



Enhancing Scientific Cooperation between the
European Union and Central America

Fortaleciendo la cooperación científica entre la
Unión Europea y América Central



ENLACE Travel Grant Scheme

Report on the first call



ENLACE (Enhancing Scientific Cooperation between the European Union and Central America) is a project co-funded by the European Commission in its 7th Framework Programme under the Grant Agreement no 244468 running from 1st Nov. 2009 to 30th Oct. 2013.



1. General information on the first Call

The aim of the travel grant scheme is to promote exchange between Central American and European researchers as well as to encourage contacts between research institutions so that they may explore possibilities for joint participation in the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7).

The travel grant consists of two components:

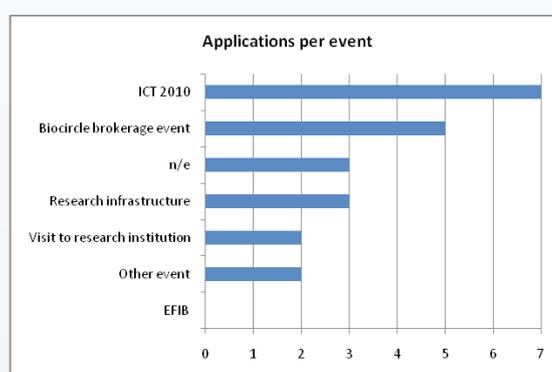
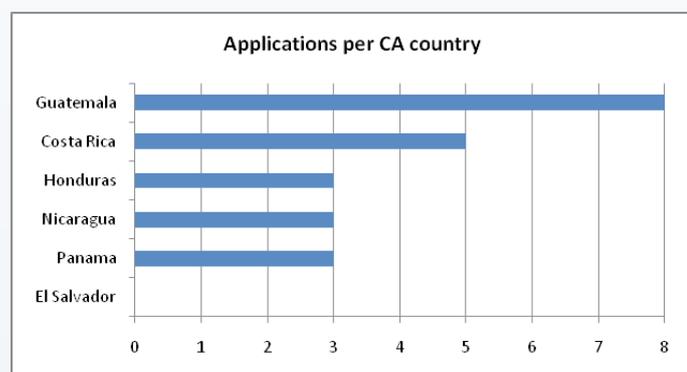
1. The participation of Central American researchers on specialized international conferences or brokerage events taking place in Europe.
2. Visits to specific research centers / institutions with existing contacts or acquaintance between the grantee and an European or Central American researcher or research group.

The first call of the grant scheme was a pilot action focusing on selected international conferences and FP7 brokerage events:

1. ICT 2010: Digitally Driven in Brussels (September 27-29)
2. Information Day and Brokerage Event on Food, Agriculture and Fisheries and Biotechnology in Brussels (September 13)
3. International Conference on Research Infrastructure in Rome (September 30)
4. EUROPABIO's: 3rd annual European Forum for Industrial Biotechnology (EFIB) in Edinburgh (October 19-21)

The call was launched from 25th of April to 10th of June 2010. Eight grants á € 3.000 were available.

22 researchers from Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama applied for a grant.



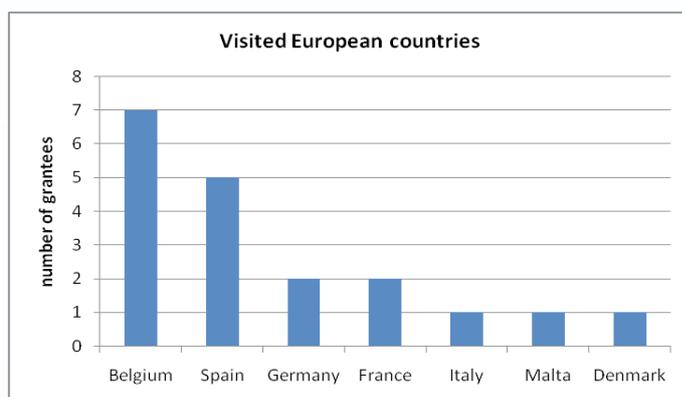
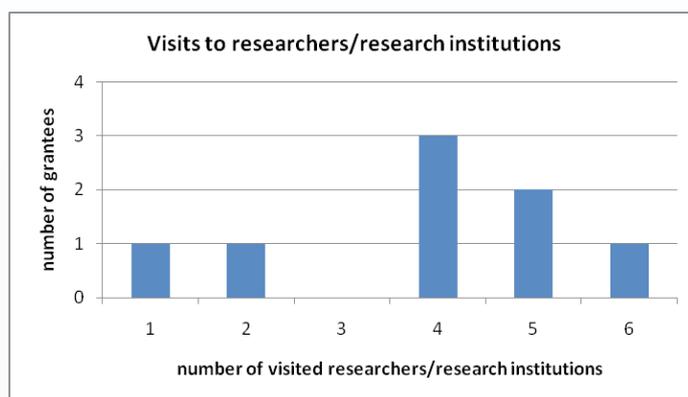
The LAI carried out the formality and eligibility check of all applications. 17 candidates passed this first step of the selection process. The evaluation of the 17 remaining applications was realized by three partners of the ENLACE consortium: CSUCA, CERCAL and APRE. The members of the Project Steering Committee (PSC) finally selected eight grantees.

