

WESTERN BALKANS

REGIONAL R&D STRATEGY FOR INNOVATION

RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FUND

From “brain drain” to “brain gain”

Western Balkan countries face profound challenges in building a research base, which is a precondition for innovation and competitiveness and a fundamental pillar of national innovation systems. The scientific diaspora from the Western Balkan countries is a large potential source of internalization of research. Increasing scientific collaboration with the scientific diaspora and retaining young talents by expanding opportunities for careers in research are part of a strategy for achieving research excellence in the region and strengthening its integration to the global scientific community.

Objective The Research Excellence Fund will strengthen research capabilities in the Western Balkan countries and promote excellence by fostering collaboration between Western Balkan scientists and the region’s scientific diaspora. The fund will also strengthen the integration into the European Research Area by providing support to young scientists and building research capacity.

By providing regional funding and scaling up resources, it would help avoid fragmentation across countries and focus financial, human capital, and infrastructure resources on scientific areas with the largest benefits for regional competitiveness and development.

Description The fund will run three programs: the International Collaboration in Research Program, the Young Researchers Grant Program, and the Training Grants Program.

- ▶ *International Collaboration in Research Program.* This program will provide research grants to finance regional and potentially international research collaboration and scientific collaboration with the diaspora. Research proposals should involve at least two Western Balkan countries and at least one researcher from the scientific diaspora (that is, a national of any of the Western Balkan countries). Researchers will be encouraged to apply to ERA (FP7) and other sources of funds. Amounts could be up to €1,000,000 (per project for a maximum period of three years).
- ▶ *Young Researchers Grant Program.* This program will provide research grants to fund fellowships for young researchers at the doctorate and postdoctorate levels. Support for these research projects will require candidates to have completed their PhD or MSC in the sciences or engineering within a five-year period prior to their application and to be no older than 35. Amounts could be up to €100,000 (per individual for a maximum period of two years).
- ▶ *Training Grants Program.* Financial support will be offered for doctoral training. Participation in technical courses and the improvement of proposals that have not qualified in framework programs and other regional research programs may also be supported. The objective is to provide local researchers with the necessary competence and knowledge to enable them to participate in competitive calls for proposals from the European and international scientific communities. Amounts could be €30,000–40,000 (per candidate for a maximum period of four years).

The Joint Statement of the Ministerial Conference — held in Sarajevo 2009 — expressed the interest of the region in developing a joint strategy on research and innovation.

The World Bank and the European Commission in September 2011 signed an agreement to support the development of the strategy. The technical assistance is financed with EUR 1,5 million through a Multi-Beneficiary Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).

The International Collaboration in Research Program will be built on the experience of Croatia’s Unity through Knowledge Fund Connectivity Program.

See <http://www.ukf.hr/>.

The Young Researchers Grant Program will follow closely the experience of the European Research Council Starting Grants.

See <http://erc.europa.eu/funding-schemes>.

The note on EU policy initiatives for universities and researchers (28/11/2012), provides a set of best practice based principles for innovative doctoral training.

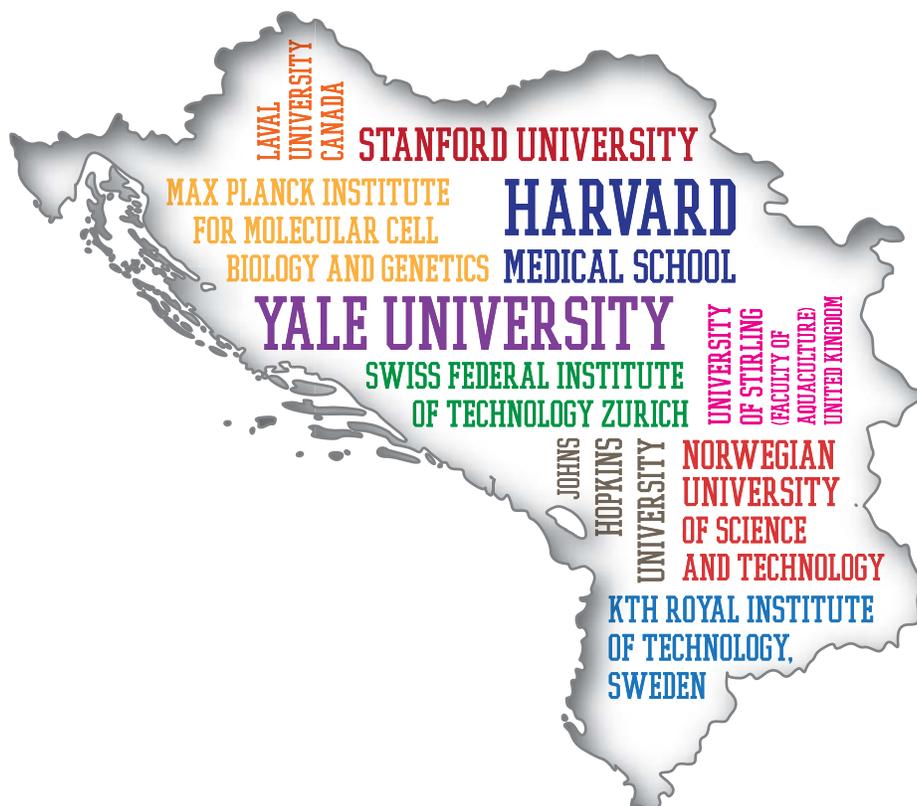
Governance The Supervisory Board of the WISE Facility will supervise and guide the operations of the fund. The WISE Facility will prepare detailed operational manuals and guidelines, design the calls for proposals, and monitor and evaluate the program. The WISE Supervisory Board will appoint an Approval Committee, with a maximum of five persons, composed of members of the regional and international scientific community and the private sector; individuals will serve for a limited period of time (for example, two years). The Approval Committee will have the final responsibility for project selection.

Operational procedures Implementation and supervision of projects will be conducted at the national level through a national partner organization to be appointed by the corresponding government. In collaboration with the NPOs/PIUs, the WISE Facility will issue a regional call for proposals. The AC will select the project proposals through a public, transparent, and cost-effective process based on the recommendations of an international peer review panel appointed for the specific call for proposals and following standard international best practices for the selection of scientific research projects, in line with the general and program-specific funding objectives.

The operational manual for the research funds and the guidelines for the operation of each program will detail its functions. Procedures will be established based on, among others, the experience of the European Research Council and regional experiences such as the SEE-ERA.NET PLUS. A balanced approach between curiosity-driven and mission-driven research, integration into broader research projects, and provision of cofinancing, including with or from the business sector, and world-class research excellence are envisioned as key components of those documents.

SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Western Balkans scientists are present in leading research institutions



EXPECTED OUTPUTS

- ▶ 80 projects promoting international collaboration and research funded
- ▶ 50 young researchers grant projects funded
- ▶ Training grants for 200 PhDs in science from leading universities

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Contribution to improving the research base and conditions for research excellence (Strategic Objective 1)

- ▶ Slowed brain drain and supported brain gain and investing in human capital
- ▶ Increased number of scientific publication, copublication with international partners, and publications by young researchers in high-impact journals
- ▶ Better integration with ERA as reflected by a larger number of applications and approvals for Horizon 2020 and related programs
- ▶ Increased share of young researchers participating in research teams
- ▶ Increased inflow of young researchers (“returnees”)
- ▶ Increased number of PhDs in science

ESTIMATED COST

- ▶ International Collaboration in Research Program — € 40 million
- ▶ Young Researchers Grant Program — € 3 million
- ▶ Training Grants Program — € 12 million

Total Cost — € 55 million



THE WORLD BANK



Regional Cooperation Council