Fellowship Report

Organisation sending: University of Sarajevo (UNSA)

Name of the fellow: Maida Hadžiabdić

Organisation Hosting: Helmholtzzentrum für Schwerionenforschung/Facility for Antiproton and Ion Research (GSI/FAIR)

Location of the fellowship: Germany

Name of the mentor: Pradeep Gosh

Strategic foresight report: GSI/FAIR vs. UNSA

This report compares the institutional strategies and best practices of FAIR/GSI and the University of Sarajevo (UNSA) within the framework of EU funded research, with a focus on supporting researchers in the Western Balkans. Drawing on data from the FAIR/GSI GET_INvolved Programme and POLICY ANSWERS project, it highlights challenges and opportunities while offering strategic foresight to guide UNSA as one of the WB leading HEI in aligning with European Commission (EC) funding priorities.

1. **Comparative overview: GSI /FAIR and UNSA**

1.1 GSI /FAIR's International model of engagement

Institutional Profile:

- 1,600+ employees and 1,000+ guest researchers annually.
- 40+ programs, and strategic partners worldwide.
- Budget: €221.2M (GSI) and €8.5M–€7M for institutes in Jena and Mainz.
- GET_INvolved Programme: Offers internships, traineeships, research stays, and study tours for BSc, MSc, and PhD candidates from all over the world.
- Gender & Inclusion policy: 150+ mentors from 40+ nationalities support diverse backgrounds through structured mentorship.
- Talent Factory Approach: Positioned as a hub for developing highly skilled professionals in STEM directly contributing to Europe's innovation ecosystem.

1.2 UNSA – Emerging actor with regional perspective

Institutional Context:

- Budget: 129.2M University of Sarajevo with 30 member institutions
- Involved in regional pilot projects through POLICY ANSWERS (e.g. mobility schemes, innovation vouchers, and study visits)
- Limited visibility in high-impact EC grant environments like Horizon Europe/ERC/MSCA

Opportunities for UNSA:

- Bilateral cooperation models inspired by GSI's approach (e.g., structured exchange, mentorship, and mobility).

- Strengthen internal grant-writing and coordination offices to improve Horizon/MSCA success rates.

2. **GSI – Best Practices and procedures**

- Structured engagement with Platforms: GSI uses its own platform, social networks and POLICY ANSWERS WB info hub to maintain alignment with EU research agendas, reform trends, but also for outreach and ecosystem engagement.
- Project support ecosystem: GSI is deeply involved in capacity building, matchmaking platforms (e.g. via stakeholder networks), and structured mentoring for early-career researchers.
- Cross-sector collaboration: Integrates social innovation with R&I agendas, leading to strong impact in areas like green transition and digitalisation.
- Emphasizes transparent knowledge-sharing mechanisms.
- Aligns internal project management tools with EC requirements from the proposal stage.

3. **UNSA – Current procedures and Gaps**

Strengths:

- Participates in capacity building and international workshops, especially via POLICY ANSWERS activities.
- Demonstrates growing involvement in MSCA and Horizon Europe through pilot and mobility schemes.

Gaps Identified:

- Limited institutional visibility on platforms
- Reactive rather than proactive alignment with emerging EU priorities (e.g., Smart Specialisation, Green Deal).
- Human resource shortages in research support and grant management teams.

Tips for Western Balkan partners

1. Policy Engagement: Encourage participation in steering platforms, regional innovation councils and info days.
2. Consistent presence on WB Info Hub LinkedIn, YouTube
3. Mentorship networks: Develop internal programs connecting senior researchers with early-career grant applicants.
4. Strategic foresight training: Regular workshops on EU trends and anticipatory governance can build institutional resilience and foresight.

4. Trend analysis: Challenges and Opportunities for Researchers

4.1 Challenges for UNSA

- Complexity of EC Application processes: Many WB researchers lack experience navigating Horizon Europe, MSCA, and other EU frameworks.

- Inconsistent institutional support
- Brain Drain: High researcher mobility without reintegration strategies weakens UNSA capacities.

4.2 Opportunities for UNSA

- Western Balkans Mobility Scheme: Supports early-career researchers, offering a tested model for regional mobility and collaboration.Innovation Vouchers and Youth Awards: Low-barrier entry points for novice institutions and researchers.
- Smart Specialisation and Green Transition: Trending policy areas

5. Impact of POLICY ANSWERS

- Policy Reform Monitoring: Tracks performance in R&I, green energy, and research capital across WB economies and decision-making processes.
- Capacity Building: Trainings, peer learning webinars, and regional workshops increase institutional readiness (e.g. IPR, Open Science).
- Youth Innovation Integration: Focus on youth schemes as both developmental and EU-alignment tools.
- Providing systematic monitoring across critical areas (R&I, education, youth, digital, culture etc.).
- Launching pilot projects such as mobility schemes, innovation vouchers, and fact-finding missions (e.g., Open Science).
- Supporting policy platforms and capacity-building tailored to specific country needs (e.g., study visits and training workshops).

Impact: Steady alignment of WB HEIs with EC standards with opportunities for more systematic and proactive engagement.

Outcome: Policymakers increasingly prioritize EC-aligned reforms, with measurable indicators driving strategic shifts in national agendas.

6. Plan: GSI and UNSA

- Mobility programmes targeting administrative staff and early-career researchers
- Agreement on GET_INvolved: Partner Programme Internship, Training and Research Programme for Students and Researchers
- Digital: Launch a joint online knowledge base for grant tools, open-access publishing,
- Prepare joint applications.
- Dual mentorship program: Match GSI experts with UNSA researchers for personalized support during Horizon and MSCA submissions.

Conclusion

GSI/FAIR presents a replicable model of excellence in mobility, diversity, and international cooperation. For UNSA strategic alignment with these best practices, supported by POLICY ANSWERS project and EC mobility schemes, can accelerate competitiveness and systemic transformation in leading regional higher education dedicated to the research and innovation.

Key data and links

- 1,600 GSI staff + 1,000 guest researchers/year
- 500+ international students via 35+ bilateral agreements
- GET_INvolved portal: fair-center.eu/GET_INvolved
- WB Info Hub: westernbalkans-infohub.eu
- POLICY ANSWERS contact: policy-answers@westernbalkans-infohub.eu