

ROUNDTABLE DIALOGUE

Diaspora for Convergence: Mobility-Driven Research and Innovation for EU Integration

Part of the SCiDEV in Brussels Advocacy Actions, supported by the #IGNITA Initiative

30 October 2025, 14:00-16:00

Venue: [Full Circle House, Ch. de Vleurgat 89 Brussels 1050](#)

BACKGROUND

Enhanced mobility, research, and innovation are crucial for accelerating the economic and social convergence of the Western Balkans with the European Union. In recent years, the region has made significant strides in aligning with European research and innovation frameworks. All six Western Balkan economies now participate in [Horizon Europe](#), through association agreements or cooperative mechanisms that strengthen their integration into the [European Research Area \(ERA\)](#). Most have adopted or are implementing [Smart Specialization Strategies \(S3\)](#) to align national research and innovation priorities with EU standards. The [EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans](#) introduced conditional financing through the [Reform and Growth Facility \(RGF\)](#), linking reforms in research, education, and governance to increased investment and competitiveness. At the same time, mobility agreements under the Berlin Process on the mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications have the potential to lower barriers for researchers and professionals, while [COST Actions](#), [European Institute of Innovation and Technology \(EIT\)](#) Regional Innovation Hubs, and participation in [Digital Europe](#) have expanded pathways for collaboration and digital transformation.

Yet considerable potential remains untapped. Major structural challenges persist — underinvestment in R&D (often below 1% of GDP), weak governance and institutional capacities within the research and innovation ecosystem, and limited incentives for reintegration of researchers and attracting talents. Regional cooperation often stays project-based and fragmented, leaving the Western Balkans vulnerable to continued peripheral participation in Europe's knowledge economy.

In this context, mobilising the Western Balkans diaspora—researchers, innovators, and policy actors embedded in EU institutions, universities, and research centres—emerges as a strategic opportunity to bridge the gap between policy alignment and practice. Their engagement can translate reforms into sustained research collaboration, brain circulation, and institutional strengthening, consolidating the region's role in Europe's research and innovation landscape. Harnessing this potential will not only reinforce the Western Balkans' position within the European Research Area but also accelerate its EU accession trajectory through knowledge, innovation, and shared growth.

Building on [SCiDEV's long-standing legacy](#) in strengthening the [participation of universities and research institutions](#) in European programmes, and its active engagement in the [Berlin Process](#) through the [Civil Society and Think Tank Forum](#) and the [Joint Science Conference](#), this dialogue reflects our continued commitment to advancing mobility-driven research and innovation as a driver of convergence between the Western Balkans and the European Union.

SCiDEV's research and advocacy highlight the complementary role of diaspora engagement, brain

circulation, and cross-border collaboration in transforming mobility into sustained knowledge exchange and innovation capacity. Through [#IGNITA Initiative](#)—a regional platform supported by the [Open Society Foundations – Western Balkans \(OSF-WB\)](#)—we promote a shared vision of a region that is more connected, competitive, and integrated within Europe’s research, innovation, and policy ecosystems.

We invite stakeholders from across the Brussels community—including EU institutions, member state representations, research and academic networks, think tanks, and regional partners—to join this Roundtable Dialogue and exchange ideas on building a more connected, innovative, and convergent European research and innovation space. The focus of the event will be particularly on Albania, but also on the wider Western Balkans region.

Working language: English

This event is part of the Open Society Foundations | Western Balkans initiative #IGNITA, a collaboration among regional civil society organisations to create a hub for stakeholders focused on regional cooperation and EU integration. Discover more about IGNITA [here](#). Discover more about SCIDEV’s project [here](#).

TENTATIVE AGENDA ROUNDTABLE DIALOGUE

Diaspora for Convergence: Mobility-Driven Research for the Western Balkans' EU Integration

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13:45 – 14:00 | Welcome Coffee & Participant Arrival

Informal networking among participants

14:00 – 14:25 | Opening and Context Setting

Moderator: *Abi Dodbiba, IGNITA External Expert*

Purpose: To frame the dialogue within the broader EU enlargement and research policy agenda, underlining how mobility-driven research and diaspora engagement can accelerate Western Balkans–EU convergence.

Opening Remarks:

- **Blerjana Bino**, Executive Director, SCiDEV
“From Mobility to Convergence: Strengthening Research and Innovation Links between the Western Balkans and the EU – What the data shows us”
- **Representative**, Open Society Foundations – Western Balkans / IGNITA Initiative (TBC)
“IGNITA: A Regional Platform for Knowledge, Cooperation and Advocacy”

14:25 – 15:50 | Dialogue: Mobilizing the Diaspora for Research, Innovation, and EU Convergence

Moderator: Blerjana Bino, SCiDEV

Purpose: To explore how mobility-driven research, innovation, and diaspora engagement can serve as practical instruments of EU integration for the Western Balkans with a particular focus in Albania. The discussion will identify mechanisms for improving participation in EU research frameworks and for transforming mobility into sustainable knowledge exchange, brain circulation, and institutional collaboration.

Guiding Questions:

- *How can the academic and professional diaspora contribute to stronger research collaboration and innovation partnerships with EU institutions and programmes?*
- *What mechanisms can enhance participation in Horizon Europe, COST, Digital Europe, and future frameworks such as FP10?*
- *How can Brussels-based missions, think tanks, and academic networks act as bridges for knowledge exchange, policy convergence, and the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU's research and innovation ecosystem?*

Inputs from:

- **Representative**, DG Research and Innovation (DG RTD) – “EU Priorities for Research Cooperation with the Western Balkans” (TBC)



- **Representative**, *DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations – Eastern Neighbourhood and Institution Building (DG ENEST) – “Embedding Research and Innovation in the EU Growth Plan and Enlargement Agenda” (TBC)*
- **Representative**, *DG for Education and Culture (DG EAC) – “Mobility as a driver for growth and the role of Erasmus+”*
- **Representative**, *CEFTA Secretariat - “Regional Economic Integration and Innovation Cooperation” (TBC)*
- **Representative**, *Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) - “Building Regional Frameworks for Research and Innovation” (TBC)*
- **Representative**, *COST Actions (TBC)*
- **Academic and Professional Diaspora Representatives (TBC)**

Discussion

15:50 – 16:00 | Key Messages and Closing Remarks

Orkidea Xhaferaj, *Digital and Innovation Policy Expert, SCiDEV*

“Policy Takeaways and Next Steps for a More Connected and Innovative Region”

