the importance of establishing partnerships with regional and EU-based research institutes to achieve success in such projects. The presentation also explored new opportunities and potential areas for Riinvest's involvement in Horizon Europe projects and current opportunities for cooperation between EIZ and Riinvest in the field of research and innovation, paving the way for future joint initiatives. Furthermore, the session highlighted what Riinvest could offer as a partner, highlighting its strengths and unique contributions. Riinvest stands out as a highly reputable and capable partner, bringing a wealth of strengths and unique contributions to any collaboration. As the oldest think tank institution in Kosovo\*, Riinvest has built a reputation over three decades. This expertise has allowed Riinvest to establish partnerships with donors, collaborators, and key organizations within Kosovo and beyond. A core strength of Riinvest is its team of highly qualified professionals with extensive experience in managing and implementing projects. Furthermore, Riinvest has an understanding of Kosovo's socioeconomic context and a comprehensive database on the business environment in the country. Another issue discussed was the challenges of small economies like Kosovo and their low participation in EU framework programmes. The main part of the discussion was concrete recommendations for the Riinvest

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\*Kosovo This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



Institute regarding internal capacity building, creation of collaborations and higher participation of Riinvest in EU framework programmes.

### **Evaluation of previous project proposals: What can we do better in the future?**

The second activity of the fellowship focused on a comprehensive review of an unsuccessful application to Horizon Europe submitted jointly by Riinvest and EIZ and several other institutions. Together with the EIZ team, the proposal and the evaluation report were analysed to identify proposal weaknesses and to address the feedback provided by independent expert contracted by European Commission. This effort aimed to review the previous proposal, enhance its strengths and ensure alignment with the expectations and priorities of the Horizon Europe funding calls. This activity provided a practical learning opportunity for the Riinvest team, equipping us with practical knowledge in developing and reviewing proposals. Based on the evaluation report from the independent experts, several sections of the proposal were improved. The reviews focused on strengthening the research methodology, clarifying project objectives, work packages and expected impacts and refining dissemination and exploitation strategies. These lessons will enhance the quality of future applications and give Riinvest a deeper understanding of the key elements needed for successful proposals.

### **Management and administration of EU projects, specifically Erasmus+**

The next activity was a workshop by the head of the project management and administration office at EIZ. This activity aimed to transfer knowledge from EIZ to Riinvest staff to create a similar office to increase efficiency and productivity with project management. The presentation gave an overview of the structure, roles and responsibilities of the management and administration office at EIZ, showing how it plays a key role in supporting the implementation and administration of projects, serving as a point of contact in resource management, team coordination, budgeting and quality assurance of projects. The presentation also outlined the best practices and tools used by EIZ to improve operations and maintain high standards in project management. This activity highlighted the importance of having a dedicated and well-structured office to improve Riinvest's capacity manage EU-funded projects effectively and align its internal processes with international standards. Also, the second part of the workshop focused on the preparations for Erasmus+ projects, where both institutions could collaborate in the future to benefit from this EU funding opportunity.

### **Visit to Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes (AMPEU)**

Another activity was visiting the Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes (AMPEU) in Croatia. With a mission to help citizens and organisations transform good ideas into successful projects, AMPEU is vital in facilitating access to EU funds. During the meeting, the AMPEU team shared Croatia's experiences with EU programmes, providing valuable insights into how these practices can be adapted for the benefit of Kosovo. The discussion highlighted the importance of strategic planning, effective project design and fostering partnerships to maximize the impact of EU-funded initiatives. Special attention was paid to how organisations in Kosovo, such as Riinvest, can benefit from the application processes, improve their project proposals and leverage available resources to secure funding. This activity served as an example of how structured support mechanisms and targeted capacity-building efforts can lead to greater participation and success in EU programmes.

### **Concluding remarks**





The short-term fellowship at the Institute of Economics, Zagreb, was a unique experience for me but also for Riinvest in general, providing a wealth of knowledge, practical skills and strategic insights to strengthen its capacity to manage and administer EU-funded projects. Each activity - from presentations and joint reviews to institutional visits - contributed significantly to the transfer of knowledge from EIZ to Riinvest. The EIZ team's recommendations for Riinvest have been very concrete, such as: (i) increasing cooperation and networking with regional institutions, (ii) strengthening scientific excellence, (iii) cooperation with the University of Prishtina, civil society organizations and the private sector, (iv) establishing a project office with non-researchers, and (v) staff participation in international conferences. These recommendations are valid not only for Riinvest, but also for other research organizations in the Western Balkans.

Another important issue that is mentioned is the lack of applications and projects awarded to Kosovo research organisations, and this is because the requirements call place small countries like Kosovo with a lack of capacity in the same position as countries like Croatia, Hungary, Germany and Serbia that have a long experience in these EU programmes. This concern will be addressed and argued in a future policy brief. Finally, by implementing the lessons learned and the recommendations given, Riinvest will be better prepared to benefit from EU funding mechanisms and contribute to impactful projects in the field of Research and Innovation and beyond.

