

Declaration on Research and Innovation Infrastructure Access and Collaboration

Preamble

We, the Ministers and high-level representatives responsible for research and innovation are united by our vision for scientific progress, innovation, and regional prosperity.

Recognising the vital role that scientific research and innovation play in shaping the development of the Western Balkan six;

Committing to foster collaboration, knowledge exchange, and the strategic utilisation of research and innovation infrastructures;

Aiming to promote mobility among researchers, innovators, and students, enhance the utilisation of existing research facilities, and strengthen ties between academia and the business community;

Seeking to facilitate access to research and innovation infrastructures across the region, thereby advancing scientific discovery, innovation, and social and economic growth;

Recalling the Chair's conclusions from the Berlin Process Summit held in Tirana in October 2023 regarding the regional transnational cooperation and mobility in higher education, research, and innovation;

By endorsing this Declaration, we embark on a collective journey towards a future that broadly enables research and innovation, where breakthroughs are in service of common benefits, and where collaboration fuels our region's growth.

We have agreed to:

1. **Facilitate Research and Innovation Cooperation** by actively fostering collaboration across the region.
 - 1.1. Encourage researchers, innovators, and students to move freely across the region to access research and innovation facilities, collaborate, and share expertise.
 - 1.2. Embolden joint research and innovation initiatives as well as knowledge sharing to help create a vibrant regional innovation ecosystem.
2. **Utilise Existing Research and Innovation Facilities** by ensuring that they serve as dynamic hubs for cutting-edge exploration and discovery.
3. **Empower the Next Generations** by promoting mobility among researchers, innovators, and students to create a vibrant ecosystem where fresh ideas flourish and expertise thrives.
4. **Cultivate Deeper Synergy between academia and the business community** by facilitating partnerships between research institutions, innovation enablers, and the business community to drive transformation and address real-world challenges.

Principles: Strengthen Regional Cooperation Links

Open Access: Research and innovation infrastructures within the region shall be open to researchers and innovators in line with the regulatory framework of the receiving economy and internal open-access policies of the research and innovation infrastructures.

1. **Collaboration:** Encourage joint research and innovative projects, knowledge sharing, and collaborative initiatives across the region.
2. **Capacity Building:** Invest in training programmes to enhance the skills of researchers, innovators, innovation enablers, technicians, and students in utilising research and innovation facilities effectively.
3. **Transparency:** Ensure transparent processes for accessing research and innovation infrastructures, including clear guidelines, application procedures, and evaluation criteria.
4. **Open Access Outputs Sharing:** Promote and encourage sharing of research outputs obtained through this collaboration, according to the FAIR principles and access policies of the involved participating institutions.

Implementation and Sustainability

1. **Regional Coordination:** Establish a Research Infrastructure Coordination Committee (RICC) consisting of representatives nominated by the respective line ministries responsible for research and innovation. RICC will:
 - Facilitate information exchange,
 - Monitor progress,
 - Address challenges related to infrastructure access.
2. **Promotion and Awareness:** Conduct awareness campaigns to inform researchers, innovators, students, and industry stakeholders about available research & innovation facilities and collaboration opportunities.
3. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Encourage private sector involvement through joint activities and knowledge transfer.

We commit to continuing to enhance our political and technical collaboration in this area as well as invite the RCC to coordinate – in close cooperation with regional sectoral organisations – the implementation of this Declaration, within the framework of the Common Regional Market Action Plan.