

**SIXTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME- SPECIFIC SUPPORT
ACTION**



Contract no.: 515923

Title: Development of researchers' mobility policy guidelines for the region of Western Balkans

Final Activity Report

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Project Execution

1. Project Objectives

WEB-MOB project was funded by the European Commission 6th Framework Programme (Specific Support Action) and its duration was 26 months. The main objective of WEB-MOB was the ***development of mobility policy guidelines*** for the region of Western Balkans aiming to enhance the mobility policy of the countries participating in the consortium in terms of preventing the brain-drain of the researchers, attracting researchers back in the countries of origin and, generally, contribute to the strategic planning for the exploitation of human resources. The consortium was comprised of 7 contractors from 5 different Western Balkan countries and one Member State; all of them worked towards the achievement of the same objectives, even though the responsibilities of each contractor differed. All above acted in line with all complementary rules of INCO: integration and strengthening of ERA, support of international mobility of researchers in relevance to INCO countries. In more details, WEB-MOB's main objective was to attract to Western Balkan region, researchers from other regions (inter-regional mobility) and/or from other countries (intra-regional mobility), while promoting the intersectorial mobility (mobility between industry and academia) and intra – national mobility in the Western Balkan partner countries. Furthermore, the project aimed to identify the existing mobility obstacles concerning the incoming mobility in every country, which very often were beyond the competences and will of the authorities in charge of research.

The main output of the project was the preparation of a series of guidelines related to researchers' mobility policy in the region of Western Balkans that could be useful to national governments for the formulation of common policy in terms of enhancing researchers' mobility policy and eliminate existing mobility barriers in the region. Additionally, the use of a plethora of dissemination tools (the WEB-MOB portal, organisation and participation in workshops, participation in international conferences, local and regional events, production and dissemination of informative material etc.) highlighted the attractiveness of Western Balkan region for mobile researchers and achieved maximum visibility for the results of the WEB-MOB project.

Accordingly, the main results achieved throughout the first implementation year (1/9/2005-31/8/2006) are summarized below:

- Implementation of a mapping exercise identifying the existing legislation related to mobility obstacles in the Western Balkan countries (WP2).
- Completion of three mapping exercises identifying research and academic organizations capable of attracting researchers; focal points within ministries; governmental organizations, local authorities, professional associations and chambers capable of offering information or assistance in matters of overcoming mobility obstacles based on the injunctions of national legislations (i.e. visa requirements, work permits, social security, pension rights, etc.). Additionally, part of the mapping exercise concerned the identification of web addresses providing relative information to IPR issues, job opportunities, salaries, taxation schemes, national legislation in relation to mobility (visa requirements, work permits, social security, pension rights etc.) (WP3). All information collected was integrated in a database.
- Development of the first prototype of the WEB-MOB portal (<http://webmob.masfak.ni.ac.yu>) (WP7)

- Establishment of two National Expert Groups (the Albanian and the Croatian ones) (WP1)
- Organisation of the following events:
 - Kick off meeting in Saranda (16/9/2005, Albania).
 - Organisation of the second Steering Group meeting (5/5/2006, Serbia) (WP1)
 - Organisation of a local workshop (2/3/2006, Zagreb) by the Croatian partner (FSB-UZ) with the main goal of introducing the WEB-MOB objectives, the experiences of the mobile postgraduate students, professors and industry representatives to the public (WP5).

