

## Fostering Cooperation between Academia and Government in the Field of Migration

September  
2012

### *Executive Summary*

The project “**Building training and analytical capacities on migration in Moldova and Georgia**” (GOVAC), funded by the European Union’s Thematic Programme and running from 2011 - 2013, gave new impetus to the discussion on the possibilities and limitations for fostering permanent cooperation between governmental and academic institutions in the area of migration. The experience gained during GOVAC, the good practices developed, as well as lessons learned, are important not only for this particular project or region, but for the development and implementation of migration policies and capacity building within responsible administrations in general. This policy brief addresses important aspects of the cooperation between government and academia, discusses options and areas for such cooperation and provides recommendations for its actual implementation.

### *Background*

GOVAC aims to set up a durable mechanism which ensures self-sufficient and institutionalised training capacities in Moldova and Georgia for the management of migration and asylum. The unique project methodology *inter alia* builds on **cooperation between governmental and academia institutions in both Georgia and Moldova.**

The project is being implemented under the leadership of ICMPD by a consortium of partners which includes migration-related institutions from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Switzerland, and Council of Europe. The project is funded by the EU Thematic Programme, the Danish Refugee Council and the partner states.

### *Current Context*

Governments’ main function is the execution of legislation, and related to that, the development of new strategies, implementation plans and proposals for amendments of existing laws. In case new policies need new legislation, governments need to cooperate with parliaments and seek, at least indirectly, approval from the electorate. Thus, government action in the area of migration **prioritises political and social contexts** and not necessarily the views of migration research. On the other side, universities have been set up to **do research** and to **teach** but also to **prepare students for a useful role in society** as many of them become civil servants serving for the governments of their countries after graduation.

Given their respective roles, fostering cooperation between administration and research is **anything but an easy task.** This is even truer for the heavily debated area of migration, where conflicts between the recognition of research findings and day-to-day policy constraints occur quite frequently. Thus, both sides are called to respect each others` cultures and logics without losing the ability for dialogue and critical reflection. **How could such cooperation function in practice?**

*The GOVAC project follows the priorities of the external dimension of the European Union’s migration policy*

*The need to foster cooperation on migration between government and academia*

One way is to **strengthen the capacity** for analysis and research within the administrations themselves. The GOVAC project focused on this aspect as one of its main objectives, trying to enhance government officials' knowledge and understanding on how migration really works, on the one hand, while increasing the concrete capacity for analysis, monitoring and evaluation on the other. However, administrative capacities will regularly reach their limits when it comes to certain information needs. They will be driven by political priorities, focus on aspects linked to the current public and political debate and find it difficult to find access to important migrant categories, whose members will try to avoid contact with "the authorities" completely or provide information that is believed to be in accordance with government officials' expectations. Independent researchers normally have fewer problems in reaching out to migrants and in gaining access to their real experiences and views. Moreover, independent researchers tend to reflect more critically upon the impact of migration policies than government representatives. Such criticism might not always be convenient or justified; however, for the further improvement of migration policies it is still inevitable.

Government and academia have their respective strengths and weaknesses when it comes to understanding and explaining migration. Cooperation between the two spheres carries a large potential for the **constant improvement of migration policies** but, as past experience shows, only when it is not limited to occasional encounters but **unfolds in a structured and institutionalised manner**. The GOVAC project meets this requirement by carrying out all its activities jointly between government and academic institutions and by involving government representatives and academic experts in the joint development of its outputs and results. The project also works towards permanent and institutionalised cooperation in the form of MoUs laying down its principles, as well as through course curricula and training manuals defining its substantive scope.

When it comes to their substantive input, GOVAC showed that **universities can make excellent contributions** to this cooperation in a twofold way: by providing results of their scientific research to the government as a basis for policymaking and by adapting educational goals for students to the policy needs and actual situation in order to increase the professional level of future civil servants. On the other side, governments are in a position to increase the effectiveness and the practical orientation of academic education by acquainting students with the realities of civil service by offering internships, and providing universities with an actual and up-to-date overview of the migration situation from an administrative perspective and of the policy development and programming in response to it.

## Cooperation Options

There is a broad variety of actors shaping a modern society and its political systems. The main ones have to be those representing the *trias politica*: the legislative, the executive and the judiciary power.

