



**ENLACE – Enhancing Scientific Cooperation between the  
European Union and Central America**

[www.enlace-project.eu](http://www.enlace-project.eu)

**Travel Grant Scheme  
Report on the second call**

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## 1. General information on the first Call

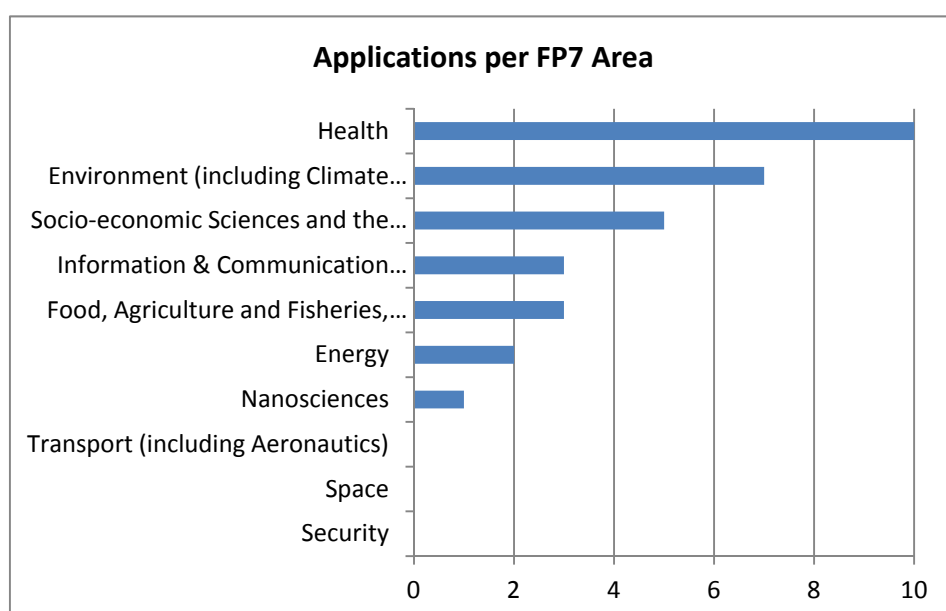
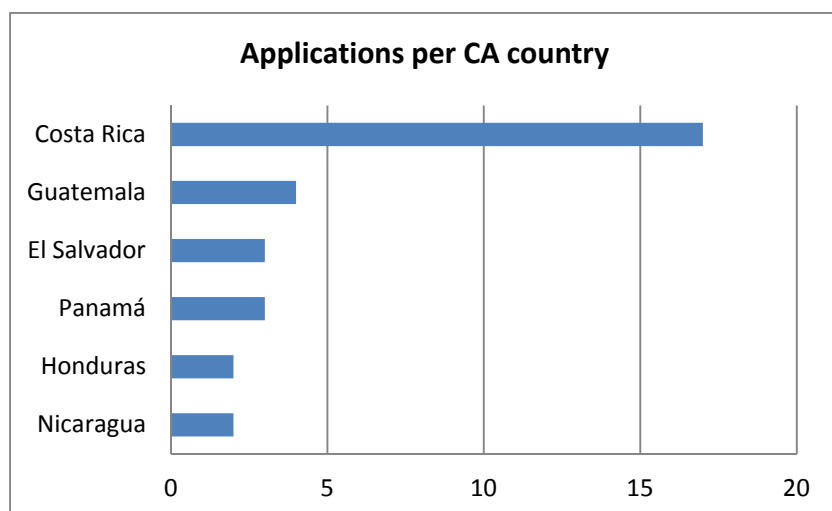
The aim of the travel grant scheme is to promote exchange between Central American and European researchers as well as to encourage contacts between research institutions so that they may explore possibilities for joint participation in the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme for Research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

The second call of the travel grant consisted of the following two components:

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

The second call of the grant scheme was open to applications for international conferences taking place in Europe in all FP7 thematic priorities. It was launched from the 21st of March to the 1st of May 2011. 14 grants á € 3.000 were available.

31 researchers from Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama applied for a grant for conferences in different FP7 areas.