During the second project implementation year, the major achievements are briefly described as follows:

- Formation of National Expert Groups (NEG) of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia (WP1). Organisation of two Steering Committee meetings in Hvar Island (29/9/2006-Croatia) and in Sarajevo (20/4/2007-Bosnia and Herzegovina) (WP1).
- Continuous update of the database with the results of the mapping exercise (e-directories) which was created during the first period of the project. The database contains lists with: a) research and academic institutes, b) web links of portals containing useful information for mobility issues and c) the identification of focal points within ministries, government organizations, and local authorities (WP 3).
- Organisation of multiple workshops in different countries for the promotion of the project and feedback. Multiple local events were organised in most of the WB countries as well as presentations of the project in international level. (WP5).
- Development of mobility guidelines. Partners from Western Balkan countries collected all necessary information related to researchers' mobility issues and the coordinator produced a comprehensive report which contained policy guidelines for reducing and eliminating mobility obstacles. The report is meant to be used as a consultation tool for policy makers of the region. (WP6).
- The constant update of the WEB-MOB portal which, also, changed its URL from <http://webmob.masfak.ni.ac.yu> to <http://www.WEB-MOB.eu> in order to give a more European perspective to the project. Despite the completion of the project, the consortium decided to expand the ownership of the domain name for two more years (WP7).

2. Contractors involved

Partic. Role	Partic. No.	Participant name	Participant short name	Country	Date enter project	Date exit project
CO	1	Centre for Research and Technology Hellas	CERTH	Greece	Month 1	Month 26
CR	2	University of Nis, Mechanical Engineering Faculty	MEF	Serbia & Montenegro	Month 1	Month 26
CR	3	Regional Environmental Center and Eastern Europe Country Office and Serbia and Montenegro	REC CO S&M	Serbia & Montenegro	Month 1	Month 26
CR	4	Geographic Studies Centre	GSC	Albania	Month 1	Month 12
CR	5	Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Information and Materials, Research Center for Energy	ICEIM-MANU	FYROM	Month 1	Month 26
CR	6	Hydro-Engineering Institute Sarajevo	HEIS	Bosnia & Herzegovina	Month 1	Month 26
CR	7	Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture, University of Zagreb	FSB-UZ	Croatia	Month 1	Month 26

The coordinator of the project is the Centre for Research and Technology-Hellas and, as such, it managed and assured the smooth implementation of the project and the timely delivery of quality results. All partners contributed actively, not only to the establishment and implementation of the consortium's management structure procedures, but to fulfilling all contractual obligations towards the achievement of stated goals.

However, few months before the end of the project, the consortium faced a challenge when the Albanian partner (GSC) informed the coordinator that due to institutional reformations initiated by the newly elected Albanian government, GSC had to shut down its operations and is no longer able to participate in the project.

The consortium reacted promptly and CERTH, as coordinator, initiated the procedure to ask for an amendment of the contract by terminating GSC's participation to the project and transferring the obligations to CERTH. The beginning of the negotiations with the EC started at the end of August. While CERTH was preparing the required documents, it was asked from all partners to officially agree with the amendment procedure by sending letters signed by their legal representatives. All partners agreed with the amendments and CERTH has at its disposal the requested letters.

Meanwhile, CERTH requested from GSC to send an official letter explaining the situation. After numerous communications with Dr. Berxholi from GSC, the Albanian Academy of Science (Prof. Sulstarova) and the Albanian Ministry of Education and Science (Dr. Gjinko), the consortium finally received the aforementioned letter.

The official documents requesting the amendment were sent to the EC.

3. Work performed

Throughout the lifetime of the project, all partners worked towards fulfilling the contractual obligations, achieving quality results and ensuring maximum visibility for the project in national, regional and European level. The WEB-MOB project was organised in 7 Work Packages (hereafter WP). The first WP covered all management activities and the next six the supporting ones.

For the project management needs (WP1), three bodies were established: the Steering Committee, the Secretariat and advisory bodies (National Expert Groups). During the duration of the project, 4 Steering Committee meetings were carried out aiming at establishing the management procedural structures and discussing various issues related to the project implementation. The Secretariat, part of the coordinator's team, ensured the day-to-day management and control. Regarding the establishment of National Expert Groups, 4 groups were established in the end (5 groups were initially planned). In the first implementation year, the Croatian and the Albanian National Expert Groups were established, while in the second year the Serbian and the one for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The names of the members of the National Expert Groups could be found at the WEB-MOB portal.