Apart from the three *montesquieu* main powers, many other societal and political actors such as employers, trade unions, religious institutions, NGOs, journalists, and, not least, academia, play an active and decisive role in society and politics. Obviously, their interests, short and long-term objectives, and work methods do not always coincide with those of the administration. However, the functioning of a modern society cannot solely rest on the three main powers but needs to rely on all the other actors, even in cases when there is no formal obligation to do so. Moreover, understanding, appreciation and trust on the side of society are a key prerequisite for legitimating any state policy.

Decision-making in the case of migration, asylum, citizenship and foreigners' integration depends on the attitudes and involvement of all the above mentioned

**Cooperation as  
benefit for all**

actors, academia and journalists, in particular. Interaction, the exchange of views and cross-fertilisation is of utmost importance. Governments need to know how academia approaches certain issues and the government benefits if academia better appreciates the parameters of policymaking and implementation. Here the two should meet, particularly in the context of ongoing education. As a matter of fact, most of the individuals working for administration have an academic background themselves and have been exposed to academic views and methods. Closer ties between administrations and universities will not only strengthen the practicality of an academic education in the area of migration but also increase the readiness of graduates to engage in such cooperation once they have started their careers as civil servants. Thus, the **concrete areas of cooperation between academia and government in the migration field** should include:

- Involvement of academia in the professional education and training of civil servants responsible for migration policies and management, such as formal inclusion in academies for public administration, job training in ministries and state agencies or on ad-hoc basis for special areas of interest;
- Involvement of government in university courses and programmes on specific migration issues, e.g. migration regime, administrative procedures, actual migration situation, etc.; mutual participation in the development and updating of academic migration curricula and migration-related professional training programmes in administrations;
- Cooperation on migration research: mutual exchange of research priorities, needs and results contributing to evidence-based migration policy development;
- Mutual cooperation in addressing the career entry of today's students:
  - » Internships at governmental institutions;
  - » Joint identification of topics and priority areas for MA and PhD thesis between government and academia;
  - » Organisation and implementation of joint conferences, seminars, workshops and other initiatives with the participation of civil servants, academics and students alike.

### **Cooperation Fields**

The outlined cooperation options are of particular relevance for many areas of migration policy and management, most of all for those areas that **touch upon sensitive issues** like asylum, immigration, integration and citizenship, protection and management of state borders and trafficking in human beings. Debates on these issues more often than not involve emotion, feelings and fears. Therefore, the emphasis (rightly or wrongly) is put on public perception and sentiments rather than on facts or long-term interests. **Facts can influence the political debate**, change attitudes and address "migration myths", but only when they are **available in formats that can be used by decision- and opinion-makers**. Closer ties between government and academia are a precondition for establishing those facts that are relevant in the political debate and for developing ways to communicate them to the media and public.

However, cooperation should include much broader areas than just migration authorities and law departments at the universities. Asylum, migration and citizenship are also issues of political and social sciences, economy and journalism. As a truly cross-cutting issue, **migration governance requires a multi-disciplinary approach**. Subsequently, there is a need to not only involve a broad number of societal actors but also all those institutions and entities that hold formal responsibilities linked to migration, such as ministries of interior, foreign affairs,

*Multi-disciplinary approach to migration issues*

economy, social protection and their respective agencies.

### ***Recommendations for Implementation***

As stated before, it is recommended to establish cooperation between government and academia on academic/professional education and on migration research in **a permanent and formalised manner**. It is vital to jointly develop priorities and approaches, but once this has been accomplished to also lay down the **principles, functioning and expected results** of this cooperation in binding forms, such as memoranda of understanding or cooperation agreements between universities (faculties/departments involved) and government (ministries/state agencies involved). The agreements should define the scope, methods and fields of cooperation, as well as the principles and tools for its practical implementation.

### ***Related Publications***

Relevant information on the GOVAC project and its outputs, including information on its migration curricula, the project background and various reports, are published on the ICMPD research website <http://research.icmpd.org/> under the GOVAC project section.

### ***Contact Information***

For more information please contact **Violeta Wagner**, GOVAC Project Manager, at ICMPD.

Competence Centre for Legal Migration & Integration  
International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)  
Gonzagagasse 1, 5th floor  
1010 Vienna, Austria  
Tel: +43 1 504 46 77 2391  
Fax: +43 1 504 46 77 2375  
Email: [violeta.wagner@icmpd.org](mailto:violeta.wagner@icmpd.org)

***Cooperation on  
decision-making  
and working level***