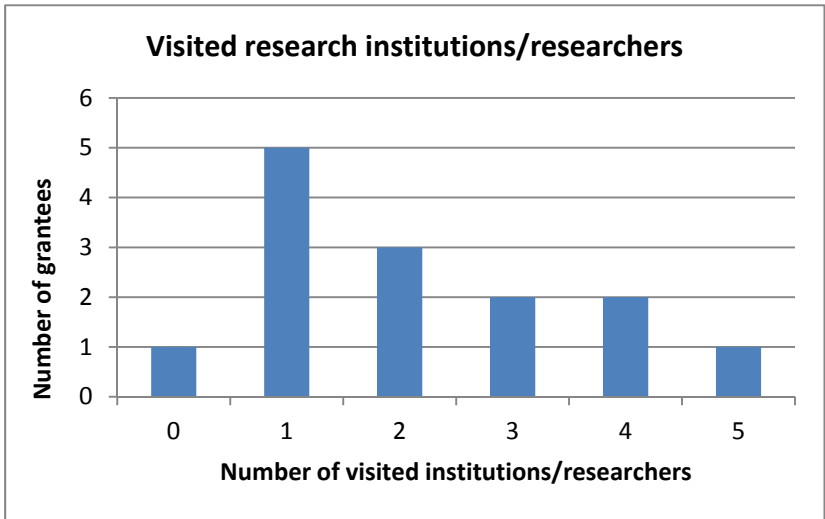
The Austrian Latin America Institute (LAI) as responsible partner for the travel grant scheme carried out the formality and eligibility check of all applications. 26 candidates passed this first step of the selection process. The evaluation of the 26 remaining applications was realized by two partners of the ENLACE consortium: CSUCA (Central American University Superior Council) and APRE (Agenzia per la Promozione della Ricerca Europa). The members of the Project Steering Committee (PSC) finally selected 14 grantees.

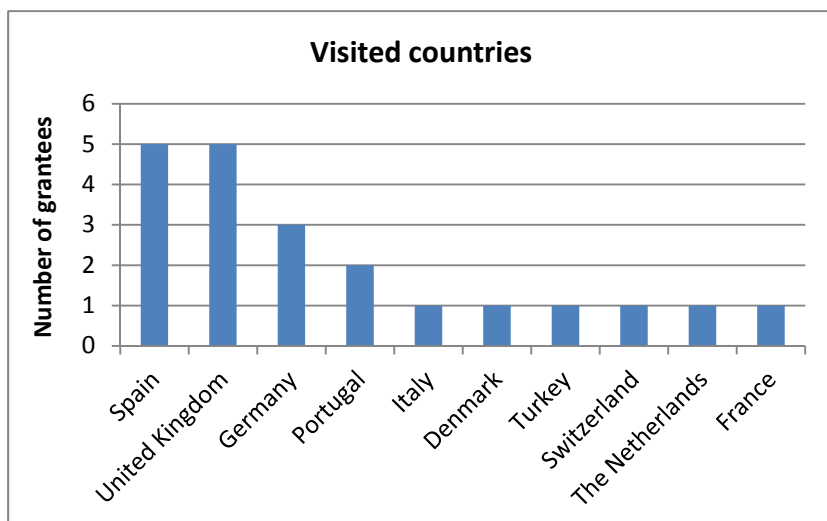
Funded grants per country			
	Female	Male	Total
Costa Rica	4	5	9
El Salvador	0	1	1
Guatemala	1	1	2
Honduras	1	0	1
Nicaragua	0	1	1
Total	6	8	14

Funded grants per FP7 area	
Environment	4
Health	5
Nanosciences	1
KBBE	2
ICT	1
SSH	1

If required by the grantees LAI provided support for the preparation of the travel agenda, e.g. by writing recommendation letters.

After their stays in Europe, the grantees had to give report on the realized activities and spent costs. In general, the ENLACE grantees were very busy during their stays in Europe realizing visits to researchers and / or research institutions. One grantee did not manage to visit an institution due to problems to find a common date for visiting the foreseen institution. Some grantees only visited one university, but there they met with staff of different institutes of the university. In total, the grantees visited ten different countries (European Union and Associated Countries). Five of them went to Spain and the United Kingdom respectively.





Besides the networking possibilities in the framework of the conferences, the grantees also had the possibility to present themselves, their institutions and their research work through an active participation in the conference. Ten grantees gave a presentation or presented a poster, one also was chairing a session. Additionally, they had the opportunity for (informal) work meetings with current and potential partners. Two researchers may be mentioned particularly: Dr. Pablo Hernández Hernández, researcher at the Philosophy Research Institute of the University of Costa Rica, got the opportunity to publish one of his presentations given at the XXXII Congress of the German Association of Romance Studies celebrated in Berlin. Dr. Jorge Cortés Núñez, researcher at the Center for Research in Marine Biology and Limnology (CIMAR), and Professor at the School of Biology, of the University of Costa Rica (UCR) won the prize for the "Best Digital Object in the Taxonomy" for his presentation of a video, describing the study of marine biodiversity done by CIMAR in Costa Rica at the World Conference on Marine Biodiversity 2011, held in Aberdeen, Scotland.

During their visits to research institutions the grantees not only got an insight view of the European institutions but vividly discussed and worked on joint ongoing research and possible future research projects and collaborations (trainings, exchange, guest lectures, study programs, etc.), worked on joint publications, presented their own research work and institutions through lectures or workshops held at the visited partner institution and some of them also discussed cooperations on a university-level (e.g. for establishing a Memorandum of Understanding).

## 2. Results of the evaluation by the grantees

The participants of the second call of the ENLACE travel grant scheme were asked to fill in a questionnaire to evaluate the grant scheme. Eleven out of the fourteen selected grantees returned the questionnaire.