During the first year, the activities connected to WP2 and WP3 were concluded. A mapping exercise of the existing legislation related to mobility obstacles in the countries of the Western Balkan region was completed (WP2). These mapping exercises on legislation review for mobility obstacles led up to the development of 5 national legislation reviews, each for every WB country participating at the consortium. All legislation reviews can be found at the WEB-MOB portal. Regarding WP3, all partners conducted three mapping exercises for identifying research and academic organisations capable of attracting researchers; identifying web-links of portals containing information related to mobility issues (i.e. entry conditions, visa requirements, work permits etc.); and, finally, specifying focal points with ministries, governmental organisations, local authorities, professional associations and chambers capable of offering information or assistance in terms of overcoming mobility obstacles. All collected data were integrated in a database which is available at the portal.

Furthermore, regarding the progress of WP4 activities (Preparation of Informative Material), all deliverables were prepared earlier than planned (all of them were due to 14th month). More specifically, one thousand multilingual leaflets were prepared in order to inform the target groups briefly about the purposes of the project, while all questionnaires were properly developed and disseminated to stakeholders. Furthermore, the power-point presentations were prepared and used in the workshops uploaded to the portal, as well.

Regarding WP5 (Awareness campaign) activities, one workshop was organised by FSB-UZ on 2 March 2006 in Carlovac, Zagreb. The main goal of the workshop was to introduce the WEB-MOB targets, the experiences of the mobile postgraduate students, professors and industry representatives to the public. There were 7 speakers and, approximately, 70 participants from different sectors (industry, higher education, research institutions, local government representatives and the general public).

Finally, regarding WP7 (WEB-MOB portal), all participants contributed to the design of the portal's structure and to the collection of the information uploaded. From the first year, the portal was in operating state and ready for internal testing.

During the second period of the project, the consortium's main objective was to produce the Guidelines for reducing and eliminating mobility obstacles (WP6). However, the consortium's efforts were not limited to WP6, but to WP3, WP4, WP5, WP6 and WP7.

Most of work regarding WP3 was finished by the end of the first period. Nevertheless, partners continued to work on WP3 mostly by updating the data that have already collected. Specifically, partners worked on the:

1. Identification of additional national institutions
2. Collection/updating of data for the identified institutions
3. Updating of the national institutions database
4. Collection/updating of the other relevant information on S&T sector in each country
5. Formation of the collected data by all WBC partners according to MEF's specifications.

MEF (partner 2) was responsible for the incorporation of the above data to the portal. Furthermore, MEF:

1. Designed specifications for the data collection in order to be uploaded on the portal in a unified and user friendly way.
2. Redundancies in RD database for Serbia and Montenegro has been fixed in collaboration with REC.
3. As agreed in the Sarajevo SG meeting, MEF team took the responsibility to test, indicatively, the usability of Croatia's mobility guide. The test has been performed in MEF's computer classroom with a group of Serbian students from the University of Nis. Since no negative comments or remarks have been issued, it was concluded that Croatia's web mobility guide is fully usable.

The database contains more than 600 organizations (Universities, Research Organizations, Academies of Sciences and Companies with research departments). Each record contains the name, contact data, description, main departments, international experience and other useful information related to the organization. The organizations are searchable by country, by category, by keywords and/or by organizations name. Finally, continuous research is carried out in the web in order to identify information material for the "Latest news" column.

As previously mentioned, during the first period, and for the purposes of an enhanced awareness campaign, the consortium prepared one thousand leaflets (WP4). All leaflets were distributed by the end of 2006. Therefore, the consortium published one thousand more with some slight updates. The address of the WEB-MOB portal was changed to the new one (www.WEB-MOB.eu) and the image of the Homepage portal was also changed, showing the updated version of the portal. Additionally, and having in mind that the internet penetration in the Western Balkan countries is poor, the consortium decided to prepare a CD-ROM where all the information of the portal would included in it without the need for an internet connection. The CD-ROM includes all deliverables of the project, the PowerPoint presentations from various events and all the "News and Announcements" that were posted on the portal from the beginning of its operation.

