

## ➔ EASTERN EUROPE: IPF INITIATIVE FACILITATES RESEARCH AND CURBS BRAIN DRAIN

### **In a Nutshell**

Inadequate capacities for policy analysis in transition countries continue to hinder progress. The innovative International Policy Fellowships (IPF) initiative provides policy leaders with the chance to work with mentors on policy projects while remaining in their home countries.

Since 1998, more than 150 fellows and alumni have turned to the programme to investigate alternative ways of ushering in much needed reforms. Many have gone on to influence specific policies, promote participatory policy-making, or establish regional or local institutes.

### **The Story**

International scholarship and fellowship programmes for researchers and activists from transition countries have often been associated with brain drain, as highly trained human resources move elsewhere. In Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the IPF programme of the Open Society Institute provides leaders from all sectors with a year of opportunities to work with mentors on policy projects, while remaining in their home countries. As a result, fellows not only conduct original field research to benefit their communities, but also establish and maintain ties with local policy-making organizations.

There are enormous challenges and opportunities for innovative and independent researchers in transition countries, where gaping holes persist in local social science field research and policy analysis. Launched in late 1998 in affiliation with the Centre for Policy Studies of the Central European University in Budapest, IPF has a budget of approximately \$1 million for 50 to 55 fellows per year. Its mission is to identify the next generation of leaders in Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and other regions of interest to the Soros Foundation's network, and support their policy research. The programme also aims to improve the quality of independent analysis and help prevent "brain drain" by ensuring leaders can conduct research in their home countries while maintaining mobility and intellectual freedom. It seeks to develop the capacity of participants to write professional policy documents and advocate policies, basic skills that frequently need to be sharpened. In turn, the Soros Foundation can employ participants' ideas and policy papers for the development of programme strategies for itself and other organizations.

The fellowship programme's success draws from a number of elements. To start, a competition to select participants is publicized through extensive advertising campaigns via the Internet, newspapers, offices of the Soros Foundation, local institutions and recruiting events. The competition itself, which is transparent and

multi-tiered, includes application screening by programme staff, evaluations by experts and colleagues to ensure that research objectives correspond to donor programme objectives, and conference call interviews of all finalists.

Once the grants are allocated, funds are disbursed in two instalments that cover monthly stipends, research expenses, required laptop computers and other technical equipment, local language as well as English publication expenses, and travel and training costs. Additional funding is available for last-minute conference participation and necessary budget amendments. Participants sign contracts that state clear project goals and their audience.

Over the course of the year, fellows participate in three to four professional policy trainings, while social activities set the stage for future collaboration and exchange among alumni. Following comprehensive Web site development training, participants post project reports on individual home-pages. At least two expert mentors are appointed by specialists or fellows themselves to oversee projects and complete interim and final mentor critique forms. The mentors are leading policy makers and experts in the fellow's particular field of study, and often work with influential international organizations, governments or universities. While providing participants with supervision and feedback, they also benefit by obtaining first-hand knowledge of research projects that often challenge mainstream concepts and assumptions about social issues and public policy.

## **Results and Critical Factors**

- In countries with a history of authoritarian regimes, highly educated and competent researchers interested in doing policy analysis often lack the necessary resources, such as well-researched data, and skills, such as the ability to assess relevant factors and options in a non-ideological way, and clearly present feasible recommendations for action. Appropriate policy training, networking and research opportunities can open possibilities for the development of new resources and skills, taking the researchers far beyond their local bureaucratic setting. Seed funding for these kinds of initiatives often yields far greater returns in the development of sustainable policy-making capacity than project funding for policy experts working outside the local context.
- The more than 150 IPF fellows and alumni to date have explored issues of reform in countries in transition and sparked public discussion on problems that previously were inadequately addressed. A majority has gone beyond the stated contract goals to impact specific policies and promote participatory policy-making.
- Other IPF alumni have established regional or local policy-making institutes with local and other sources of funds. Recently, they have joined forces to set up the Institute for Public Policy Analysis in Georgia, the

Centre for Public Policy Strategies in Lithuania, the Poznan University Centre for Public Policy in Poland, the European Policy Forum in the Czech Republic and the Press Freedom Centre in Hungary.

- Fellows have published hundreds of articles and papers, both locally and overseas. They have organized press conferences and written books compiling original field research for leading Western publishers. Based in part on the IPF model, several Soros Foundation country offices and other organizations have established their own national policy fellowship programmes.

### **Further information**

International Policy Fellowships ([www.osi.hu/ipf](http://www.osi.hu/ipf)).

Centre for Policy Studies ([www.ceu.hu/cps/oth/oth\\_welcome.htm](http://www.ceu.hu/cps/oth/oth_welcome.htm)).

Open Society Institute Budapest ([www.osi.hu/](http://www.osi.hu/)).

The Soros Foundation ([www.osi.hu/](http://www.osi.hu/)).

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