Funded grants						
	Grants per country	Female	Male	ICT 2010	Information Day and Brokerage Event on Food, Agriculture and Fisheries and Biotechnology	International Conference on Research Infrastructures
Costa Rica	3	3	0	2	1	0
Guatemala	3	1	2	2	1	0
Nicaragua	1	0	1	1	0	0
Panama	1	1	0	0	0	1
Total	8	5	3	5	2	1

If required by the grantees LAI provided support for the preparation of the travel agenda by writing recommendation letters. APRE gave support to the grantee Dr. Batista from Panama for the organization of bilateral meetings in Italy. CERCAL on the one hand assured logistic support for grantees of the ICT 2010 event in Brussels giving them practical information as accommodation, transport, etc. On the other hand, CERCAL also helped the grantees to find European partners, if required. TETALAP also provided assistance to the ENLACE grantees participating in the Information Day and Brokerage Event on Food, Agriculture and Fisheries and Biotechnology in Brussels.

In general, the ENLACE grantees were very busy during their stays in Europe realizing visits to researchers and / or research institutions. Only one grantee visited one research institution. Another grantee even visited six different European research

chers / research institutions.



Besides Belgium, where seven grantees either participated in the ICT 2010 or in the Information Day and Brokerage Event on Food, Agriculture and Fisheries and Biotechnology, most grantees also went to Spain to visit potential partners there.

Within the framework of the first call of the grant scheme, cooperations with the EC and other EC funded projects facilitated to boost the benefits for the grantees and to achieve the aim of the grant scheme. Five ENLACE grantees took part in the ICT 2010: Digitally Driven in Brussels (September 27-29) organized by the European Commission and also got the possibility to join the EU-Latin America ICT R&D cooperation workshop organized by the FP7 project EULARINET (in cooperation with several other projects). Moreover, the FP7 project BIO CIRCLE financed the participation of two additional Central American researchers, who applied for an ENLACE grant, at the Information Day and Brokerage Event on Food, Agriculture and Fisheries and Biotechnology in Brussels (September 13). Furthermore, the Central American partners of the ENLACE consortium serve as multipliers for the promotion of FP7 events and activities in their institutions and countries. For example, two researchers of the University of Costa Rica also took part in the Information Day and Brokerage Event on Food, Agriculture and Fisheries and Biotechnology in Brussels.

2. Results of the evaluation by the grantees

The participants of the first call of the ENLACE travel grant scheme were asked to fill in a questionnaire to evaluate the grant scheme.

In general, the evaluation of the first call shows a positive picture regarding its objectives (promotion of exchange between Central American and European researchers as well as enhancement of contacts between research institutions). For the grantees, their journeys to Europe (including the participation in an international conference / brokerage event as well as visits to European researchers / research centres) brought benefits for their personal and institutional work due to the different contacts established, the intended or already implemented cooperations and also the increase of their knowledge about the 7th Framework Programme.

Dissemination of the grant scheme

The grantees learned about the grant scheme from different sources. Three grantees got to know the grant scheme through their own universities which are partners within the ENLACE consortium. Other sources of information were: the Ministry of CyT or the ONCYT respectively, the advise of the organizers of the brokerage event, a cooperation partner in Europe, the Project-Angels Course within the framework of the Pro-Ideal Plus Project and the internet.

The information regarding the grant scheme on the ENLACE website as well as the rules and regulations for the participation in the grant scheme were clear and comprehensible for all grantees.

Selection process

For most of the grantees the selection criteria were justifiable, the selection process was clear and transparent and they were sufficiently informed about the results of the selection.

Organization / Administration

In general, the organization of the travel grant scheme as well as the organization of the participation in the respective events were evaluated positively.

Moreover, the communication with the ENLACE team and the support provided for the elaboration of the travel agenda were well validated. Only one grantee mentioned that the support was discrete and it was not possible to contact the organization

intended to visit.

The amount of the grant (3000 €) was sufficient and adequate for the realization of the objective. Five grantees spent more than the awarded amount. Two grantees had to reimburse around 900 €. The amount spent depended on the length of the journey and the number of trips within Europe. Three grantees mentioned critically that the loss of money due to currency conversion was not within the eligible costs.