Regarding WP5 activities, all partners of the consortium got involved in the promotion of the project and its goals. Partners of Western Balkans countries organised or participated in a series of events in their countries where they presented

the project, handed out leaflets and answered questions about it. CERTH, according to the contractual obligations proceeded in three international conference announcements in Paris, in Sofia and in Thessaloniki presenting the WEB-MOB project. These presentations had such a great impact in the audience that CERTH was invited by the Austrian Ministry of Science and Education (BMWF) and by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK) to present the WEB-MOB project.

During the second implementation period, the most important deliverable of the project was developed: the “Synthesis report and Policy guidelines for reducing and eliminating obstacles to the mobility of researchers” (D 6.3). The Synthesis report includes all data regarding the existing mobility policy in European Union and in the Western Balkan region and, also, provides policy recommendations for reducing and eliminating mobility obstacles. This report could be used as a consultation tool for the national governments so as to enhance mobility policy.

Indicatively, some of the recommendations are presented below:

1. To the European Commission:

- 1.1. Help enforce the scientific visa Directive 2005/71/EC in all EU member States that have not yet implemented it.
- 1.2. Include the Western Balkan Countries in all the European Commission's activities related to European scientific diaspora.
- 1.3. Extend the Twinning Programme to Research institutions and Ministries of Science and Education in WBCs.
- 1.4. Extend ERA-MORE network to the other WBC (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro).

2. To the WBC and EU:

- 2.1. Include the priority of facilitation of mobility of researchers in the Stabilisation and Association Agreements with WBCs.
- 2.2. The WEB-MOB policy guidelines could be integrated into the discussions of the Steering Platform on Research with the Western Balkan Countries and the planning of the future SEE-ERA.NET activities related to mobility as well as in other support actions targeting the region.
- 2.3. The results of the WEB-MOB could feed into the planning and programming of CEEPUS III. The countries of the region are invited to make full use of the present CEEPUS programme and related CEEPUS activities (e.g. CEEPUS TV)
- 2.4. Start negotiations between EU and Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, FYRoM and Serbia on a selective visa liberalisation regime for academics from WBCs (researchers, university professors and students), the elements of which should include:
 - (a) A stronger presumption that the visa will be issued;
 - (b) A simplified application process with fewer required supporting documents;
 - (c) No visa fee;
 - (d) No interview; and
 - (e) Significantly reduced processing time.

- 2.5. The European Social Security Card could be extended to WBCs.

3. To all WB countries (policy makers)

- 3.1. Facilitate mobility of Western Balkan researchers at the border.
- 3.2. Facilitate long term mobility of EU researchers in WBCs by simplifying attached documents for a long term scientific visa.

- 3.3. Until the time that hosting agreements are enough following the model of Directive 2005/71/EC, the invitation letter of host research institution, which is necessary in order to issue the visa or the residence permit, should not be notarized by two authorities (as it is done at least in FYRoM and Bosnia-Herzegovina). The only requirement necessary should be the validation of the invitation letter with an official stamp and the signature of an authorised representative of the research institution (as it is practised in Croatia)
- 3.4. The language barrier has to be lifted.
- 3.5. Discretion of authorities to refuse residence permits for other grounds e.g. that there are unemployed nationals with the same qualifications must be abolished.
- 3.6. Validation of children's previous education in another country should be simplified. If it is for a researcher's family reunion through the conclusion of EU and WBCs

Finally, regarding WP7 activities, special attention was given by the consortium to maintain a well organised and always *up-to-date portal* which would include all activities and efforts of the consortium regarding the project. The WEB-MOB portal was initially hosted in MEF (partner 2) and its URL was "<http://webmob.masfak.ni.ac.yu>". However, it was decided that the project should have its unique URL address and www.WEB-MOB.eu was chosen. The extension .eu was intentionally selected to give a European perspective to the project. The domain name was registered until the end of the project; nevertheless the consortium, having in mind the impact of the project to various stakeholders, renewed the subscription of the domain name for two more years. For the next two years of its operation, the portal is planned to host mobility news concerning the WB countries.