In general it can be stated, that the travel grant scheme is a good opportunity to promote the exchange between Central American and European researchers as well as to enhance contacts between research institutions from both regions. For the grantees, their journeys to Europe (including the participation in an international conference as well as visits to European research institutions) brought benefits for their personal and institutional work. Opportunities on different levels (education, research, exchange etc.) were opened due to strengthened and / or established contacts, due to intended or already implemented cooperations and also due to the increase of their knowledge about the 7th Framework Programme.

### Dissemination of the grant scheme and Selection process

The selected researchers got to know the grant scheme through different sources, either through the Ministry of CyT or the ONCYT of their countries, through their universities or colleagues at their

university, through European colleagues or they found the information in the internet. All grantees stated, that 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 them.

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 grantees positively evaluated the organization of the travel grant scheme as well as the organization of the participation in the respective conferences. Also the communication with the ENLACE team and the support provided for the elaboration of the travel agenda were well validated, although four grantees stated that they did not need this kind of support.

Seven selected researchers indicated that the amount of the grant (3000 €) was sufficient, for three of them this was not the case. In two cases, it was not possible to visit additional research institutions in further countries due to the financial and time limits. Twice, the amount of the provided per diems was seen as too low, as European countries in general are quite expensive. Eight grantees spent more than the awarded amount. The spent costs depended on the length of their stay in Europe and the number of visited research institutions in different cities/countries. Two grantees criticized the payment of the grant as complicated as well as a delay in the transfer of the second rate.

### **Short-term benefits**

All grantees who filled in the questionnaire declared their stays in Europe as personal benefit because of different reasons, for example:

- It was possible not only to get in contact with researchers and academics of specific thematic areas but also to learn a lot, exchange perspectives and get new ideas for the own work regarding research, specific methods and techniques, education as well as administrative issues.
- An important experience was the mutual learning and exchange between the researchers and that the European partners also can benefit from the ideas of the Central American partners.
- The visit to the research institutions facilitated a better coordination with the European colleagues, joint research activities as well as the initiation of a collaborative project and the participation in an FP7 proposal.
- In one case a future stay at the visited institution for a more extended period is envisaged for the year 2012.

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

- It was possible to present not only the own research work but also the home institution.
- A consequence of the visit to the research institution is that the own research department started a process of a joint project. Seven researchers from the home institution will participate in this project. Additionally, it was possible to strengthen an already existing project of the home university in the area of "Problem Based Learning" through the visit to the European research institution.
- The participation in the grant scheme allowed presenting the country and region with a great potential for the development of research in the area of tropical marine and coastal resources. Moreover it opened doors for future cooperations with the European research institution.
- Through the visit to the European research institution an exchange of students was started which might evolve into a long-term collaboration in this area.
- During the visit to the research institution it was possible to prepare a Memorandum of Understanding between the European and the Central American university.
- The established contacts serve as references for other cooperations as they now know the interests and needs of the Central American institution.

- Now there will be a greater potential to realize collaborative research and elaborate projects.
- The participation in the grant scheme allows to consolidate the international cooperation network of the university and to share the new contacts with the colleagues of the home institution, especially for the young ones for whom the contacts may open educational and research opportunities.
- European researchers known during the journey will be invited to the Central America partner institution in order to study at and work with the grantees' institution.
- During the journey to Europe it was not only possible to get in contact with individual researchers but also with research networks / a network of researchers interested in the same or similar thematic area. The stay in Europe allowed strengthening the formation of the network. The researchers' institutions serve as platforms for joint future activities.

During the conferences all grantees were able to establish contacts with institutions / researchers. As international conferences are a meeting point for researchers from different countries who want to exchange experiences and knowledge and discuss perspectives, it is a good opportunity and adequate place to get in contact with them. Thirteen out of fourteen grantees also visited research institutions. In general they established their travel agenda before coming to Europe.

Regarding the contacts established during the journey, one grantee mentioned that the participation in the conference was of more benefit, for two researchers the contacts outside were of more benefit for them as the established links are more enduring and therefore have more potential to develop joint future project proposals. Eight grantees stated that both – the participation in the conference and the visit to the research institution – were important for them. The participation in the conference on the one hand allows widening the spectrum of people who work on different topics whereas the visits to the research institutions are more specific and personalized. In this regard, the two different components have different functions and therefore complement each other.

Although only three grantees stated that they were invited to be part of a European consortium, all researchers said that they managed to get European partners for their research projects. Ten out of eleven grantees mentioned that the participation in the grant scheme allowed deepening their knowledge on the FP7.

#### **Further remarks**

- One grantee stated that it would have been useful to be able to change the dates of the visit to the research institution in order to maximize the benefits of the stay.
- The time between the information of the selection results and the journey to Europe (to participate in the conference and visit the European research institution) was quite short.
- At the moment of receiving the grant, it would have been useful to get information on European research groups or consortia who work in the scientific field of the grantees.