

VIRTUAL MOBILITY (VM) GRANT REPORT TEMPLATE

This report is submitted by the VM grantee to VNS Manager, who will coordinate the approval on behalf of the Action MC.

Action number: CA18201

VM grant title: Data collecting for the Establishment of the Database on the Conservation actions on threatened plant species, and institutions dealing with plant conservation in Europe

VM grant start and end date: 21/07/2021 to 15/10/2021

Grantee name: Maja Lazarević

Description of the outcomes and achieved outputs (including any specific Action objective and deliverables, or publications resulting from the Virtual Mobility).

(max. 500 words)

Virtual Mobility (VM) Grant enabled intensive data gathering for the activity „Establishment of a joint European interactive platform containing data on conservation actions on threatened plant species and institutions dealing with plant conservation and concrete conservation actions”, which is a joint activity of the Working Groups 1, 2 and 4. The activities conducted under this grant lead to the formation of the database that currently contains more than 3000 entries. This is not the final number, since more contributions are expected in next two months. One of the outcomes of this grant is development of the online survey in the format of the Google Forms. The invitation for this online survey is distributed among interested collaborators, and hopefully will enable faster and more simple data gathering in the future.

Gathered data are a valuable contribution to several specific research coordination objectives, such as: identification of knowledge gaps in plant conservation, promotion of best practices through exchange of knowledge and experience among plant conservationists of different backgrounds; harmonization and encouragement of the implementation of existing protocols and guidelines in plant conservation; identification of the role and contribution of different stakeholders in plant conservation.

The main contribution of this database is reflected in the capacity-building objectives of the CA18201. Namely, the Database on conservation action on threatened plant species and institutions dealing with plant conservation in Europe represents the basis for the establishment of the network of researchers, institutions and other stakeholders from Europe involved in plant conservation, especially those from ITC and Near Neighbour Countries. Collected data will be used for the development of an interactive platform containing data on conservation actions from 2000 onward aimed to help threatened plant species to survive. Platform will contain the data about the actions, but also on the institutions dealing with plant conservation in Europe and wider. Since the database gathered participants from different backgrounds – University teachers and scientific researchers, representatives from governmental institutions, but also from NGOs, it will serve as the excellent point of connection for different plant conservation stakeholders. Participants from different countries were included in the development of

the database. Thus, this database has gathered all the practitioners at one place, enabling exchange of knowledge between those working in countries with well developed conservation activities and those with less experience in the topic. Many Early Career Investigators (ECI), including myself participated in this Database, and possibly some STSMs will be used in the near future for its completion and further analysis. Both genders were equally represented among participants. The idea is to make the Database publicly available and regularly updated after the end of Conserve Plants COST Action, providing continuous exchange of knowledge and information on plant conservation in Europe. The interactive platform within the official website will be one of the main outcomes and deliverables of Conserve Plants within the 3rd year of the action. The data gathered within this VM Grant will be the main part of this interactive platform contributing to the outcomes and deliverables of CA18201.

Description of the benefits to the COST Action Strategy (what and how).

(max. 500 words)

Participants in the establishment of the Database on conservation actions on threatened plant species and institutions dealing with the plant conservation in Europe come from different countries and backgrounds. More than 230 colleagues from 48 countries were contacted and offered to participate in this activity. At the moment, we have 148 participants from 43 countries. The activity covered the whole Europe. Collaborators from transcontinental countries such as Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey, are also included. While most of the participating countries are COST full members, others are Cooperating Members (Israel), or Near Neighbour Countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kosovo*, Lebanon, Russia, and Ukraine). Having such a large number of participants from throughout the Europe and beyond makes huge potential for the exchange of knowledge and experience, and for future collaboration in plant conservation and other related research as well.

Participants are of different backgrounds. Thus, we have students in different stages of their studies, from master and PhD studies to postdoc students, Early Career Investigators – ECI (including myself), researchers and university teachers, representatives from governmental institutions and NGOs, as well as practitioners from botanical gardens, national parks, and other protected areas. Thus, all aspects of plant conservation are covered – theoretical, scientific, practical, and legislative.

What is clear from the Database already at this point is that some countries are well experienced in plant conservation and have hundreds of conservation actions, while others barely have a few actions of this type. In some countries, mainly those that are part of European Union (EU) there are many funds prepared to support plant conservation, in others there are none. Having collaborators from all these types of countries involved in this activity will certainly facilitate communication between them, help efficient exchange of knowledge and experience, make it easier to find funds that are supporting plant conservation, and experts dealing with it. All this will enable collaboration among different stakeholders with the aim to help threatened plant species to survive.

All genders are equally represented in this activity.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Description of the virtual collaboration (including constructive reflection on activities undertaken, identified successful practices and lessons learned).

(max. 500 words)

The first contacts with most of the participants was already established. However, because of slow responsiveness and delays in submitting the data, many of them had to be contacted again. Thus, in the period from 21 July 2021, throughout the summer period reminders were sent to all those who agreed to participate, but still did not send the data. Some colleagues gave up, so in those cases, I searched for the new once sending them the call for participation for the first time. This was the case, for example, with Germany, Greece and Romania, where new collaborators were successfully found. Every data set received was checked, and if needed, sent again to the collaborators for corrections.

Several online meetings were held during the grant period with the colleagues asking for additional explanations (eg. Mike Fay, Kew Garden, UK), offering collaboration and help with collecting data through STSM (Pablo Tejero Ibarra and Andreu Cera, Spain), or for consulting in the process of development of online survey (Boštjan Surina, Croatia).

The online survey was developed through Google Forms, as a potentially more approachable and simple way to gather the data. Invitation to fill in the form was sent to the collaborators that still did not

send the data, or from which we expect more data. However, for the moment, most collaborators still prefer to use the Excel file.

At the end of the grant period, Conserve Plants Meeting was held in Bologna (14-15 October 2021). A short update on the progress of the Database was held by Giovanna Aronne at the MC Meeting on the first day. A more detailed report was done by me online at the meeting of the WG2 on the second day. This was very useful, as some new suggestions arrived upon it, which may lead to collecting more data for the database.

Working on such a complex activity with so many participants is a big challenge tied with many advantages and disadvantages. At the beginning we agreed to contact first the members of CA18201. However, this activity showed a low level of participation of our members, since 72% of collaborators are colleagues that are not members of our COST Action. We tried to get in touch with top experts in the field. In some cases we gained their attention and contributions. However, in other cases, mostly because of their work overload we had to turn to some other colleagues that are not so directly involved in conservation action. The general work overload led to many delays in submitting the data. However, since we began on time, and the results of this activity should be delivered within the 3rd year of CA18201, we could afford these changes. One of the biggest issues is that there are countries from which we did not manage to find collaborators, eg. Denmark, Malta, Sweden, etc., or those from which we did not gather sufficient data, eg. Germany, Spain, etc. However, I still hope that this might change in the future.