During the second period of the project, the following activities regarding the portal took place:

1. MEF team has implemented country-specific portals, enabling customized view to all information presented at WEB-MOB portal, generated on basis of chosen country. Its successful implementation enabled context-based filtering of website content and use of country sub-domain portals, for ex. croatia.webmob.eu. Sub-domains have not been implemented.
2. For the purpose of measuring the visibility of WEB-MOB portal, advanced tools have been implemented. Google analytics advanced stats has been integrated with the portal, offering opportunities for advanced visitor tracking and analysis. It tracks all visits and generates comprehensive and valuable reports, including GeoIP related information. Also, software for aggregated stats analysis has been developed and implemented by MEF. A snippet which generates excel stats format identical to format generated by google analytics has been developed. Purpose of this task was to enable aggregate historical view on website visitor stats, including a period before analytics installation.
3. Links to all ERA-MORE portals are added in a form of drop down list displayed at lower left corner of homepage.
4. WEB-MOB Leaflet is published on portal, easily accessible from homepage.
5. A new graphical template for WEB-MOB portal is designed. This was a prerequisite for implementation of country-specific portals. It included all

tasks relevant to automatic identification of site template elements affected by country-specific contextualization task and their customization.

5. Impact

It is believed that the results of the WEB-MOB project will strongly impact mobility policy in the Western Balkans region, while, additionally, the results could promote and enhance the process of ERA integration of those countries and improve the relations with EU in the field of research. WEB-MOB, not only contributed to INCO's General Measures, but, also, to the Lisbon's mandate related to the Mobility Strategy for the European Research Area and the priorities of the Action plan for S&T Cooperation between EU and Balkan Countries of 2003.

First of all, the main deliverable of the project, the 'Synthesis Report and the Policy Guidelines for reducing and eliminating obstacles to the mobility of researchers', is meant to be used by national governments and policy makers in order to forward ERA goals and strategies. The main results of the report showed that even though major steps have been done, many issues still need to be prioritised in the policy agendas and integrated in national legislations. Specific recommendations for each country have been developed and are available for consultation by national governments and European stakeholders.

Furthermore, the project and its results have been presented in local, national and international workshops, symposiums and conferences achieving maximum visibility. The plethora of announcements in different events made the project widely known and resulted in the coordinator's invitation to events organised by the Austrian Ministry of Science and Education (BMWF) and by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK) for presenting the project. The coordinator always found opportunities to promote the project in events focusing on mobility issues.

It is worth to mention that WEB-MOB portal played a big role for achieving the maximum visibility for all project's activities. The structure of the portal and the information provided distinguished it as a valuable tool for the realisation of the planned activities and contributed to WEB-MOB's impact. During the two-year duration of the project, the portal was visited by approximately 6000 people. All deliverables and, other, general information are available on line. Since the portal has received many positive comments, the consortium has decided to extend the subscription of the domain name for two more years. For the next two years of its operations, the portal is planned to host mobility news concerning the WB countries, as well. Also, the e-directories developed for the purposes of the WEB-MOB project are considered to be used by the Serbian, Croatian and FYROM's national mobility portals and in the future by the Albanian, Montenegro's and Bosnia's portals..

Additionally, the project helped the partners to establish close cooperation links with each other and with persons in key positions for promoting mobility policies. It is noteworthy that two of the project's participants have been nominated as Bridgehead Organisations in their national ERA-MORE Networks (Serbian and Croatian national ERA-MORE Networks) and the Mobility Guides drafted for the project will be used as the basis for the development of the national Mobility Guides.

Finally, it is argued that the project's results could be used for the benefit of the local, national, regional and European research community.