Short-term benefits

All grantees declared their journeys as personal benefit because of different reasons:

1. It was possible to get to know different fields of application of technology and to get information on the technological development in Europe.
2. It was possible to learn about the FP7 (financing, preparing a application and being part of a consortium, ongoing initiatives between Latin America and Europe, etc.)
3. It was possible to get to know other sources of financing.
4. It was possible to get new perspectives and opportunities for the own professional career.
5. The established contacts help to constitute project consortia as well as facilitate exchange in order to encourage scientific cooperation.
6. It was possible to get partners in a consortium which will present a proposal in January 2011.

Besides personal benefits, nearly all grantees stated that their journey to Europe also brings benefits for their institutions:

1. It was possible to find out about possibilities for funding projects.
2. It was possible to find partners for other members of the institution, not only for the grantee.
3. It was possible to find partners to build a consortium and apply within an FP7 call.
4. There now exist contacts to European research institutions which are willing to receive students of the Central American institution for traineeships.
5. European researchers are willing to come to the Central American institution doing joint research and teaching courses.
6. It was possible to present the own institution to the European scientific community which also allows to attract new reserach projects and facilitate exchange of researchers. As a consequence, new joint academic programmes or scholarships / exchange of students may be developed.

All grantees were able to establish contacts with institutions / researchers during the conference / brokerage event. As nearly all grantees had a clear travel agenda with planned visits to research institutions, all of them were also able to establish or strengthen contacts with institutions / researchers outside the conference. In general, the grantees got in contact with research institutions which they wanted to visit already before travelling to Europe. Four grantees also stated that some contacts arose during their stay in Europe.

Regarding the contacts established during the journey, only one grantee mentioned that the participation in the conference was of more benefit than the contacts outside the conference. Three grantees stated that both the participation in the conference and the contacts outside the conference were of great benefit for them. The participation in the conference allowed a better understanding of the FP7, gave a wider perspective on strategies or alternatives for further development and a new vision of the state of the art, of the European research and its tendencies as well as recommendations of successful projects. During the visits of research institutions / researchers, it was possible to share concrete ideas for cooperation and joint projects as well as get an idea of the type of investigation the institution is realizing. On a long-term perspective, the contacts outside the conference will be more enduring. Four grantees even indicated that they / their institutions were invited to participate in a consortium. Apparently, the two different components complemented each other.

To improve the support regarding contacts to European research institutions, the grantees made various suggestions:

1. Organization of meetings with similar institutions also including funding institutions to get to know possibilities for funding projects.
2. It would be useful to get to know participants with common research interests before the event so that it would be possible to already discuss more in detail about joint research interests.
3. It would be helpful to know about the priorities of the FP7 calls before applying for a grant. This would ensure that researchers who may have a specific interest in a certain FP7 call apply for a grant.
4. It would be useful to facilitate the contact between the participants in the event and the ENLACE grantees (e.g. by announcing that there are grantees of certain Central American institutions participating in the event).
5. It would have been interesting to get introduced to the Latin American participants of the conference before.

6. To get in contact with the appropriate research institutions, it is important to define own institutional research priorities, as the areas of investigation of each research group are very specific. The ENLACE team should give recommendations so that the grantees may get in contact with European researchers / research institutions before their visit to Europe.
7. It would be useful to have more information on the FP7 and the NCPs of each country.
8. Organization of a closing meeting for the grantees for the exchange of experiences.

The established contacts / cooperations may bring certain benefits for the grantees' institutions in the future:

1. With the support of European institutions it will be possible to elaborate projects which directly penetrate into fundamental needs for the development of the local society. As local experiences also may be valuable for European initiatives, the established contacts also may be a medium of transfer for these experiences.
2. The idea is to establish exchange of students and professors and joint supervision of Master thesis to better get to know each other's working style and to look for joint research themes.
3. There now exists the opportunity to participate in international projects within specific calls of the EU or calls of other funding institutions.
4. Strengthening of certain areas of investigation, improvement of the professional career (new PhDs and training of already existing), strengthening of the working group to present national projects, strengthening of the curricula due to visits of European experts.
5. Participation in the Project Angels programme of the Pro-Ideal Plus project (Project Angels are persons specifically trained in the understanding of the ICT programme and EU funding mechanisms)
6. Joint cooperation projects, academic visits, joint programmes
7. Latin American contacts to work together to consolidate partnerships
8. Realization of projects, publications

Further general remarks

As there exist various institutional benefits and there are also good professional degree programmes, one grantee stated that it is important to raise the awareness of the decision-makers within the Central American universities so that researchers may have more freedom to travel and develop their professional career.

The call for the grant scheme was launched before the publication of the FP7 calls. Therefore, it was difficult to know if the priorities of the FP7 calls would include topics of interest both for the grantees and for the possible collaborators.

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